



Local Development Plan 2030

Technical Supplement 10

Countryside Assessment

September 2019

www.midandeantrim.gov.uk/planning



**Mid & East
Antrim**
Borough Council

Contents

1.0	Introduction	3
	Purpose of this document	3
	Planning and Development in the Countryside	3
2.0	Policy Context	4
	National and Regional Policy	4
	Natural Heritage	6
	Biodiversity	8
	Landscape	10
	Local Policy Context	13
3.0	Profile	20
	Natural Heritage	20
	Landscape	25
	Settlement Setting Appraisal	30
	Development Pressure Analysis (Summary)	34
4.0	Survey Work and Studies informing the Countryside Strategy	39
5.0	Preferred Options Paper	42
6.0	Consultee and Councillor Engagement	45
7.0	Draft Plan Strategy Policy Approach	46
8.0	Soundness	50
	Appendices	51

Appendix A Landscape Character Assessment (see separate document)
Appendix B Development Pressure Analysis (see separate document)
Appendix C Candidate Sensitive Landscape Scoring Matrix (see separate document)
Appendix D Candidate Sensitive Landscape Scoring Matrix Justification (see separate document)
Appendix E Candidate Sensitive Landscape Report (see separate document)
Appendix F Strategic Settlement Evaluation (See Position Paper 11) (see separate document)
Appendix G Maps (see separate document)
Appendix G.1 Overview maps
Appendix H Evolution of relevant draft Plan Strategy policy

Tables

- 1.1 Neighbouring Councils Position
- 1.2 Consideration of Soundness

1.0 Introduction

Purpose of this document

- 1.1 This technical supplement brings together the evidence base that has been used to inform the preparation of the Mid and East Antrim Local Development Plan (LDP) 2030 draft Plan Strategy. It is one of a suite of topic based technical supplements that should be read alongside the draft Plan Strategy to understand the rationale and justification for the policies proposed within it.
- 1.2 This Countryside Assessment includes the following four interrelated strands:
 - an Environmental Assets Appraisal;
 - a Landscape Assessment;
 - a Development Pressure Analysis; and
 - a Strategic Settlement Evaluation
- 1.3 This document builds upon and updates LDP Position Paper 5 “Environmental Assets” and Position Paper 10 “Development Pressure Analysis” which established the baseline position for the Mid and East Antrim Preferred Options Paper (POP) and identified key issues to be addressed by the LDP. This Technical Supplement also includes a Landscape Character Assessment, which includes a Setting Settlement Appraisal, and a Candidate Sensitive Landscape Report. The final strand is the Strategic Settlement Evaluation (LDP Position Paper 11) and is attached as Appendix F to this Technical Supplement. The Countryside Assessment sets out the evidence base that has informed the draft Plan Strategy Countryside Strategy and Natural Heritage policies.

Planning and the Countryside

- 1.3 The diversity of Northern Ireland’s habitats, species, landscapes and earth science features (i.e. natural heritage) are important and highly valued assets of our society. Our natural heritage provides a wide range of opportunities for enjoyment, recreation and sustainable economic activity. The conservation, enhancement and restoration of the abundance, quality and diversity and distinctiveness of the region’s natural heritage are also fundamental to the overall health and well-being of our society.
- 1.4 The Borough of Mid and East Antrim is predominately a rural area. The open countryside is home to some 22% of the population of the Borough and is an important location for a number of economic activities, mainly in the agricultural, tourism, renewable energy and minerals sectors. Our countryside is also an important environmental resource. Landscape and seascape is often of high quality. Approximately 370 square kilometres of the Antrim Coast and Glens Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty falls within the Borough. Aside from the rural farmed landscape which is predominately around Ballymena, the countryside of Mid and East Antrim is a diverse landscape that is distinguished by remote upland moorlands, glens and river corridors, a stunning coastline in the east, and areas of extensive wetland associated with Lough Beg in the west. All of these landscapes have their own distinctive rural and cultural character and accommodate a diverse range of natural habitats, wildlife species, and heritage assets.
- 1.5 The richness of our natural heritage, in terms of landscape, natural environments and biodiversity is recognised in the significant number of designated sites that are protected under international (including European), national or local legislation and convention. Certain species and habitats also benefit from legal protection. Irrespective of planning policy brought forward through the LDP, it is a requirement that statutory obligations are met through managing development to protect these areas for future generations. The planning system has an important role in enhancing and conserving our landscapes and natural heritage and planning authorities must ensure their decisions and actions are fully compliant with international (both Global and European) and regional obligations. At many levels, development can potentially adversely impact on our environment and it is therefore important that all those involved in the planning process ensure that any potential environmental impacts, whatever the scale, are identified to enable effects to be considered, avoided or mitigated.
- 1.6 Council recognises the value of the countryside and seeks, through the LDP, to protect and where possible enhance the rural environment, whilst promoting sustainable economic development that supports rural communities and is appropriate to the rural context. However, it is also recognised that meeting both of these aims requires careful management through the planning system.

2.0 Policy Context

Draft Programme for Government 2016-21

- 2.1 Improving health and wellbeing is a key priority of the NI Executive which is reflected through the draft Programme for Government (PfG) 2016 - 2021.
- 2.2 The PfG Framework sets out the aspirations of the Executive for society and provides a strategic context for other key strategies and policies. It contains 14 strategic outcomes.
- 2.3 In providing a Countryside Strategy to manage development in a manner which strikes a sustainable balance between protection of the environment from inappropriate development, while supporting and sustaining rural communities, will help to deliver on a number of PfG outcomes, particularly those relating to the creation of attractive and sustainable places to live and work.

Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy

- 2.4 The NI Executive's 'Everyone's Involved – Sustainable Development Strategy' 2010 supports the strategic outcomes of the PfG with sustainable development policies and principles. It sets out six priority areas for action, the most relevant of which is, "to strike an appropriate balance between the responsible use and protection of natural resources in support of a better quality of life and a better quality environment". This priority action and the general sustainability agenda is supported by the following strategic objectives:
- Ensure an appropriate policy and legislative framework is in place supported by a regulatory regime which will deliver statutory environmental standards in respect of air, water and other environmental pollution
 - Promote sustainable land management
 - Promote sustainable marine management
 - Ensure our built heritage is used in a sustainable way
 - Improve the quality of life of our people by planning and managing development in ways which are sustainable and which contribute to creating a better environment
 - Take action to reduce biodiversity loss.
- 2.5 The fifth objective in particular is central to informing the LDP, although others may still need to be taken into account.

Regional Development Strategy 2035 (RDS)

- 2.6 The RDS sets the context for the sustainable development of Northern Ireland to 2035 and provides the overarching strategic planning framework to guide the delivery of the Programme for Government. The RDS contains guidance at two levels; Regional Guidance (RG), to apply to all parts of the region and refers to the 3 sustainable development themes of Economy, Society and Environment; and Spatial Framework Guidance (SFG which is guidance specific to each of the 5 elements of the Spatial Framework.
- 2.7 The broad aims of the RDS encourages sustainable development in the countryside for the benefit of rural communities. However this is to balance with other aims, one of which is to protect and enhance the environment for its own sake.
- 2.8 In setting out this aim, the RDS acknowledges that the environment is one of our greatest assets with its "stunning landscapes, an outstanding coastline, a complex variety of wildlife and a rich built and cultural heritage for the ecosystem services it provides, and its sense of place.
- 2.9 In seeking to conserve, protect, and where possible, enhance our natural environment the RDS provides regional guidance RG11 with the following strategic goals:
- Sustain and enhance biodiversity in line with the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy;
 - Identify, establish, protect and manage ecological networks;
 - Protect and encourage green and blue infrastructure within urban areas;

- Protect and manage important geological and geomorphological features;
- Protect and enhance and manage the coast;
- Protect, enhance and restore the quality of inland water bodies;
- Recognise and promote the conservation of local identity and distinctive landscape character;
- Conserve, protect and where possible enhance areas recognised for their landscape quality; and
- Protect designated areas of countryside from inappropriate development (either directly or indirectly) and continue to assess areas of designation.

Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS)

- 2.10 The SPPS contains five core principles, underpinning the new two tier planning system, two of which include, *“improving health and well-being”*, and *“preserving and improving the Built and Natural Environment”*. The SPPS highlights that the natural and heritage assets of the countryside and coast need to be recognised for the contribution they make to enhancing human health and wellbeing and acknowledges the exceptional quality of our built and natural environment as an important contributor to cultural identity, history and sense of place.
- 2.11 In preparing LDPs, Councils are directed to bring forward strategies that reflect the aims and objectives of the SPPS to facilitate sustainable development in the countryside without expense to the region’s natural and built environment. It establishes a precautionary approach in developing policy in relation to national or internally significant landscapes and natural heritage resources and a presumption against development in known areas of land stability and/or coastal erosion.
- 2.12 The SPPS notes that some areas of the countryside exhibit exceptional landscapes where the quality of the landscape and unique amenity value is such that development should only be permitted in exceptional circumstances. It states that, where appropriate, these areas may be designated as Special Countryside Areas with appropriate policies to ensure their protection from unnecessary and inappropriate development. Local policies may also be brought forward to maintain the landscape quality and character of Areas of High Scenic Value (AHSV).
- 2.13 The LDP has an active role to play in conserving, protecting and, where possible, enhancing these unique landscapes and environments for present and future generations. This requires a sensitive and integrated approach to the management of development when developing strategies and policy. The SPPS states that policies and proposals for the countryside should be informed by an evidence base that includes a landscape assessment and environmental assets appraisal.
- 2.14 As regards to the natural heritage, the SPPS advises LDPs to adopt a strategic approach to identify and promote the design of ecological networks to help reduce the fragmentation and isolation of natural habitats. In addition LDPs should seek to identify and promote green and blue infrastructure where this will add value to the provision, enhancement and connection of open space and habitats in and around settlements.
- 2.15 The SPPS notes that all LDP proposals and policies should be rigorously assessed for their environmental impacts.

Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland (1993) (PSRNI)

- 2.16 The Planning Strategy when published in 1993 was a review of Department’s approach to development throughout Northern Ireland in light of the challenges facing our rural economy, and increasing pressure upon our environment and countryside. The Strategy sets regional policies and practice to encourage balanced and environmentally sustainable development in rural areas. The Strategy highlights that Northern Ireland’s coastline is of great importance not only for its striking natural beauty, but also in terms of its scientific interest, its wildlife habitats and recreational opportunities. Further, the SPPS emphasises that LDPs and future adopted Marine Plans should be complementary, particularly with regard to the inter-tidal area.

- 2.17 The majority of strategic policies contained within the Strategy have now been superseded by various Planning Policy Statements. Remaining provisions of The Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland' include:
- 2.18 Regional Planning Policy CO 1 – 'The undeveloped coast' states that development proposals may only be permitted on the undeveloped coast in the following circumstances:
- where the proposed development is of such national or regional importance as to outweigh any potential detrimental impact to the coastal environment; and
 - where no feasible alternative site within an existing urban area exists.
- 2.19 Regional Planning Policy CO 4 – 'Access to the Coastline' states that development that would result in the closure of existing access points will normally only be acceptable where a feasible alternative is provided. Under this policy development proposals to provide or extend access to the coastline will normally be permitted provided that natural and built heritage conservation interests, landscape quality and amenity of the local area are safeguarded.
- 2.20 Regional Planning Policy PSU 10 – 'Development at Risk' states development will not be permitted in areas known to be at serious risk from flooding, coastal erosion or land instability. Under this policy new development in coastal areas will not normally be permitted where expensive engineering works would be required to either protect development on land subject to coastal erosion, or defend land at risk from coastal flooding.

Marine Strategy Framework Directive-Marine Policy Statement and the Marine Plan for Northern Ireland (draft 2018)

- 2.21 The Marine Strategy Framework Directive was formally adopted by the European Union in July 2008. It provides the legislative framework for an ecosystem approach to the sustainable management of the marine environment.
- 2.22 The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013, require the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) as the Marine Plan Authority, to prepare marine plans. The Marine Plan has been developed within the framework of the UK Marine Policy Statement to facilitate the sustainable development of the marine area and provide the policy framework to aid decision making on plans affecting the marine environment.
- 2.23 The marine area comprises all marine waters including sea bed, subsoil, sea loughs and tidal rivers, so far as the tide flows at Mean High Water Spring Tide. This inshore region extends to include tidal rivers and sea loughs. The SPPS emphasises that Local Development Plans and future adopted Marine Plans should be complementary, particularly with regard to the inter-tidal area.

The Water Framework Directive 2000

- 2.24 Is transposed into law through the Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 (Statutory Rule 2005 No. 544). Its aim is to establish a framework to protect all surface waters and groundwater with the aim to reach good ecological and chemical status in all waters as a rule by 2015. Both the Habitats and Birds Directives and the Water Framework Directive aim at ensuring healthy aquatic ecosystems while at the same time ensuring a balance between water/nature protection and the sustainable use of nature's natural resources.

Natural Heritage

Planning Policy Statement 2: Natural Heritage

- 2.25 Current operational planning policy for development proposals which affect the natural environment are primarily considered under *Planning Policy Statement 2: Natural Heritage* (PPS2). Published in July 2013, PPS2 sets out the current regional policy for the conservation, protection and enhancement of natural

heritage in Northern Ireland. For the purpose of PPS2, Natural Heritage is defined as “the diversity of our habitats, species, landscapes and earth science features”.

- 2.26 The policy objectives for Natural Heritage are to:
- Protect, conserve, enhance and restore the abundance, quality, diversity and distinctiveness of the regions natural heritage;
 - Further sustainable development by ensuring that natural heritage and associated diversity is conserved and enhanced as an integral part of social, economic and environmental development;
 - Assist in meeting international (including European), national and local responsibilities and obligations in the protection and enhancement of the natural heritage;
 - Contribute to rural renewal and urban regeneration by ensuring developments take account of the role and value of natural heritage in supporting economic diversification and contributing to a high quality environment; and
 - Take actions to reduce our carbon footprint and facilitate adaptation to climate change.

Natural Heritage Designations

- 2.27 A hierarchy of designations is available under European, National and local legislation and designation is primarily the responsibility of NIEA. Generally sites are selected for their rarity value or for the diversity of species and habitats they contain, or as a representative example of their habitat type on a local, national or international scale. These sites can be influenced by implementation of land use zonings and policy. Some designations are brought forward under the LDP process. The range of designations includes:

Sites of International Importance

Ramsar Sites

- 2.28 The Convention on Wetlands, called the Ramsar Convention, is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for Ramsar Conservation and requires Contracting Parties to designate suitable wetlands for inclusion in the Ramsar List. As a Contracting Party to the Convention, the UK is required to designate wetlands in accordance with criteria agreed by these parties for inclusion in a list of “Wetlands of International Importance”. Objectives for the delegate countries involves wetland and waterfowl conservation. A wetland is defined as being an area of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural, or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt and including areas of intertidal marine water. Wetlands as ecosystems are extremely important for biodiversity conservation which is recognised for the wellbeing of society.
- 2.29 The **Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic** (the ‘OSPAR Convention’) came into effect in 1998. OSPAR is the mechanism by which 15 governments and the European Union work together to protect the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic. OSPAR incorporates a wide range of marine issues from work on pollution and dumping at sea to the conservation of marine biodiversity. Under the OSPAR Marine Protected Area commitment the UK government is working to establish a well-managed, ecologically coherent network. As an initial contribution to the OSPAR network most of Northern Ireland’s Marine SACs have been submitted as OSPAR MPA and many of our coastal Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) are also likely to become OSPAR MPAs to fulfil our commitment.

Special Protection Areas (SPA’s)

- 2.30 Special Protection Areas (SPA’s) are designated under the European Commission Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds (79/409/EEC) (The Birds Directive). All European Community member States are required to identify internationally important areas for breeding, overwintering and migrating birds and designate them as Special Protection Areas (SPAs). The United Kingdom practice is to protect these areas under domestic legislation before classifying them as SPAs. The Birds Directive is implemented in Northern Ireland through the Conservation (Natural Habitats etc) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995

Special Areas of Conservation (SAC’s)

- 2.31 The EC Council Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Fauna and Flora (92/43/EEC) (The Habitats Directive) requires member states to designate Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), to protect

some of the rarest or seriously threatened habitats and species in a European context (excluding birds) and take measures to maintain and restore them. The Directive identifies those habitats and species at greatest risk as priority habitats or species, and member States must provide for their declaration as SACs. The Habitats Directive is implemented in Northern Ireland through the Conservation (Natural Habitats etc) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995.

Sites of National Importance

Statutory Nature Reserves

- 2.32 A nature reserve is defined as an area of importance for flora, fauna and/or features of geological or other special interest, which are reserved and managed for conservation and to provide special opportunities for study or research. Nature reserves represent ‘core areas’ of high biodiversity value – reservoirs for native wildlife managed primarily for nature conservation. As well as protecting nature, nature reserves represent an important ‘natural capital’ resource, providing people with the opportunity to learn about and study our natural heritage and biodiversity in a managed environment and to engage with nature. They also may be managed to provide public recreation to the extent that this is compatible with their natural heritage interests.
- 2.33 DAERA is charged with making a range of nature conservation designations covering both land, freshwater and the sea. These include statutory nature reserves. The current enabling legislation for establishing and managing both Nature Reserves (NR) and National Nature Reserves (NNR) in Northern Ireland is the **Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985** as amended 1989, 2002 and 2013 (NCALO) but there is no statutory requirement for DAERA to declare more sites. Sites of national and sometimes international importance are usually managed by the Department’s Northern Ireland Environment Agency or by agreement with a voluntary conservation body.

Areas of Special Scientific Interest

- 2.34 Are sites which are of special interest designated under the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 (as amended). Areas of Special Scientific Interest are areas of land that have been identified by scientific survey as being of the highest degree of conservation value by reason of any of their flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features. ASSI’s have a well-defined boundary and by and large remain in private ownership. The underlying philosophy is to achieve conservation by co-operation with landowners who receive a list of notifiable operations which the Department considers might harm the nature conservation interest of the site and may therefore require a management agreement

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

- 2.35 AONB’s are designated by the Department primarily for their high landscape quality, wildlife importance and rich cultural and architectural heritage under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (NI) Order 1985 (NCALO). The Department can also designate a National Park under this legislation.

Sites of Local Importance

Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) and Wildlife Refuges

- 2.36 Local Nature Reserves, or LNRs for short, are areas that have been specially set aside for biodiversity and where people can enjoy wildlife. Many LNRs lie within, or close to, urban areas. Declaring a site as a LNR is a visible sign of a local authority’s commitment to protecting biodiversity. Often designation is linked to actions and targets within a council’s Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP). LNRs can be provided by District Councils under powers conferred on them under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985. Wildlife Refuges are provided for under the Wildlife Order.

Biodiversity

- 2.37 At the Earth Summit held at Rio in 1992 over 150 countries, including the UK, signed the Convention on Biological Diversity. This promotes the conservation of biodiversity, the sustainable use of biodiversity. It was the first global agreement to cover all aspects of biological diversity and the first to recognize that its conservation is a common concern of humankind and an integral part of sustainable development. The Convention committed signatories to develop national strategies to conserve biodiversity, and a UK

Biodiversity Action Plan was published in 1994. In Northern Ireland a Biodiversity Group was established in 1996 and a Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy was endorsed in 2002. Local Authorities are recognised as having a pivotal role in protecting and enhancing biodiversity, a role formalised by the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

The Wildlife and Natural Environment (NI) Act 2011

- 2.38 The Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 places a statutory duty on every public body to further the conservation of biodiversity when exercising any functions. The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) published a guidance document “The Biodiversity Duty” (May 2016) to guide public bodies on their statutory duty regarding biodiversity. This document can be accessed via <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/biodiversity-duty>

Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy to 2020

- 2.39 Sustaining and enhancing biodiversity is fundamental to furthering sustainable development. The EU Biodiversity Strategy seeks to halt the loss of biodiversity and ecosystems services by 2020 and this is reflected in both Priority 3 of the Programme for Government and the Regional Development Strategy. The Biodiversity Strategy for Northern Ireland, builds upon the first Biodiversity Strategy published in 2002 with an modern approach emphasises on management of biological systems to deliver the materials and services upon which people depend – referred to as the ecosystem services approach.
- 2.40 While protection of individual species and habitats is essential, the thrust of the Strategy is to manage natural and man-modified systems to deliver a multitude of outputs which support society and the economy. The strategy explains the protection of individual species and habitats is both a tool for delivery and a result of this approach. However, recognition of interconnectedness and complexity of biological systems enables a more coherent approach. The Strategy makes it clear that biodiversity protection is absolutely fundamental to society and the economy.
- 2.41 The strategy identifies a number of high-level regional challenges which will require particular attention:
- valuing the environment in the broadest context;
 - reducing the impact of climate change;
 - obtaining adequate resources for biodiversity projects from a wide range of sources;
 - encouraging ecosystem scale protection measures;
 - enhancing data gathering and management;
 - tackling invasive species; and
 - engaging society more fully to halt biodiversity loss.

UK National Ecosystem Assessment Northern Ireland (2011)

- 2.42 The Northern Ireland National Ecosystem Assessment (NI NEA) is a major Defra sponsored study and is the first analysis of Northern Ireland’s natural environment in terms of the benefits it provides to society and to economic prosperity. The study provides an assessment of the extent and condition of Northern Ireland’s natural and human modified habitats and the ecosystem services they provide.
- 2.43 The study provides an introduction to the use of the ecosystem approach to inform policy development and management decisions which can in turn enhance ecosystem health and ensure maximum contribution to human well-being and economic prosperity.
- 2.44 Key recommendations from the assessment include:
- The Northern Ireland National Ecosystem Assessment (NEA) should inform policy and decision-making;
 - A fully integrated cross-departmental and intersectoral approach is needed;
 - Greater understanding is required at public and political levels of ecosystem services;
 - Further research, especially around establishing financial values for service delivery, is required;

- Effective delivery of ecosystem services requires informed and integrated management across a range of habitats that supports high levels of biodiversity and ensures long term resilience to changing circumstances;
- The role of ecosystem services in mitigating the effects of human impacts, including climate change and biodiversity loss, should be considered in all decisions about the use of land and sea;
- Carbon management needs to be seen as an important part of management for multiple service delivery;
- The full value of sequestration in existing habitats must be factored into carbon and greenhouse gas budgets and targets and given weight when making decisions on land management regimes;
- Planning and management policies need to be aligned with natural processes to maintain the capacity for multiple service delivery;
- A network of ecologically coherent sites should form a core for integrated management within the wider environment, delivering ecosystem services and minimising environmental degradation; and
- The island of Ireland should be considered as a whole for ecosystem management.

Landscape

- 2.45 Northern Ireland's landscapes are its hidden treasure, something often recognised by others who visit but sadly less so by most of us living here. **The European Landscape Convention (ELC)** defines 'landscape' as 'an area as perceived by people whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors' and 'it concerns landscapes that might be considered outstanding as well as every day or degraded landscapes'. 'It is a new way of thinking about landscape, responsive to different local, national and regional interpretations. It is not simply about landscape as biodiversity or ecology. It's not only concerned with the countryside or matters of heritage. It addresses the experience we have of a place. A more democratic concept, it relates to remarkable *and* degraded landscapes, the special *and* the everyday, all territories from rural to urban; all areas, from the most treasured to the most nondescript and unloved, the places and spaces in desperate need of regeneration.'

European Landscape Convention

- 2.46 The European Landscape Convention was signed in Florence in October 2000 and endorsed by the UK government in 2006. The primary aim of the convention was to promote a holistic understanding of landscape in its protection, management and planning, and to organise European co-operation on landscape issues
- 2.47 The Articles of the Convention sets out general measures that commit signatory states to a number of actions which are designed to help ensure compliance with the overarching aims of the ELC.
- 2.48 In January 2014 the DOE published its first Landscape Charter in response to its obligations under the European Landscape Convention. Northern Ireland's Landscape Charter is second in the United Kingdom after Scotland. Whilst not government policy at present, it is anticipated that this position statement will prepare the way for policy development.
- 2.49 The Charter outlines ten affirmations for Northern Ireland's landscapes:
1. Our landscapes are an essential aspect of our sense of place and belonging.
 2. Our landscapes contribute to our health, well-being and quality of life.
 3. Our landscapes are for all of us as part of our national and community identity.
 4. Our landscapes reflect the multiplicity of our history and culture.
 5. Our landscapes shall continue to inspire expression in words, sound and images.
 6. Our landscapes shall continue to express who we are and have been as people.
 7. Our landscapes shall continue to attract others to visit and generate wealth.
 8. Our landscapes shall continue to attract individuals and businesses to locate here.
 9. Our landscapes shall assist in marketing the export of our goods and services.
 10. Our landscape and its management shall become an example to other nations.

- 2.50 To help ensure that our landscapes continue to fulfil these roles in the overall public interest, it is important in the first instance to understand these landscapes and the elements that give rise to their distinctive character.

Landscape Character Assessments

- 2.51 Landscape character assessment (LCA) involves mapping, classifying and describing the various landscape features that gives a defined area it's 'sense of place. The resulting classification of the landscape can be used as a basis for making judgements about the character and condition of the landscape. This can form part of the baseline evidence in formulating policy and provides to assist in making decisions about development management. The RDS states that *"by understanding how places differ we can also ensure that future development is well situated, sensitive to its location and contributes to environmental, social and economic objectives"*
- 2.52 Northern Ireland is covered by an existing landscape character assessment called **Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment 2000 (NILCA 2000)**. This study was carried out at a relatively detailed scale and defined 130 separate landscape character areas each with a distinctive character, based upon local patterns of geology, land form, land use, cultural and ecological features. In addition the NILCA sets out principles for landscape management and accommodating new development in each of the defined areas. It also includes settlement analysis of the larger settlements. Descriptions of these LCAs are available on the DAERA website and can be accessed via <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/landscape-character-northern-ireland#toc-1>
- 2.53 **The Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment (NIRLCA)**, which defines 26 regional scale landscape character areas, was published in February 2016 and can be found on the DAERA website and accessed via <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/landscape-character-northern-ireland#toc-1>. The NIRLCA provides a strategic overview of the landscape in Northern Ireland, an impartial evidence base which planners, developers and the public can use to guide and inform strategic decisions regarding the protection, management and sustainable development of Northern Ireland's landscape, and sets the context for more detailed local landscape studies in the future. It aims to draw together information on people and place, and the combinations of nature, culture and perception which make each part of Northern Ireland unique. The NIRLCA has been developed in accordance with the general principles set out in the Natural England document *'An approach to Landscape Character (2014)'*, as well as earlier guidance on the subject.
- 2.54 DAERA envisages that the NIRLCA will provide the context for more detailed local assessments to be brought forward by Councils in their LDPs. Councils will therefore have to decide whether to bring forward new local LCA's to provide an up-to-date evidence base to inform decisions or, alternatively, to rely on the original LCAs while taking due account of changes.

Planning Policy Statements and Supplementary Guidance

- 2.55 **Planning Policy Statement 21 'Sustainable Development in the Countryside'(PPS 21)**, published in June 2010 is the current operational planning policy that development proposals in the countryside are primarily considered under. The policy provisions of PPS21 takes precedence over PSRNI policy provisions for Countryside Policy Areas in so far as their title changed to title Special Countryside Areas.
- 2.56 The policy objectives of PPS21 are retained by the SPPS and are:
- manage growth in the countryside to achieve appropriate and sustainable patterns of development that meet the essential needs of a vibrant rural community;
 - to conserve the landscape and natural resources of the rural area and to protect it from excessive, inappropriate or obtrusive development and from the actual or potential effects of pollution;
 - to facilitate development necessary to achieve a sustainable rural economy; including appropriate farm diversification and other economic activity; and
 - to promote high standards in the design, siting and landscaping of development in the countryside

- 2.57 **'Building on Tradition: A Sustainable Design Guide for the Northern Ireland Countryside'** provides assistance to all those involved with sustainable development in the Northern Ireland countryside to understand the requirements of PPS21. The guide promotes quality and sustainable building design in Northern Ireland's countryside with the aim to conserve our rural landscape and natural resources, facilitate a sustainable rural economy and promote high standards in the design, siting and landscaping of development in the countryside.
- 2.58 The SPPS retains the policy objectives of **Planning Policy Statement, PPS 18 'Renewable Energy'** (August 2009) which sets out planning policy for development that generates energy from renewable resources. The statement outlines the main sources of renewable energy are the wind, the sun (solar energy), moving water (hydropower), heat extracted from the air, ground and water (including geothermal energy), and biomass (wood, biodegradable waste and energy crops).
- 2.59 The aim of the Statement is to facilitate the siting of renewable energy generating facilities in appropriate locations within the built and natural environment whilst contributing to achieve renewable energy targets. The policy objectives of PPS 18 are:
- to ensure that the environmental, landscape, visual and amenity impacts associated with or arising from renewable energy development are adequately addressed;
 - to ensure adequate protection of the Region's built and natural, and cultural heritage features; and
 - to facilitate the integration of renewable energy technology into the design, siting and layout of new development and promote greater application of the principles of Passive Solar Design.
- 2.60 Further information on current renewable energy technologies is set out in the **'Best Practice Guidance to Planning Policy Statement 18 'Renewable Energy'. (Draft) Supplementary Planning Guidance: Anaerobic Digestion** provides additional advice and guidance specific to anaerobic digestion (AD) to complement information already set out in the Best Practice Guidance to PPS 18.
- 2.61 **'Wind Energy Development in Northern Ireland's Landscapes'** in conjunction with PPS 18 provides broad, strategic guidance in relation to the visual and landscape impacts of wind energy development. The guidance is based on the sensitivity of Northern Ireland's landscapes to wind energy development for each of the 130 Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) in Northern Ireland. Each LCA is given an overall sensitivity level using a five point scale from high to low sensitivity. The publication provides guiding principles for site selection, layout and design of wind energy developments, the assessment of landscape and associated sensitivities, opportunities and challenges.

Local Policy Context

Legacy Area Plans

- 2.62 The existing development or area plans that apply to Mid and East Antrim Borough are:
- **Ballymena Area Plan 1986-2001, adopted in 1989**
 - **Larne Area Plan 2010, adopted in 1998**
 - **Carrickfergus Area Plan 2001, adopted in March 2000**
 - **Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (insofar as it relates to the former Carrickfergus Borough Council area), (see note below regarding status)**
- 2.63 Whilst the draft Plan Strategy has taken account of the existing Area Plans, it has also been necessary to consider their longevity and the fact that all pre-date even the original version of the Regional Development Strategy, published in 2001. They also predate many of the other regional policies referred to in the previous section.
- 2.64 The draft Plan Strategy (para 2.2.3) refers to the somewhat complex situation in regard to the status of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (BMAP) which included the former Carrickfergus Borough Council area. Whilst the Carrickfergus Area Plan 2001 remains the extant statutory plan for this area, the council has also had regard to the provisions of the Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (2004) (dBMAP) as the most recent expression of local planning policy for that area and therefore remains a significant material consideration in developing the draft Plan Strategy. Council has considered draft BMAP (2004) in combination with the Planning Appeals Commission Inquiry report in the preparation of the Mid and East Antrim Borough Council draft Plan Strategy.

The Larne Area Plan 2010:

Special Countryside Areas (SCAs)

The Larne Area Plan 2010 designated the coastal land between Larne and Garron Point as the 'Undeveloped Coast Countryside Policy Area' (CPA) in recognition of its significant landscape and amenity value and vulnerability to development pressure (see Appendix F Map 8). This policy only permits development that is of such national or regional importance as to outweigh any potential detrimental impact to the coastal environment and where no feasible alternative site existed within the urban area.

Following publication of PPS21 – 'Sustainable Development in the Countryside' in 2010, new policy provisions took precedence over Countryside Policy Areas designated in existing statutory Area Plans. However, the Undeveloped Coast CPA as identified in the Larne Area Plan 2010 is one of 5 exceptions throughout Northern Ireland in which the original Area Plan CPA policy was retained. These designations have been renamed Special Countryside Areas – PPS21 refers.

SCA – Undeveloped Coast

Areas of Constraint on Mineral Development (ACMD)

ACMD's identify areas to be protected from the harmful effects of mineral extraction and/or processing because of their intrinsic landscape, amenity, scientific or heritage value (including natural, built and archaeological heritage).

There are 3 areas included within the designated ACMD within the extant Larne Area Plan These areas include the Special Countryside Area along the Coast Road, in the Glens and that portion of the Garron Plateau which is included in the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB (Appendix F, Map No 8).

MN1 – Area of Constraint on Mineral Development

The Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (2004)

Coastal Area Designation

The BMA Coastal Area designation seeks to provide additional protection for the unique landscape value and nature conservation interest, which is particularly important in order to preserve the setting of the BMA and to protect the views from both Belfast Lough and the shoreline. (Appendix F, Map No 8)

Within Mid and East Antrim Borough the BMA Coastal Area designation includes all coastal areas within the former Carrickfergus Borough, with the exception of the Urban Waterfront at Carrickfergus. The Policy only allows

planning permission to be granted where development proposals are of such national or regional importance as to outweigh any detrimental impact on the coastal environment; or it can be demonstrated that any proposal will not harm the qualities of the coastal landscape, while still protecting nature conservation value.

There is 1 designated BMA Coastal Area within MEA.

COU 3 – BMA Coastal Area (Designation)

COU 4 & 5 (Policy)

Rural Landscape Wedges

In Carrickfergus area, Rural Landscape Wedges are designated to fulfil a variety of functions. These include defining and protecting the setting of settlements, preventing the coalescing of settlements and maintaining the rural character of the countryside. (Appendix F, Map No 8)

There are 2 Rural Landscape Wedges designated in BMAP that fall within Mid and East Antrim Council Borough

CE04 – Rural Landscape Wedge Greenisland is designated to the west of Greenisland between Jordanstown, Metropolitan Newtownabbey and Greenisland to distinguish and maintain the separate identities of these 3 areas, preventing their merging. Though it also provides an important element in defining and protecting the setting of Greenisland and Metropolitan Newtownabbey.

CE05 – Rural Landscape Wedge Carrickfergus is designated between Carrickfergus and Greenisland to distinguish and maintain their separate identities by forming a visual break between the two settlements; prevent the merging of the two communities; provide an important element in defining and protecting the setting of Carrickfergus and Greenisland; maintain the rural character of the countryside; and protect the identity and setting of the small settlement of Trooperslane adjacent to Carrickfergus.

COU2 (Policy)

Areas of High Scenic Value (AOHSV)

In Carrickfergus District, Areas of High Scenic Value (AOHSV) are designated to protect the natural setting of a settlement, or areas important in defining local landscape character. These areas are important for their landscape quality, scenic quality and natural heritage assets. (Appendix F, Map No 8)

There are 2 designated AOHSV within Mid and East Antrim Council.

COU 6/02 – Carrickfergus Escarpment

COU 6/01 - Island Magee

COU 7 (Policy)

Local Landscape Policy Areas (LLPA's)

LLPAs do not preclude development, but are designated to help protect those areas within and/or adjoining settlements which are considered to be of greatest amenity value, landscape quality or local significance and are therefore worthy of protection from undesirable or damaging development. They can include archaeological sites and monuments and their surroundings, listed and other locally important buildings and their surroundings, river banks and shore lines and associated public access and attractive vistas, localised hills and other areas of local amenity importance. (Policy ENV 3)

BMAP designated 16 LLPAs within the former Carrickfergus Borough. These are distributed across the settlements of Carrickfergus, Greenisland and Whitehead. It should be noted however that there are no LLPA's designated in the extant Ballymena or Larne Area Plans as these types of designations were introduced after those plans were adopted.

Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance (SLNCI)

There are **23** SLNCI's designated within the former Carrickfergus council area. We will reassess this strategy and examine the need for additional SLNCI's throughout the remainder of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council area. The following link to BMAP Part 4 Volume 4 District Proposals, Carrickfergus Map Booklet, shows Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance within the former Carrickfergus Borough.

https://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/policy/development_plans/devplans_az/dbmap2015/dbmap-pt4vol4-carrickfergus-map-booklet.pdf

Corporate Plan

- 2.65 Our Corporate Plan sets out the Council's vision, themes and objectives that will shape our work and the services that we provide up until 2023. The aim of the Corporate Plan is to deliver the same long term vision and outcomes for the Borough that are set out in the Community Plan. The key objectives of the Plan are identified under five main themes all of which fall under the wider strategic theme to be a high performing council:
- Sustainable jobs and tourism.
 - Good health and wellbeing.
 - Learning for life.
 - Community safety and cohesion.
 - Our environment.

Community Plan

- 2.66 Our Community Plan – 'Putting People First' was published in April 2017 and covers the period from 2017 to 2032. The vision of the Community Plan is that: *"Mid and East Antrim will be a strong, safe and inclusive community, where people work together to improve the quality of life for all"*. The strategic priorities set out in the Community Plan have been identified through joint working with 12 statutory partner organisations and informed by extensive consultation with the public and community and stakeholder groups. The strategic priorities are developed around the five key themes that now inform the Corporate Plan.
- 2.67 The Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 sets out a statutory link between the Community Plan and the LDP, in that the preparation of the LDP must take account of the Community Plan. The strategic priorities of our Community Plan have therefore been taken into consideration in the preparation of the draft Plan Strategy.
- 2.68 Improving the health and wellbeing of communities and ensuring the natural environment and built heritage of our borough is protected and sustainably managed are key themes in our Community Plan. As work on the LDP progresses, we will seek to deliver on any community planning outcomes where there is an identified spatial land use or local planning policy solution.

Mid and East Antrim Local Biodiversity Action Plan

- 2.69 Many of our open spaces within Mid and East Antrim are rich in biodiversity and are a valuable natural asset to the Borough. Local Authorities are recognised as having a pivotal role in protecting and enhancing biodiversity through the management and development of lands and property by influencing local policies and changing attitudes. The Action Plan recognises the threats to biodiversity and provides a framework for local action to help meet the Councils commitment to the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, which introduced a statutory duty for public bodies to further the conservation of biodiversity.

Cross Boundary Policy Context

- 2.70 In developing our Countryside Strategy, account has been taken of the local policy context as it relates to the emerging LDP's of our three neighbouring councils:
- Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council;
 - Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council Belfast City Council; and
 - Mid Ulster District Council.
- 2.71 Neighbouring Council's Preferred Options Papers, supporting evidence base and published draft Plan Strategies have been taken account of, as these are regarded as the most relevant documents when considering cross-boundary issues. Because Carrickfergus falls within the Belfast Metropolitan Area, there has also been engagement with Belfast City Council and other councils in the Metropolitan area.

Table 1.1 Neighbouring Councils' Position

Neighbouring Council	Position
Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council	<p>ANBC published its draft Plan Strategy in June 2019 the relevant policies are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategic Policy 8, Natural Heritage, promotes the protection, conservation, enhancement and restoration of ANBC Natural Heritage Assets. - Policies DM 37-42 are to protect natural heritage from the adverse impact of development. <p>Designated Sites of nature Conservation Importance The general policy approach is to protect designated sites of nature conservation importance from the potentially damaging impact of inappropriate development, taking account of international, national and local obligations.</p> <p>Protected Species Policy aims to protect all legally protected species and habitats from the damaging impact of development with the potential to harm them.</p> <p>Habitats, Species and Features of Natural Heritage Aims to ensure that adequate protection is afforded to those features of natural heritage or biodiversity value which fall beyond designated sites.</p> <p>Landscape Protection 7 Strategic Landscape Policy Areas are identified for protection from undesirable or damaging development. Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance (SLNCIs) and Local Landscape Policy Areas (LLPAs) are to be brought forward in the Local Policies Plan. The associated operational policy aims to ensure that the visual amenity, local character and distinctive landscapes and its associated features, are properly considered in assessing development. It also aims to protect distinctive landscapes which are particularly sensitive to change due to their quality, features and low capacity to absorb new development.</p> <p>Coastal Protection Recognising the importance of the ANBC coastal area the policy seeks to protect and enhance this zone with the boundary to be designated at Local Policies Plan Stage.</p> <p>Trees and Development Policy aims to protect existing trees, woodland and hedgerows which are considered to be of amenity value, promote well considered landscape schemes in new developments and enhance tree cover seek to retain trees wherever possible and encourage more tree planting in order to enhance the amenity value</p>

<p>Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council</p>	<p>CCGBC published its POP in June 2018. CCGBC relevant preferred options:</p> <p>Natural Heritage Key Issue NH1: Protection of Most Sensitive Landscapes and Seascape. The preferred option was to retain the principle of the existing policy framework and designate the most sensitive areas as Special Countryside Areas (SCAs) and provide policy to protect these areas. Key Issue NH2: Protection of AONBs. The preferred option was to Provide policy based on the identified landscape quality of each AONB.</p> <p>Coastal Development No options have been put forward at the strategic Plan stage. CCGBC list the SPPS requirements, which must be carried out as part of the LDP and explains this will be considered in response to comments received during the 12 week public consultation, in consultation with the relevant government departments and stakeholders and adjoining councils in preparation of the Plan Strategy.</p> <p>World Heritage Site The Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast, Northern Ireland's <u>only</u> World Heritage Site, lies within CCGBC.</p> <p>Renewables Key Issues RN1: Facilitating Renewable Energy Development Whilst Protecting Landscapes. The preferred option is to retain the principle of the existing policy framework and designate areas of constraint within most sensitive landscapes and provide a policy for those areas to protect sensitive landscapes from inappropriate forms of renewable development.</p> <p>Public Utilities Key Issue: PU1: High Structures in Sensitive Landscapes. The preferred option is to identify specific areas within most sensitive landscapes as Areas of Constraint on High Structures development.</p> <p>Minerals Key Issue MN2: Promoting Sustainable Minerals Development – Areas of Constraint on Minerals Development (ACMDs). The preferred option is to designate areas to be protected from mineral development and define other areas elsewhere where mineral development will be acceptable in principle. CC&G's state this option provides certainty to the operators and also allows for the protection of the environmental assets within the Borough.</p>
<p>Mid Ulster District Council</p>	<p>Mid Ulster published its draft Plan Strategy in February 2019. Relevant Policies are :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SCA 1 Special Countryside Areas - NH 1 – NH 6 Natural Heritage Policies - HE 16 – Local Landscape Policy Areas - OS 2 – Protection of River Corridors <p>Natural Heritage The MU strategy includes identifying sites of international, national and local importance accompanied by appropriate policies to ensure their protection and / or enhancement. The precautionary principle is applied in relation to developments on national or international significant landscapes or natural heritage resources. MU intend a review of the existing SLNCs and may bring forward additional new SLNCs within the Local Policies Plan.</p> <p>The MU strategy designates Special Countryside Areas (SCA) to protect most sensitive landscapes from inappropriate development. The SCAs are designated along the shores of Lough Neagh and Lough Beg, and on the most wild and remote parts of the Sperrins AONB and Slieve Beagh where there is a presumption against all new development. . The SCA's are complemented with Areas of Constraint in other environmentally sensitive areas in order to control specific types of development, namely wind turbines and other high structures.</p>

In addition to these designations biodiversity and landscape character are recognised through the designation of **Local Landscape Policy Areas**. The MU Local Policies Plan will bring forward where appropriate bespoke policies for LLPA's.

- 2.72 The Council has responded to neighbouring Council's POPs and the draft Plan Strategies for Antrim and Newtownabbey and Mid Ulster as they were published. In addition, the Council is also represented on a number of working groups to discuss cross-boundary issues, for example the Metropolitan Area Spatial Working Group and Lough Neagh Forum.
- 2.73 Members of the plan team have also met with officials in the three neighbouring councils during preparation of the POP. In preparation for the draft Plan Strategy, members of the plan team met again in July 2019 with officials in the three neighbouring councils to outline the various broad approaches of our draft Plan Strategy and to discuss cross-boundary issues. Cross boundary differences in policy approaches in regard to the countryside are discussed below.
- 2.74 **Mid Ulster District Council** draft Plan Strategy designates a Special Countryside Area around the western shores of Lough Beg and along the west bank of the River Bann as far north as Glenone. It sets out a general presumption against development, with exceptions provided for:
- ancillary open development relating to appropriate recreation / open space uses, which have been demonstrated to be in the wider public interest; or
 - in-situ replacement of an existing building of a similar size and character;
 - communications apparatus to serve a recognised 'not spot';
 - the policy at Lough Beg allows for consolidation or minor expansion of existing development relating to the commercial fishing industry.
- 2.75 The Mid Ulster draft Plan Strategy also designates the River Bann as a River Corridor with a policy (OS 2) to protect this asset for biodiversity, nature conservation and public access and recreation.
- 2.76 **The MEA** draft Plan Strategy designates an SCA around the eastern shores of Lough Beg and therefore mirrors the Mid Ulster policy approach to the lough, albeit that there are differences in the exceptions. However the MEA Countryside Strategy extends the SCA for only a relatively short distance to the north along the river. Further north, as far as Portglenone and extending to the east, our draft Plan Strategy designates an Area of Constraint on High Structures (ACHS). This designation seeks to manage the height of wind turbines, pylons and masts, as well as other obtrusive forms of development in this open and expansive landscape which is highly sensitive to such development. It also seeks to minimise harmful impacts on wild birds given that this area is included within a designated SPA. Whilst there is a difference in policy approaches between the two Plans in this area, both Plans recognise that this is an important area that is vulnerable to pressure from development. The SPPS does not require identical policy approaches in such situations. In this case both Councils have discussed the issues and there is a mutual understanding of the rationale behind the different policy approaches.
- 2.77 In consideration of the Mid Ulster policy OS 2, MEA has brought forward a similar policy which includes the River Bann, as well as three other rivers in the Borough. This will help ensure consistency on this cross-boundary issue and will to some degree offset the aforementioned differences in policy approaches.
- 2.78 **Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council** draft Plan Strategy adopts a broadly similar approach to MEA in relation to their strategic designations around the council boundary. These include Strategic Landscape Policy Areas, Local Landscape Policy Areas, and Coastal Policy Area. As the precise boundaries for these areas are to be brought forward in the Local Policies Plan, MEA in their consultation response has highlighted that judgement will be reserved until such time as these boundaries are identified. We will have particular interest in securing 'joined-up' planning in relation to the sensitive (cross boundary) areas designated in our Countryside Strategy, including Carrickfergus Escarpment (designated as an ACHS), Lough Beg (designated as an SCA), The BMA Coastal Area, and the countryside between Greenisland and Jordanstown (designated as a Rural Landscape Wedge).

- 2.79 **Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council** published its POP in June 2018 and is still at a relatively early stage in preparation of their draft Plan Strategy. However, in discussions with this council, it has been noted that the extant Northern Area Plan 2016 did not continue some countryside designations currently contained in the Larne Area Plan 2010, despite the AONB and natural heritage designations of international importance overlapping the council boundary. Thus, the designated SCA along the undeveloped coast north of Larne, does not extend into the CCG council area. Similarly, the designated Area of Constraint on Mineral Development (ACMD) does not extend into the CCG area. Accordingly, it is imperative to ensure that discussions on these strategic matters are continued with our neighbouring council to the north.
- 2.80 In consideration of all neighbouring Council's development plan documents and discussions held with their officials, it is the opinion of this Council that at present there is no significant and apparent cross boundary conflict with our draft Plan Strategy, insofar as it relates to the Countryside. However, as indicated above, continuous engagement with neighbouring Councils will be important in the interest of joined up planning in the countryside.

3.0 Profile

Natural Heritage

- 3.1 The Mid and East Antrim Borough Council natural environment is made up of a diverse range of scenic landscapes, stunning coastlines and impressive vistas. It is also home to a range of habitats, wildlife and species.
- 3.2 At present, many of these environmental and landscape assets are protected by various designations. As a planning authority, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council must pursue economic and social priorities while simultaneously being aware of legislative obligations and the regional policy direction in relation to our environmental assets. Sites of important natural heritage assets within Mid and East Antrim Borough Council include:
- 4 RAMSAR sites
 - 4 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
 - 5 Special Protection Areas (SPAs)
 - 1 Proposed Special Protection Area (pSPA)
 - 40 Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI's)
 - 2 Nature Reserves
 - 8 Local Nature Reserves
 - 23 Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance (SLNCI)(Carrickfergus section of draft BMAP)
- 3.3 The international and national environmental designations are reflected spatially on the maps contained within Appendix F. All current environmental designations except local are available on the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) website <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk>

Sites of International Importance with the Mid and East Antrim Borough area include:

Ramsar Sites

- 3.4 There are **4** Ramsar designated within MEA:

- Lough Neagh and Lough Beg
- Garron Plateau
- Larne Lough
- Belfast Lough

Special Protection Areas (SPA's)

- 3.5 There are **5** SPAs within MEA:

- Antrim Hills
- Belfast Lough Open Water (*to be subsumed within the proposed East Coast (NI) Marine SPA*)
- Belfast Lough
- Larne Lough
- Lough Neagh and Lough Beg

- 3.6 There is currently a proposed SPA, to be named the East Coast (Northern Ireland) Marine SPA, which is to include marine waters of the Irish Sea and begins at Ringfad near Carnlough and extends to Cloghan Head near Ardglass. This area will subsume the existing Belfast Lough Open Water SPA. This proposed SPA adjoins Larne Lough SPA and Belfast Lough SPA which are considered mainly terrestrial habitats.

Special Areas of Conservation (SAC's)

- 3.7 There are currently **2** SACs within MEA area and **2** SACs that concern the MEA coast.

- Garron Plateau
- Main Valley Bogs
- North Channel
- The Maidens (off-shore)

NB: Classified SPAs and SACs together form the European wide network of sites known as 'Natura 2000'.
 3.8 As an initial contribution to the **OSPAR Convention** commitment, most of Northern Ireland's Marine SACs have been submitted as **OSPAR Marine Protected Areas** and many of our coastal ASSIs are also likely to become OSPAR MPAs to fulfil NI commitments.

Sites of National Importance within Mid and East Antrim Borough Council area include:

Statutory Nature Reserves

3.9 There are **2** Statutory Nature Reserves within MEA area:

- Straidkilly (Ulster Wildlife Trust)
- Swan Island (subsumed within Larne Lough SPA)

Areas of Special Scientific Interest

3.10 There are **40** Areas of Special Scientific Interest designated under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands Order 1985 within the Plan area either in whole or part, which are listed as follows. Areas of Special Scientific Interest are areas of land that have been identified by scientific survey as being of the highest degree of conservation value by reason of any of their flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features. ASSI's have a well-defined boundary and by and large remain in private ownership. The underlying philosophy is to achieve conservation by co-operation with landowners who receive a list of notifiable operations which the Department considers might harm the nature conservation interest of the site and may therefore require a management agreement (See Appendix G.1 Map G2).

ASSI's in Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

1 Ballygalley Head	21 Killydonnelly
2 Blackburn	22 Knock Dhu and Sallagh Braes
3 Carneal	23 Larne Lough
4 Castletown	24 Lemnalary
5 Cleggan Valley	25 Linford
6 Cloghfin Port	26 Little Deer Park
7 Copeland Reservoir	27 Lough Beg
8 Cranny Falls	28 Minnis
9 Culnafay	29 Newlands
10 Feystown	30 North Woodburn Glen
11 Frosses Bog	31 North Woodburn Reservoir
12 Galboly	32 Outer Belfast Lough
13 Garron Plateau	33 Portmuck
14 Glarryford	34 Rathsherry
15 Glenarm Woods	35 Scawt Hill
16 Glenarm Woods (Part 2)	36 South Woodburn
17 Glen Burn	37 Straidkilly Wood
18 Glynn Woods	38 The Gobbins
19 Gortnagory	39 The Maidens
20 Kilcoan	40 Waterloo

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

3.11 A significant part of the **Antrim Coast and Glens AONB** lies within MEA Borough. The coastline of County Antrim from Ballycastle to Larne and the world famous Glens of Antrim contain some of the most beautiful and varied scenery in Northern Ireland. Designated in 1988, the AONB covers 70600 ha. The area is dominated by a high undulating plateau cut by deep glens, which open north and eastwards to the sea. It is an area of contrasts: gentle bays are separated by blunt headlands; exposed moorland gives way to sheltered valleys; wide open expanses to enclosed farmland. Slemish Mountain rises abruptly, its wildness in sharp contrast to the neat fields of the Braid Valley below. The main aim of the AONB designation is to protect and enhance the landscape quality for the benefit of those who live there and for those visitors who come to enjoy it.

Sites of Local Importance

Local Nature Reserves

3.12 There are **8** local nature reserves within MEA:

- Bashfordsland Wood and Oakfield Glen, Carrickfergus (MEA)
- Beach Road Nature Reserve, Whitehead (MEA)
- Carrickfergus Mill Ponds (MEA)
- Cranny Falls, Carnlough (MEA)
- Diamond Jubilee Wood, Whitehead (MEA)
- Feystown (Ulster Wildlife Trust)
- Glenarm (Ulster Wildlife Trust)
- Isle of Muck (Ulster Wildlife Trust)

Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance (SLNCI)

3.13 Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance are LDP designations, identified in the past through detailed ecological and scientific surveys commissioned by NIEA. These nature conservation sites represent a range of habitats, sites of specific geological or earth science interest and sites important for specific flora and fauna. These sites are designated in Local Development Plans with associated policies that seek to protect and, where possible enhance, their natural heritage assets and nature conservation value.

3.14 There are **23** SLNCI's designated within the former Carrickfergus council area by the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan.

SLNCIs in Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

Antrim Coast Blackhead to Whitehead	Knockagh - Dorisland
Ardboley	Lough Mourne
Blackhead (Geodiversity)	North Woodburn Reservoir Site
Bentra Wood	Oakfield
Castle Dobbs	Slimero
Coast North and South of Cloughen Point	Slimero Mountain
Carrickfergus Castle	South Woodburn
Copeland Reservoir	West of Mutton Burn
Dalways Bawn	Whitehead (Geodiversity)
Jointure Bay Stream	Woodburn
Keeran Moss	Woodland West of Black Hill
Kilroot	

Woodland

3.15 Woodland within MEA (DAERA, April 2018):

- Approximately 3459.9 Ha of woodland managed by the Forest Service
- Approximately 2838.5 Ha of woodland not managed by the Forest Service

Woodland in MEA

Woodland in MEA Managed by NI Forest Service
Portglenone Forest
Portglenone Forest - Top Wood
Portglenone Forest - Bracknamuckley Wood
Bann Woods South - Bracknamuckley
Bann Woods South - Gortgole
Bann Woods South - Ferrystown
Cleggan Forest
Glenarm Forest

Capanagh Forest
Capanagh Forest - Shillanavogy Wood
Ballyboley Forest
Woodburn Forest
Woodburn Forest - Lough Mourne
Woodburn Forest - Copeland Reservoir & Carmanus
Woodland in MEA Managed by Woodland Trust
Galgorm Wood, Cullybackey
Keel Wood, Ballymena
Little Acorn Wood, Broughshane
The Drum, Cargan
Seaview Wood, Seacourt, Larne
Clements Wood, Ballygowan Road, Larne
Oakfield Glen, Carrickfergus
Woodland in MEA Managed by Ulster Wildlife Trust
Straidkilly Nature Reserve
Woodland in MEA Managed by Mid and East Antrim Borough Council
ECOS Park, Ballymena
Carnfunnock Country Park
Bashfordsland Wood, Carrickfergus
Diamond Jubilee Wood, Whitehead

Ancient and Long-Established Woods

- 3.16 There are numerous areas within MEA that have Ancient and/or Long-Established Woodland present. For example, one of the largest continuous areas of ancient woodland in Northern Ireland is found at Glenarm Forest (backonthemap.org.uk, 2017). There are also significant areas of ancient woodland at Woodburn Forest and Straidkilly National Nature Reserve. Portglenone Forest is an example of a significant area of long-established woodland. Other smaller areas of Ancient and/or Long-Established Woodland are dispersed throughout the rest of the Borough. Many of these areas can be viewed via the Interactive Map accessible on the website backonthemap.org.uk.

Tree Preservation Orders

- 3.17 A Tree Preservation Order (TPO) can be implemented to protect trees under the Planning (Trees) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 and the Planning (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. The Council has a duty to protect trees under Section 122 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. TPO's are normally enacted to protect trees considered to be of special value in terms of amenity, history or rarity. A TPO makes it an offence to cut down, top, lop, uproot or wilfully damage or destroy a protected tree, or to permit these actions, without first seeking the Council's consent to do so.
- 3.18 An online map of current TPOs within MEA can be accessed on the Council website via a link under the "Local Development Plan – Trees and Hedges" section.

Priority Habitats and Species

- 3.19 There are a number of priority habitat examples in Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Area including blanket bogs, lowland raised bogs and lagoons. Priority species within MEA include Common Swift, Curlew, Hen Harrier, Red Grouse, Red Squirrel and Ground Beetle. The most common form of conserving biodiversity is designation, protection and management of areas of conservation importance, through the

plan. As part of the LDP Landscape Character Assessment, priority habitats and species are noted as important features that contributes to give a defined areas its 'sense of place'. (See Appendix A for Landscape Character Assessment)

Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs)

- 3.20 LDPs should also have regard to any Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs). LBAPs aim to conserve biodiversity through local partnerships, taking into account both national and local priorities by involving local people and local organisations through practical delivery of biodiversity conservation. The Mid and East Antrim Borough Council LBAP was published in December 2014. Link to LBAP - <https://www.midandeastantrim.gov.uk/downloads/lbap-mea-final.pdf>
- 3.21 The full range of priority habitats and species and their features are listed on the DAERA website can be accessed via: Northern Ireland Priority Species <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/list-northern-ireland-priority-species>
- 3.22 Northern Ireland Priority Habitats <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-list-priority-habitats>
- 3.33 LDPs should seek to protect and integrate certain features of the natural heritage when zoning sites for development through 'key site requirements' (KSRs) and identify and promote green and blue infrastructure where this will add value to the provision, enhancement and connection of open space and habitats in and around settlements.

Landscape

Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment

- 3.34 The Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment (NIRLCA), published in February 2016, defined 26 regional scale landscape character areas using criteria based on culture, nature, people and place, and perception. Full descriptions of the 26 areas can be found on the DAERA website and accessed via <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/landscape-character-northern-ireland#toc-1>. The NIRLCA provides an impartial and robust evidence base which will inform the management of change and the delivery of sustainable development. The NIRLCA will influence a range of land use planning and development management decisions, guide policy development and designations, identify opportunities for local action, target resources and provide a mechanism for monitoring landscape changes over time.
- 3.35 The NIRLCA is pre-dated by the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment (NILCA 2000) being published in 1999. Since then there has been a substantial phase of building and other development in both urban and rural areas of Northern Ireland which has impacted on the character of many landscapes. Some of the original NILCA comments and recommendations about the landscape character within some LCA's may not be valid today. Notwithstanding this, the earlier NILCA still remains valid even though development in the ensuing period may have altered landscape character in some areas.
- 3.36 The Mid and East Antrim Borough contains 6, either in whole or in part, of the newly defined regional scale LCAs. The broad character of each of these areas as described by the NRLCA is set out below.
- 3.37 **The Lough Neagh Basin (RLCA 14)** - includes a very small portion of MEA Borough Council area. The most north westerly corner of the RLCA incorporates Lough Beg and land to the east towards Grange Corner. The Lough Beg environs carry international designations including a Ramsar site, a SPA and a national ASSI designation due to the overwintering bird population. The Lower Bann River outflows northward towards the Atlantic from Lough Beg. Fens, wetland and carr are common semi-natural habitats around the shores of the lough, which are often designated for their natural interest and include Lough Beg Nature Reserve. Strong recreational interest in the area, especially at Newferry, include water sports, birdwatching, fishing, cycling and walking.
- 3.38 **Lower Bann Valley (RLCA 15)** - includes a very small portion of MEA Borough Council Area immediately north of RLCA No.14. It includes the Bann Valley between Portglenone to the north and Newferry to the south. To the east the land rises up to Long Mountain Ridge which forms a topographical boundary between the Bann Valley and the Maine Valley (RLCA 17). Today the Bann is well used for recreational boating and fishing and is an important conduit for migrating eels and salmon which are the most important economic features of the river. There are marinas at Portglenone and Newferry.
- 3.39 **Maine and Braid River Valleys (RLCA 17)** - The majority of RLCA 17 falls within MEA Borough Council. This RLCA is formed by four river valleys; the River Maine Valley that runs north-south, which is joined by the Clough River, Braid Water and Kells Water tributaries that run off the Antrim Plateau. This LCA is contained within hills to the east, and Long Ridge Mountain to the West. The valley landscape consists of wide, open rolling farmland with drumlins which have extensive views from on top and forms a gateway to the 'Antrim Coast and Glens AONB'. The rural tranquil feel throughout the valley is interrupted by the significant road network focused on Ballymena, the largest settlement in the area. Slemish Mountain is located on the boundary of the Antrim Plateau and is a prominent outcrop which is highly visible throughout the landscape and famed for its association with St. Patrick. The scenic Ballymena Glens stretch eastwards leading towards the Garron Plateau/Antrim Plateau. Arthur Cottage near Ballymena is the ancestral home of Chester Alan Arthur, the 21st President of the USA.
- 3.40 **Antrim Plateau and Glens (RLCA 18)** - Approximately half of this RLCA falls within MEA Borough stretching from Garron Point to Larne with the southern boundary formed by the Six Mile Water valley (RLCA 19). Glenarm and Glencloy of the nine Glens of Antrim fall within MEA. This RLCA incorporates several types of landscape ranging from dramatic coastal cliffs and tranquil bays, to scenic, intimate glens once remote, exposed and generally undeveloped uplands of the Antrim Plateau mainly used for sheep farming.

Settlement is concentrated along the coast, in the bays between headlands where the soil is more fertile. The main road, the A2, broadly follows the coast with other major roads crossing the plateau where the valleys cut through. The plateau is a large scale sweeping landform, generally heath covered with several distinctive areas, including the semi-natural habitats of upland found on Garron Plateau, the forested areas of Ballyboley and the open and exposed areas of Elliott's Hill with its large scale wind energy development. Much of Garron Plateau is designated a SAC, Ramsar and ASSI for the largest area of intact upland blanket bog in Northern Ireland. Rare bird species such as the Hen Harrier and Golden Plover can be sighted here. Bronze aged sites exist near Ballygally and its castle dates from the plantation period and has been in continuous use for over 400 years. Limestone quarrying was previously important at Carnlough and still continues today in Glenarm and Kilwaughter. Iron and bauxite ores were mined at Glenravel, evidenced by the dense network of disused narrow gauge railway lines, spoil heaps and other mining infrastructure still visible in the landscape today. The area is popular with tourists attracted by the natural beauty and outdoor recreational opportunities such as the Ulster Way and Carnfunnock Country Park. There is a rich history of folklore and Irish mythology with place names like Feystown (town of the fairies). The area has a strong tradition of storytelling and song and the area has attracted many artists both local and from further afield.

- 3.41 **South Antrim Hills and Six Mile Water (RLCA 19)** - An area from Larne Lough to Ballynure and from Ballyboley forest to Woodburn forest forms the extent of land in this RLCA which falls within MEA Borough. The South Antrim Hills are located to the north of Belfast and south of the Antrim Plateau, with the Six Mile Water flowing in between. This river rises at Shane's Hill to the west of Larne and flows westwards towards Lough Neagh. Angling for Brown Trout and Salmon in Six Mile Water is a popular recreational activity. The valley rises northwards towards the Antrim Plateau. These uplands display distinctive rocky outcrops among the uneven field pattern with pastures being replaced by woodland on the lower slopes, increasingly to the east. Extensive state managed conifer forests such as Ballyboley which lies on the edge of Agnew's Hill, are important economically and also for their recreational and amenity value. There are occasional reservoirs and small loughs amongst the hills, often associated with these forests. Communication masts on hilltop sites along with pylons and electricity lines crossing the area, can detract from the remote, undeveloped feel of the highest uplands. There are number of single turbines across the hills. The development of numerous turbines may have combined impacts which become more pervasive than larger wind farms. The area is also overlooked by windfarms to the north on Elliot's Hill. The war memorial monument at Knockagh on the boundary of this RLCA is a prominent landmark.
- 3.42 **Belfast Lough and Islandmagee (RLCA 20)** - This RLCA forms the transition from the sea to the upland areas of the South Antrim Hills and the Six Mile Water to the north. The extent of land in the MEA borough which falls within this RLCA stretches from Larne and Islandmagee, through Whitehead and Carrickfergus to Greenisland. This area is part of the eastern coastline of Northern Ireland which in this RLCA is marked by the shores and hill slopes of the Belfast Lough valley; the undulating basalt ridges on both sides of Larne Lough, and cliffs along the eastern shore of the Islandmagee peninsula which . There are a mix of coastal habitats, from tidal flats within Larne Lough to cliffs and wave cut platforms near the Gobbins. Larne Lough is designated a SPA, ASSI and Ramsar site. Settlement is focused at Larne, at the mouth of the Larne Lough. Nearby there is a power station at Ballylumford and an old limestone quarry at Magheramorne. A prominent line of pylons also crosses the area from Ballylumford, down through Islandmagee to Carrickfergus. The stack of Kilroot power station just north of Carrickfergus forms a clear landmark in many views. Carrickfergus Castle also forms a landmark though less visible from a distance. An imposing Norman Castle, it was besieged in turn by the Scots, Irish, English and French. The castle played an important military role until 1928 and remains one of the best preserved medieval structures in Ireland.

Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment 2000

- 3.43 The Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment Series (NILCA Series), which includes the 130 Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) for the whole region, was published in 1999. It was followed by the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment 2000 (NILCA 2000). The NILCA 2000 uses systematic methods of assessment and includes bespoke descriptions of each of the 130 LCAs to reflect their distinctive character. Descriptions of these LCAs are available on the DAERA website and can be accessed via <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/landscape-character-northern-ireland#toc-1>. In addition, the NILCA

sets out principles for landscape management and accommodating new development in each of the defined areas. It also includes a landscape based settlement analysis of the larger settlements.

- 3.44 The NILCA 2000 also identifies **Areas of Scenic Quality** and defines them as landscapes of regional or local importance for their scenic quality. They represent a second tier (below AONBs) in the hierarchy of landscape classifications. Within Mid and East Antrim there are 3 Areas of Scenic Quality: the Lough Neagh Fringe (covering the fringes of Lough Beg and part of the Lower River Bann floodplain), Carrickfergus Escarpment and Islandmagee.

Landscape Character Assessment – Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Area

- 3.45 The Mid and East Antrim Borough contains 18 of the 130 Landscape Character Areas defined by NILCA, some of which are shared with neighbouring districts (see Appendix G.1 Map G5)
- 3.46 The Council is required to undertake a review of Landscape Character Assessments as part of the LDP process. In light of the period past and considering the substantial phase of development since the publication of the NILCA Series, the Council has completed a study to review the original evidence base provided by NILCA 2000 in relation to the Mid and East Antrim Borough. (see Appendix A - Landscape Character Assessment). The Council's Landscape Character Review does not set out policy but provides a current evidence base consistent with developments incurred in the intervening period since the original study. The review forms part of the evidence base for Mid and East Antrim Borough Council's LDP and has informed policy development in the draft Plan Strategy.

Northern Ireland Regional Seascape Character Assessment

- 3.47 The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) commissioned a Northern Ireland Regional Seascape Character Assessment (NIRSCA) which was published in 2014 and aimed to provide a strategic understanding of various areas of regional seascape character along the entire Northern Ireland coast. A seascape is an area of sea, coastline and land, as perceived by people, whose character results from the actions and interactions of land with sea, by natural and/or human factors. The seascape includes views from land to sea, views from sea to land, views along the coastline, and the effect on landscape of the relationship between sea and land.
- 3.48 A Seascape Character Area is a unique geographic area of land, intertidal and marine area with a recognisable sense of place and identity. The NIRSCA identified and mapped regional seascape character areas, detailed their key features and characteristics, and described the relationship between each seascape character area and the neighbouring terrestrial landscape character areas (as identified in NILCA, 2000) using an approach based on best practice guidance. The NIRSCA can provide an evidence base to help inform the planning, design and management of change (natural and man-made) including development along the coastline. It will also further awareness of the interconnectedness between the terrestrial and marine environments, highlighted in the Marine Act (NI) 2013 and the emerging marine spatial planning system. NIRSCA is utilized in a number of ways including marine planning and licensing, helping to inform planning policies and planning decisions as a tool to help assess siting, scale and design of development proposals.
- 3.49 The NIRSCA (2014) identified twenty-four regional seascape character areas around the coast of Northern Ireland, taking account of the location and setting, key characteristics, natural influences, cultural influences and perceptual influences. Potential forces for change in the various seascape character areas are also identified. Within Mid and East Antrim the following four seascape character areas have been identified and described as follows:

Southern Glens Coast Seascape Character Area (SeaCA) – Component LCAs: Larne Glens (LCA 123), Larne Coast (LCA 126)

- 3.50 This SeaCA includes the scenic coastline of the Larne Glens from Garron Point to the northern edge of Larne and the inshore waters to the outer extent of the circalittoral zone. Important features in this area include Carnlough Bay, the dramatic basalt cliffs and scarp slopes, and the prominent headland of Ballygalley Head. The Larne Glens provide a visual backdrop to this coastal zone. The bays provide shelter for the coastal

settlements of Ballygalley, Carnlough and Glenarm that contrast with the open and exposed headlands. Outside of these settlements the coastline has an undeveloped appearance. The shoreline predominantly consists of gravel with rocky outcrops, however there are sandy beaches found at Ballygalley Bay and Carnlough Bay. Sailing is popular within these bays. The open coast road runs along a raised beach at the foot of the cliffs in this area. Travelling along the coast road, the diversity of geology and landforms provide dramatic views and there are extensive views across the open sea, and the headlands and cliffs form a sequence of striking “gateways” along this route. The entire coastline of the SeaCA is within the Antrim Coast and Glens Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and there are registered Historic Parks and Gardens within or immediately adjacent to the SCA including Carnfunnock Country Park, Cairndhu, Garron Tower, Glenarm Castle and Drumnasole. There are various ASSIs located within this SeaCA e.g. coastal ASSIs at Waterloo and Minnis. The Maidens’ light towers are distinctive features set amongst a cluster of rocky outcrops (The Maidens ASSI) and within an otherwise open expanse of sea. The sea around the Maidens is a designated SAC. Forces for change in this SeaCA include climate change and natural erosion, potential increases in visitor numbers leading to pressure for additional visitor and recreational facilities, and the Maidens have been identified as a potential site for tidal power generation.

The Gobbins Seascape Character Area (SeaCA) –

Component LCAs: Island Magee (LCA 128)

- 3.51 This area includes the coast from the northern edge of Larne to the south of Whitehead, and the inshore waters towards the outer extent of the circalittoral zone. On the east of Islandmagee there are rugged basalt cliffs and rocky outcrops that make up a predominantly unspoilt coastline with a strong sense of remoteness, tranquillity and naturalness. The Gobbins coastal path is located on this coast and there are dramatic views across the expansive North Channel. The offshore Isle of Muck, included within Portmuck ASSI, is important for nesting birds and the surrounding open sea often provides sightings of dolphins and whales. The Gobbins ASSI is a 6.3 km-long section of cliffs which are important for their geology, seabird colony and maritime plants. The only significant beach is at Browns Bay, at the northern tip of Islandmagee. Islandmagee consists of a series of long, basalt ridges that form a backdrop to this exposed coastline which has an undeveloped appearance with rugged cliffs and open seas, and which exhibits a strong natural character.
- 3.52 There are many cultural influences on Islandmagee, for example, the Gobbins coastal path, and coastal communication sites including a signal station on Black Head, Coastguard station at Portmuck, electric fog bell at Ballycronan and ruined lighthouse on Muddersleigh Hill. Forces for change in this SeaCA include the renovation of the Gobbins coastal path which is likely to lead to an increase in visitor numbers.

Larne Lough Seascape Character Area (SeaCA) –

*Component LCAs: Larne Coast (LCA 126), Larne Ridgeland (LCA 127),
Island Magee (LCA 128)*

- 3.53 This area includes Larne Lough and the port and industrial/commercial areas to the east of Larne, and extends around the edge of the Lough to the northern edge of Whitehead. The towns of Whitehead and Larne have a significant influence on the setting of the area, Chainé Monument on the Larne seafront is a key landmark, and Ballylumford Power Station is dominant feature at the mouth of the Lough. The wooded escarpments either side of Glynn and hills on the western side of the Lough and the low rising hills on Islandmagee are significant for the Lough’s contained setting. The southern part of the Lough has a relatively undeveloped and tranquil character and there are extensive mudflats and saltmarsh at the southern end of the Lough which support internationally important wintering bird populations. An extensive network of pylons across the southern part of the Lough contribute to a visually cluttered appearance. Magheramorne Quarry is to the south-west of the Lough and a main road and the Larne to Belfast railway run adjacent to the western side of the Lough. Besides fishing, there is limited opportunity for recreation on and around the Lough.
- 3.54 Larne Lough is within designated nature conservation sites of international importance (Ramsar, SPA) and national importance (ASSI). Swan Island is within Larne Lough and is a SPA and National Nature Reserve. Forces for change in this SeaCA include proposed developments in and around Magheramorne Quarry, proposed development of gas storage chambers in Larne Lough, development pressure on the outskirts of Larne, and pollution and sea level rise could affect sensitive salt marsh habitats.

Belfast Lough Seascape Character Area (SeaCA) –

- 3.55 *Component LCAs (related to Mid and East Antrim): Carrickfergus Shoreline (LCA 129)*
- 3.56 Within Mid and East Antrim, this area extends from Greenisland to Whitehead point along the northern shoreline of Belfast Lough and adjacent land. Belfast Lough is a large, shallow sea lough and busy gateway for Belfast Port. Parts of the Belfast Lough Shoreline within Mid and East Antrim, and located between Greenisland and Carrickfergus, are within a designated Ramsar, Special Protection Area and Area of Special Scientific Interest.

The northern shoreline is relatively open in character with extensive urban and prominent industrial land use, for example Kilroot power station represents a prominent landmark. Carrickfergus is an important historic settlement on the northern shoreline with a marina providing a base for water-based recreational activity, for example sailing. Carrickfergus Harbour is a good location for fishing and a coastal path on the northern shoreline provide access to parts of the shore. Forces for change in this SeaCA include eutrophication as a result of the discharge of waste water from the Greater Belfast Urban Area (addressed through the Water Framework Directive), potential increases in water-based recreational activity with pressure for additional visitor and recreational facilities, including marina development, and potential oil and gas exploration.

Settlement Setting Appraisal

Selected Settlements: Setting and Significant Landscape Elements

- 3.57 When considering landscape policy designations around settlements, outward expansion of settlements or other relevant planning-related matters, it is imperative to consider the setting of a settlement and the landscape elements that contribute to its sense of place.
- 3.58 This section seeks to give a general overview of the ‘main’ landscape considerations around the edge of towns and villages (any Main Town, Small Town or Village included within the designated settlement hierarchy for Mid and East Antrim Borough Council draft Plan Strategy). This section does not aim to provide a comprehensive list of landscape elements on the edge of settlements, rather it is an overview which seeks to summarise settlement-specific landscape considerations that are significant for their setting.

Landscape Character and Setting Considerations

- 3.59 A settlement's identity can be as much as a result of its setting within the surrounding countryside as with the quality of its buildings and pattern of land use. Landscapes around settlements have an important role to play in maintaining the distinction between urban areas and the countryside, in preventing coalescence between adjacent urban areas and in providing a setting for settlements. However, in some locations, development pressure and pressure for outward expansion can compromise these objectives. In the context of spatial planning, due consideration of landscape elements and their relationship with urban areas and the urban-rural fringe is imperative, so that the quality of the landscape, its aesthetic attributes and its contribution to meeting wider planning objectives can be preserved and enhanced.

Ahoghill

- 3.60 This settlement is backed by a steep ridge and is sited at the convergence of several roads. The steep slopes to the west are important for the setting of this settlement.

Ballycarry

- 3.61 This settlement is a prominent feature on the slopes to the west/south-west of Larne Lough. The wooded slopes to the north and south provide a distinctive setting for the settlement when viewed from the east. The settlement's ‘perched’ setting is significant in the landscape and Red Hall Registered Historic Park, Garden and Demesne abuts the settlement's north/north-eastern edge.

Ballygalley

- 3.62 The setting of this settlement is defined by the coastal shoreline, the prominent headland to the east, woodland to the south and east and the rising slopes to the south and west which contribute to the foreground setting of Knockdhu, Sallagh Braes, and Scawt Hill. All these landscape elements contribute to a unique setting of this settlement which is located on the Coast Road. Cairndhu Golf Club and Carnfunnock Country Park Registered Historic Park, Garden and Demesnes are to the east of this settlement. The proposed East Coast (NI) Marine SPA includes the marine area around Ballygalley up to the mean low water mark.

Ballymena

- 3.63 The Braid River and River Maine provide a floodplain landscape setting to the east and south-west of the settlement. The wooded Galgorm Castle Registered Historic Park, Garden and Demesne and associated golf course is an important local landscape feature associated with the River Maine corridor. The River Maine corridor south of Gracehill is an attractive open landscape which provides a pleasant setting for Gracehill Conservation Area and Galgorm Castle and golf club. The M2 and A26 link define the eastern and south-eastern edge of this settlement creating a hard edge in these areas, however, the ECOS park on the Braid River corridor provides an area of open space which helps soften the landscape.

Ballystrudder

- 3.64 This settlement is located on low-lying land close to Larne Lough. The southern part of Larne Lough and its shoreline are included within Larne Lough ASSI, Ramsar, and Special Protection Area (SPA) conservation designations. The settlement is contained by the B150 (Low Road/Ballystrudder Road) on its western edge

and the area west of this road has a relatively undeveloped character which contributes to the setting of Larne Lough and this settlement. Muldersleigh Hill provides a distinctive backdrop for this settlement and the central ridges of Islandmagee also contribute to the settlement's setting.

Broughshane

- 3.65 The attractive Braid River corridor contributes to the setting of this settlement and provides a link for the settlement's elongated settlement pattern. Riverside footpaths, woodland and mature trees add to the strong sense of place of this attractive, well-maintained village. Ribbon development and coalescence between this settlement and industrial land to the south-west (within Ballymena settlement development limits) would represent threats to the integrity and setting of this settlement.

Cargan

- 3.66 This narrow and elongated settlement is located within the Antrim Coast and Glens Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Binvore, Cargan Rock, Craginamaddy and Tuftarney Hill are prominent hills that contribute significantly to its setting. The Antrim Hills SPA abuts the eastern edge of this settlement and the western edge of the settlement is predominantly bounded by the Cargan Water. The attractive southern approach to this settlement is defined by mature roadside trees and woodland.

Carnlough

- 3.67 This elongated coastal settlement is historically clustered around the harbour, with later development following the sweeping Carnlough Bay along the A2 towards the mouth of the Glencloy River. This settlement is located within the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB. The settlement has a scenic and distinctive setting due to the slopes which rise from the coast towards the Garron Plateau, its location at the foot of the Glencloy glen, the enclosure provided by the curve of Carnlough Bay and the headland to the south-east and its coastal location.
- 3.68 The exposed rock faces of the quarries on the slopes of White Hill form a striking backdrop to the settlement and the small-scale, undulating landscape at the foot of White Hill is particularly attractive. The settlement has a Conservation Area which includes the harbour. Any significant outward expansion of this settlement will detract from the stunning landscape setting of this settlement and its distinctive character. The proposed East Coast (NI) Marine SPA includes the marine area around Carnlough up to the mean low water mark.

Carrickfergus

- 3.69 This settlement is located on the shoreline of Belfast Lough and the castle, Kilroot Power Station and St. Nicholas' Church of Ireland Church provide a distinctive focus for the town. This settlement has a Conservation Area which includes Carrickfergus Castle and harbour and extends north-east along the shoreline. The basalt Carrickfergus Escarpment, an Area of Scenic Quality (ASQ), forms a backdrop to this settlement and, along with its undeveloped ridge and Knockagh Monument, creates a strong landscape setting. The lower slopes of this escarpment have a distinctive grid-like pattern of small fields. Outward expansion has predominantly been contained by the B90 which forms a strong boundary, however, built development in the form of single countryside dwellings and some commercial sites are located to the north of this road. Outward expansion of this settlement and development in the countryside represent threats to the character of the lower escarpment slopes and their distinctive grid-like field pattern.
- 3.70 The buffer 'green' area between Greenisland and Carrickfergus is significant as it separates these settlements and ensures they remain visually distinct. This buffer zone should be retained to ensure the visual integrity of these settlements.
- 3.71 To the east of Carrickfergus, Castle Dobbs Registered Historic Park, Garden and Demesne is an attractive landscape element, however, powerlines between this area and Carrickfergus are prominent in the landscape and create a visually cluttered appearance.
- 3.72 Belfast Lough shoreline is included within Belfast Lough Ramsar and SPA designations and the Outer Belfast Lough Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI). Belfast Lough is contained within the Belfast Lough Open Water SPA (to be subsumed within the proposed East Coast (NI) Marine SPA).

Clough

- 3.73 This is a small ridgetop settlement on cross-roads on the margin of the uplands. There are long views from the edges of the settlement, which has an informal central square with a prominent church. The clustered form and attractive character which is strongly influenced by the informal square and prominent church are key attributes of this settlement.

Cullybackey

- 3.74 The wooded ridge to the west forms a strong landscape setting and backdrop to the settlement and the church spire in the town centre creates a strong focus. The River Maine corridor with its tree-lined/wooded river banks, stone bridges and small-scale riverside pastures contributes to the settlement's distinctive landscape setting.

Glenarm

- 3.75 Glenarm has a stunning landscape setting at the mouth of the Glenarm River and is located on the coast within the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB. The settlement has developed around Glenarm Bay and harbour and has a Conservation Area which includes Glenarm Castle and gardens and quarry sites to east and west. The undeveloped headlands of Straidkilly Point and Lady's Hill and the woodland on the slopes of Glenarm glen are important landscape features for the setting of this settlement.
- 3.76 The wooded slopes of Glenarm glen contribute to the attractive, sheltered character of the glen landscape, much of which is included within the Glenarm Castle Registered Historic Park, Garden and Demesne. Straidkilly National Nature Reserve and wood (part ASSI) is located to the north of the settlement. There is no scope for outward expansion of this settlement without significant adverse impacts on the exceptional character and setting of this settlement. The proposed East Coast (NI) Marine SPA includes the marine area around Glenarm up to the mean low water mark.

Glynn

- 3.77 The wooded slopes around Glynn provide a unique enclosed woodland setting for this settlement. The pleasant setting of this settlement is reinforced by its location beside Larne Lough and strong rural character of the roads leading into the settlement. The wooded Glynn River corridor is an important landscape feature and the flat expanse of Larne Rugby pitches allows views across the Larne Lough to Islandmagee. There are important nature conservation surrounding this settlement such as Larne Lough ASSI, Ramsar, and SPA, the proposed East Coast (NI) Marine SPA and Glynn Woods ASSI.

Greenisland

- 3.78 This settlement extends along the shoreline of Belfast Lough and inland towards the Carrickfergus Escarpment parallel with Station Road. The basalt Carrickfergus Escarpment, an Area of Scenic Quality (ASQ), forms a backdrop to this settlement and, along with its undeveloped ridge and Knockagh Monument, creates a strong landscape setting. The lower slopes of this escarpment have a distinctive grid-like pattern of small fields except for the area within Greenisland Golf Club. Outward expansion has occurred to the north of Upper Road (B90), with development generally running parallel to Upper Road. Further outward expansion of this settlement and development in the countryside represent threats to the character of the lower escarpment slopes and their distinctive grid-like field pattern.
- 3.79 The 'green landscape wedges' between Greenisland and Jordanstown and Greenisland and Carrickfergus are visually significant as they provide a green buffer which separates these settlements and ensures they remain 'visually distinct'. These buffer zones should be retained to ensure the visual integrity of these settlements. Belfast Lough shoreline is included within Belfast Lough Ramsar and SPA designations and the Outer Belfast Lough Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI). Belfast Lough is contained within the Belfast Lough Open Water SPA (to be subsumed within the proposed East Coast (NI) Marine SPA).

Kells/Connor

- 3.80 The pleasant landscape setting for this 'twin-settlement' is formed by Kells Water river corridor with woodland and trees, its open riverside landscapes and mill. The character of the settlement is also influenced by attractive stone churches (one of which is the site of an early Christian monastery) and stone

walls found in places. Playing fields and a cemetery to the east of Station Road (northern edge of the settlement) provide a natural edge to the settlement.

Larne

- 3.81 This settlement has a particularly striking landscape setting with a sheltered harbour at the mouth of Larne Lough. The headland of Carnduff (between Larne and Glynn), Larne Lough and Islandmagee form a significant backdrop for the southern parts of Larne, the B1 Listed Chainé Memorial Tower is an important landmark on the eastern shoreline. The Coast Road running north out of the town is confined by the shoreline and rocky cliffs, and to north the scenic and undulating landscape at the foot of Sallagh Braes within the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB offer a dramatic landscape backdrop to the town. Development has started to spread to the south-west along the northern edge of the Ballymena Road (A8) and the potential for development spreading along this 'corridor' represents a threat to the character and quality of the landscape in an important 'gateway' to the town.
- 3.82 There are sites of significant nature conservation interest around this settlement. Larne Lough ASSI, Ramsar, and SPA are nature conservation sites located to the south-west of the Harbour Highway. Larne Lough and the eastern shoreline of Larne town are included within the proposed East Coast (NI) Marine SPA and Waterloo ASSI is located along part of the eastern shoreline of the town. Glynn Woods ASSI is located west of Bank Road and the woodland and slopes in this site contribute significantly to the setting of the town in this area.

Martinstown

- 3.83 This setting of this settlement is formed by the Clogh River corridor which runs through, and alongside, this settlement. The prominent hills and undeveloped ridgelines of the northernmost glen of the Central Ballymena Glens (LCA 117) contribute significantly to the wider setting of this settlement, particularly the hills and ridgelines to the south-east, which provide an attractive backdrop.

Portglenone

- 3.84 This settlement is an attractive small market town is located on the banks of the Lower Bann River. The river corridor, the bridge over the Lower Bann River and Portglenone Marina are significant landscape elements in the western part of the settlement. A Cistercian Abbey, Holy Well, listed buildings and Portglenone Forest about the settlements southern edge and are all included within the Portglenone House supplementary Registered Park, Garden and Demesne. In this area the surrounding woodland and Long Mountain Ridge have a significant influence on the wider landscape setting. Development has tended to expand outwards in a linear fashion along main routes into the settlement, such as along Finlaystown Road, Garvaghy Road, Hiltonstown Road and Townhill Road. Further linear 'ribbon' development would cause further erosion of the rural character in these areas, and in this context, it is desirable to advocate a compact urban form.

Whitehead

- 3.85 Whitehead has a striking landscape setting. The setting of the settlement is framed by Muldersleigh Hill and Black Head to the north-east, Carnbrock hill to the west, the White Head to the south and Larne Lough to the north. Muldersleigh Hill, Black Head and Whitehead Golf Course are within Islandmagee Area of Scenic Quality (ASQ) and contribute to a scenic setting. The Carnbrock - Fort Hill wooded ridge and White Head create a distinctive landscape setting west of the railway line. Bentra Golf Club and the recently planted Diamond Jubilee Wood are notable landscape elements in this area.
- 3.86 Larne Lough ASSI, Ramsar, and SPA are significant nature conservation sites and this area provides a valuable habitat for wildlife. Whitehead has a Conservation Area which follows the Belfast Lough shoreline between Beach Road Nature Reserve and Old Castle Road and extends into a significant part of the settlement. This shoreline (up to the mean low water mark) is included within the proposed East Coast (NI) Marine SPA and candidate North Channel Special Area of Conservation (SAC).
- 3.87 There is a prominent line of ribbon development along Red Brae Road leading steeply up the ridge of Carnbrock to the west of the Larne Road (A2). This ribbon of development is extremely exposed. Such linear outward expansion of development should be avoided in order to respect and preserve the compact urban form of this settlement.

Development Pressure Analysis (Summary)

- 3.88 Development Pressure Analysis is one of the 4 strands of the Countryside Assessment and seeks to identify those areas where significant development pressure has occurred and where landscape, environmental integrity and local rural character may be under threat of significant change. Development pressure analysis typically involves an assessment of the spatial distribution of dwellings in the countryside and the cumulative impacts of such development. Given the high number of applications for wind energy development within the Borough in the recent past and their potential visual impacts, it is considered appropriate to widen this remit to also include an assessment of wind energy development. It is also considered prudent to gain an appreciation of any development pressure from solar energy development which can have a significant visual impact in the countryside.
- 3.89 It is acknowledged that other types of development, such as mineral excavation and agricultural or industrial buildings, can also result in adverse visual impacts on the visual amenity and character of the countryside. However, in regard to such forms of development, it is widely considered that sufficient control is already provided by prevailing regional policy, and Areas of Constraint on Minerals Development (ACMD) have been designated in the extant Larne Area Plan 2010 to manage minerals development in highly sensitive areas of the Antrim Coast and Glens Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- 3.90 The development pressure analysis will serve primarily to identify areas of the countryside that have experienced significant development pressure from dwellings, wind energy development and solar energy development, and highlight any impacts resulting from this development pressure and analyse the vulnerability of sensitive landscapes, such as the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB and Areas of Scenic Quality (NILCA 2000), to the impacts of such development. Through this spatial analysis, this study will contribute to an evidence base which will inform any decisions to provide additional policy protection through the LDP for areas of the countryside vulnerable to the adverse impacts of development.
- 3.91 For detailed information on the methodology of the 'development pressure analysis', please refer to the Development Pressure Analysis in Appendix B.

Residential Development in the Open Countryside

- 3.92 The following trends can be observed from Table 1 and Table 2 within the Development Pressure Analysis (Appendix B). Table 1 shows the number of planning applications and determinations relating to new residential development in the open countryside in Mid and East Antrim between 2003 and 2018 (inclusive) and Table 2 shows the equivalent statistics after 'duplicate applications types' were excluded. These tables indicate that with the introduction of draft PPS 14 (October 2007), the number of applications received for new residential development in the open countryside fell significantly. Despite the impact of the global financial crisis in 2008, the following year, 2009, saw an increase in the number of such applications received by the Council. After the publication of PPS 21 in 2010, the number of applications received for residential development in the open countryside fell significantly and has remained at a similar level to up to 2018. It is of note, that in the three years preceding the introduction of draft PPS 14 the number of 'refused' applications for residential development in the open countryside was markedly high in comparison to other years and this is possibly due to an increase in number of speculative applications before the introduction of this more stringent policy. After the introduction of PPS 21 in 2010 Table 1 and 2 indicate a significant and sustained reduction in the number of 'approved' applications for residential development in the open countryside indicating that the policy is accommodating residential development in the open countryside in a regulated pattern that is inherently more sustainable than was previously the case.
- 3.93 In the period 1st January 2003 to 31st May 2010 (pre-PPS 21 period), the open countryside in the western part of the Borough generally experienced medium to high residential pressure with the areas closer to Ballymena town generally experiencing lower levels of pressure. In contrast, the open countryside in eastern areas of the Borough generally experienced low levels of residential development pressure with some pockets of high development pressure, and large areas that did not experience any development pressure. The overall difference in pressure levels between the eastern and western parts of the Borough can largely be explained by the following factors:

- The open countryside included within the extent of the Carrickfergus Area Plan 2001 and Larne Area Plan 2010 was included within either Green Belt or Countryside Policy Areas in the period pre-PPS 21, apart from a small area between Greenisland and Newtownabbey which was designated as 'white land'. In order to obtain planning permission for a new residential unit within the Green Belt or Countryside Policy Area, a justifiable need had to be demonstrated. Within the Undeveloped Coast Countryside Policy Area there was a presumption against any new development. In contrast, the area within the extent of the Ballymena Area Plan 1986-2001 and outside of the Ballymena Green Belt and Rural Policy Areas was classified as the 'rural remainder' and had a more relaxed policy approach towards permitting single dwellings in the countryside.
- In the east of the Borough, two large areas within the Antrim Coast and Glens Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) generally did not experience any pressure for residential development in the open countryside. Aside from the Countryside Policy Area designations, these are wild upland moorland areas that are sparsely populated and contain significant natural heritage assets of national and international importance, all of which combine to restrict development pressure.

3.94 For the period 1st June 2010 to 31st December 2018 (post-PPS 21 period) the pressure for residential development in the open countryside dropped significantly in comparison to the pre-PPS 21 period. Overall, for the post-PPS 21 period, the pressure across the Borough has been low to medium with some pockets of high pressure which are mainly located within the western part of the Borough. This significant and sustained drop in pressure from applications for residential development in the open countryside is attributed to the introduction of PPS 21, the impacts of the global financial crisis and associated downturn in the housing market, a potential decrease in number of speculative applications for dwellings in the countryside and the decreasing number of opportunities for farm dwellings (*NB: only 1 farm dwelling in principle every 10 years*) and infill dwellings as such opportunities have diminished over time.

Residential Development Pressure in the Open Countryside in the Context of Significant Natural Heritage Assets and Quality Landscapes

3.95 Between 2003 and 2018, two large upland moorland areas within the AONB generally experienced no development pressure. These areas are remote and sparsely populated and much of these upland areas are protected by strict environmental policies. The northernmost area, for the most part, corresponds with the MEA part of LCA 122 (Garron Plateau). This area contains the most extensive area of intact upland blanket bog (NI Priority Habitat) in Northern Ireland and is an internationally important Ramsar site, Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and nationally important Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI). This area is also an important habitat for wild birds and is, therefore, included within an internationally significant Special Protection Area (SPA). Cleggan Forest also takes up a significant area of land in this area. The southernmost area largely corresponds with LCA 124. This area is a broad upland area of moorland with exposed rounded summits and it extends into a narrower ridge in the north-east which contributes to the setting of the Larne coast. This area is a wild landscape and sparsely populated area a large part of this area to the east and south-east of Slemish is within the Antrim Hills SPA which is an internationally significant habitat for wild birds. Ballyboley Forest, Capanagh Forest and Capanagh-Shillanavogy Forest cumulatively take up a significant area of land in this area.

3.96 Between 2003 and June 2010, a number of areas that are of high scenic quality experienced high pressure from applications for residential development in the open countryside. These included the fringes of Lough Beg and the Lower Bann River, some areas flanking the Braid River corridor and within the AONB, areas to and north and south of Carnlough, areas close to Ballygalley, some small pockets of high pressure on the Islandmagee peninsula and a pocket of high pressure on the northern-eastern edge of the Carrickfergus Escarpment Area of Scenic Quality (ASQ). Many of these areas have significant natural heritage assets in addition to their high landscape quality. For example, Lough Beg and its' fringes are included within the Lough Neagh Fringe ASQ, Lough Neagh and Lough Beg Ramsar, Lough Neagh and Lough Beg SPA and Lough Beg ASSI. It is notable, that since the introduction of PPS 21 (June 2010), the pressure for residential development in these special areas of the open countryside has decreased, in some cases significantly, which would seem to underline the effectiveness of PPS 21 in reducing pressure for residential development in these areas to more sustainable levels. That being said, other factors such as general economic conditions

between 2010 and 2018 may also have had a dampening effect on the number of applications for dwellings in these areas. Despite these recent trends, these are landscapes that are highly sensitive to change, have limited capacity to absorb new residential development and have experienced some high pressure for such development in the past. There is therefore a strong case in some of these areas for providing additional protection to restrict development pressure from single dwellings.

Areas of the Open Countryside with Concentrated Patterns of Built Development

- 3.97 Some areas of high pressure were associated with areas that exhibited concentrated patterns of built development close to a road junction or extensive linear development along a main road. Examples of these areas include development at the Kilgad Road/Moorfields Road (LCA 115) junction and a cluster of development at the Skerry East Road/Omerbane Road junction (LCA 117). Some of these 'high' pressure areas may be included within the settlement development limits of proposed new small settlements, dependant on the outworking of the next stage of the Local Development Plan process.

Wind Energy Development

- 3.98 The following trends can be observed from Table 3 within the Development Pressure Analysis (Appendix B). The number of applications for single wind turbines was relatively low until 2010, albeit there was a gradual increase in the number of applications up until 2010 after the introduction of the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation (NIRO) in 2005. The Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation (NIRO) has been the main support mechanism for encouraging increased renewable electricity generation in Northern Ireland. During the years that this scheme was open and after the introduction of PPS 18 'Renewable Energy' in 2009, applications for single wind turbines remained relatively high up until 2015. The introduction of PPS 18 aimed to facilitate the siting of renewable energy generating facilities in appropriate locations in order to achieve Northern Ireland's renewable targets and to realise the benefits of renewable energy, whilst having due regard to natural heritage, the historic environment and residential amenity. The number of applications dropped significantly in the years after 2015 and this coincided with the closure of the NIRO to new large scale onshore wind on 31 March 2016 and to new small scale onshore wind on 30 June 2016, with exceptions to those projects that met the criteria for grace periods.
- 3.99 Table 4 within the Development Pressure Analysis (Appendix B) shows the number of 'Wind Farm Related' Applications (Comprising More Than Two Turbines) received and determined by Mid and East Antrim Borough Council. This table shows that there was a significant jump in the number of applications for wind farms in the years 2006 and 2011, with subsequent years showing a significant drop in the number of applications. These 'step increases' in application numbers come shortly after the introduction of the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation (NIRO) in 2005 and the introduction of PPS 18 'Renewable Energy' in 2009. It should be noted that the low absolute number of applications for wind farm development within MEA is expected as there are a limited number of areas that can accommodate such proposals without significant adverse impacts on key landscape and heritage assets and landscape character. In this regard, a significant part of the Borough is included within the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB and within extensive nature conservation designations. The number of applications has remained low since 2013 and this is not expected to increase significantly as the NIRO closed to new large scale onshore wind on 31 March 2016, with exceptions to those projects that met the criteria for grace periods.
- 3.100 For the period 1st January 2000 to 31st December 2018 the pressure for wind energy development is linked to elevation levels and also varies depending on the characteristics of the landscape and associated features. There has generally been low to medium pressure across the Borough with pockets of high pressure. The areas of medium and high pressure are generally associated with the most elevated areas, although some lower lying areas experienced medium or high pressure presumably due to the open nature of the landscape. It is notable that there has been pressure for wind farm development in areas close to Slemish and Agnews Hill / Sallagh Braes / Knockdhu. These key landmarks are extremely vulnerable to this scale of wind energy development.
- 3.101 In general terms, the areas which have experienced the highest pressure for wind energy development include an area west and north-west of the Garron Plateau, elevated land around Larne town, the

Carrickfergus Upland Pastures, the Islandmagee peninsula and the elevated land flanking Whitehead. There are also pockets of high pressure at Carncoagh Hill / Elginny Hill to the north / north-east of Ballymena and within the River Maine corridor north of Cullybackey.

- 3.102 Areas with a relatively high number of 'approved' wind turbines (including those turbines associated with 'approved' wind farms) for the period 2000 to 2018 are found at Carncoagh Hill / Elginny Hill, Big Colin and east of Agnews Hill. Other areas, where a relatively high number of single wind turbines have received planning permission include an area north of Glenleslie Road, Carnduff Hill between Larne town and Glynn, and an area close to the Ballyrickard Road / Waterfall Road junction between Ballynure and Glenoe. Other areas which have lesser, but still a notable number of approved turbines, include areas around the A26 Crankill Road, the upper part of Glenarm glen around Munie Road / Lisles Hill Road / Deerpark Road and an area off the Gobbins Road close to the Gobbins coastal path.

Wind Energy Development Pressure in the Open Countryside in the Context of Significant Natural Heritage Assets and Quality Landscapes

- 3.103 There are some areas that have not experienced any pressure for wind energy development or have experienced very little pressure for such development. Generally, these areas are so environmentally sensitive or the landscape and associated assets of such quality and amenity value, that any wind energy development in these areas would have a significant adverse impact. These areas include the Garron Plateau, a relatively large part of the Larne Basalt Moorland (LCA 124) to the south-east of, and including, Slemish, Glenarm Forest, areas of the Antrim Coast, the area of peatland west of Glarryford and the River Maine, the Lough Beg and Lower Bann River corridor south of Portglenone, and Woodburn Forest.
- 3.104 The Garron Plateau has significant constraints to wind energy development. This landscape contains the most extensive area of intact upland blanket bog (NI Priority Habitat) in Northern Ireland and is an internationally important Ramsar site, Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and nationally important Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI). This area is also an important habitat for wild birds and is therefore, included within an internationally significant Special Protection Area (SPA). Cleggan Forest also takes up a significant area of land in this area which is a significant constraint to wind energy development.
- 3.105 The central area of the Larne Basalt Moorland is a wild upland area that also has significant constraints to wind energy development. Much of this area is included within the Antrim Hills SPA which is an internationally significant habitat for wild birds, it includes significant areas of peatland and Slemish is a landmark attraction within an extensive setting that is visually highly sensitive. This area also includes Ballyboley Forest, Capanagh Forest and Capanagh-Shillanavogy Forest which cumulatively take up a significant area of land in this area and are all included within the Antrim Hills SPA.
- 3.106 Other smaller areas which have experienced little or no pressure for wind energy development tend to have considerable constraints to wind energy development. Along the Antrim Coast, Glenarm Forest is an iconic landscape feature which includes a registered historic park, garden and demesne, and the Antrim Coast Road (A2) is part of the Causeway Coastal Route and an area of exceptional scenic quality. South of Portglenone, the fringes of Lough Beg and the Lower Bann River corridor are included within an identified Area of Scenic Quality (ASQ) which is a highly sensitive landscape visually and environmentally, therefore representing a strong constraint to wind energy development. The peatland (NI Priority Habitat) west of Glarryford and the River Maine, and the plantation forest at Woodburn Forest, generally make these areas unfavourable for wind energy development.
- 3.107 Some highly sensitive areas have come under medium to high pressure for wind energy development and have been adversely impacted by the cumulative impacts of such development. The wind farm at Carncoagh Hill / Elginny Hill has adversely impacted on the wild character and distinctive smooth summits of these hills which are located on the edge of the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB.
- 3.108 The setting of Agnews Hill has been adversely impacted by the erection of multiple single wind turbines and there is permission for a wind farm to the east of this distinctive landscape feature of the AONB. To the north / north-east of Agnews Hill, the areas of Sallagh Braes, Knockdhu and Scawt Hill have experienced low

pressure for wind energy development. Although this pressure is low, these areas are key landscape features on the Antrim Coast which would be easily adversely impacted by obtrusive development. An Area of Special Archaeological Interest (ASAI) at Knockdhu would also be sensitive to such development. The smooth ridges of the Islandmagee peninsula have also been compromised by numerous wind turbines which has adversely impacted this small to medium scale landscape which is identified as an ASQ. The Antrim Coast with its distinctive headlands and slopes leading to the edges of the Antrim Plateau is an exceptional landscape and provides high quality scenery along the Antrim Coast Road. This landscape is highly sensitive to any form of wind energy development as has been demonstrated on the previously undeveloped headland south-east of Glenarm. Here, a single wind turbine is highly prominent in views from the A2 Coast Road and has impacted adversely on this landscape along the Causeway Coastal Route, the main tourism artery of MEA.

- 3.109 Given the high environmental and/or visual sensitivity of some areas of the Borough, it may be considered reasonable to provide these quality landscapes with 'additional' policy protection whether or not these areas have experienced pressure for wind energy development. Such a 'proactive' policy approach may be considered necessary as such landscapes have limited capacity to absorb high (or obtrusive) structures and it can take only one wind turbine to compromise the quality of such landscapes.

Solar Energy Development

- 3.110 Development pressure for solar energy development is relatively low within Mid and East Antrim for the period 2000 – 2018. All applications relating to non-domestic solar energy schemes were received between 2012 and 2016. The low numbers of applications may relate to the specific key constraints within MEA. Many of the Borough's distinctive landscapes are located within the AONB or are important for the setting of entities such as the coast, river corridors or key settlements and/or have significant natural heritage and historic environment assets that all act as key constraints on large-scale solar energy development. However, there are some areas within the Borough that have the potential to accommodate large-scale solar energy infrastructure, subject to meeting relevant planning requirements. There has been no applications for solar energy development since 2016 and this is considered to be linked to the closure of the NIRO to all technologies on 31 March 2017, with exceptions for those projects that met the criteria for grace periods.
- 3.111 There have been two applications for solar farm development in the Carrickfergus area, one adjacent to Carrickfergus settlement development limits and Castle Dobbs and one close to the Red Brae Road. There has been one application for a solar farm between Ballymena and Broughshane (Ballygarvey Road). These applications are located close to urban centres. There has been no pressure for large-scale solar energy development within the most vulnerable landscapes and this may be due to the relative remoteness of such landscapes. (There has been some pressure for solar energy development on the Islandmagee peninsula which is an identified Area of Scenic Quality (ASQ). However, these proposals have generally been of a scale which has enabled their satisfactory integration into the landscape)
- 3.112 Despite the relatively low development pressure for solar energy development, it is recognised that solar farms can be an obtrusive form of development. As such, any such development of a significant scale in our most sensitive landscapes is likely to have a significant adverse impact on the landscape and its associated assets. Therefore, it is considered reasonable to provide these quality landscapes with 'additional' policy protection from solar farms which are of such a scale that they become obtrusive in the landscape, as such landscapes have limited capacity to absorb visually obtrusive forms of development.

4.0 Survey Work and Studies Informing the Countryside Strategy

- 4.1 A series of surveys and studies were carried out to inform the evidence base for the draft Plan Strategy Countryside Assessment. These consisted primarily of the following:
- Landscape Character Assessment
 - Development Pressure Analysis
 - Settlement Setting Appraisal
 - Candidate Sensitive Landscape Report
- 4.2 These studies were carried out by the MEA Local Development Plan Team concurrently with the POP and draft Plan Strategy stages of the LDP. The studies used a methodical approach based predominantly on published expert guidance and professional advice from a chartered Landscape Architect ('critical friend'). Knowledge and experience of how planning application data is stored and categorised was used to inform the methodology for undertaking the Development Pressure Analysis.

Landscape Character Assessment

- 4.3 The Landscape Character Assessment (see Appendix A) carried out for this Countryside Assessment identified characteristics that are distinctive, unique or special within surveyed Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) and used these identified characteristics to describe variation in character of the landscape.
- 4.3 MEA has 18 LCAs which were identified by the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment (NILCA) 2000 study. The methodology (see Methodology section of Landscape Character Assessment) used to undertake this Landscape Character Assessment was informed by guidance documents provided by The Countryside Agency in 2002 and Natural England in 2014 which describe how to approach a Landscape Character Assessment. This Landscape Character Assessment also was informed by evidence collated in Position Paper 5 "Environmental Assets" which establish the baseline position for the Mid and East Antrim Preferred Options Paper in regard to natural heritage and historic environment assets. The assessment of LCAs included an appraisal of the following factors: key landscape features and characteristics, habitats and biodiversity, scale, landform, landscape patterns, settlement and human influence, key features of the historic environment, critical views, inter-visibility with adjacent landscapes and perceptual aspects. This list is not exhaustive but includes the key considerations.
- 4.4 The Landscape Character Assessment report generated an evidence base that was used to identify areas of exceptional or high landscape or scenic quality, to record the natural heritage and historic environment features that make each LCA distinctive, and to assess whether any significant changes in landscape character has occurred since the NILCA 2000 study. The LCAs were also appraised in relation to how they are perceived, experienced and valued by people and any immediate and potential 'forces for change' were identified along with associated opportunities and threats to the landscape. By appraising each LCA, the collated evidence base was used to inform subsequent studies, namely the Candidate Sensitive Landscape Report, Settlement Setting Appraisal and Development Pressure Analysis.
- 4.5 The Landscape Character Assessment highlighted that the areas of high scenic quality within the Borough still retain their special landscape assets and character, but that some of these areas are under continued pressure from new or expanding development and human activities. These areas of high scenic quality include the Antrim Coast and Glens Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the Carrickfergus Escarpment Area of Scenic Quality (ASQ), Islandmagee ASQ and Lough Neagh Fringe ASQ. Landmark features that are important for the identity of the Borough have also been identified. For example, Slemish, the Garron Plateau, the glens of Glencloy and Glenarm, Carrickfergus Escarpment, the coastal areas, Larne Lough and Lough Beg.

Development Pressure Analysis

- 4.6 The Development Pressure Analysis (see Appendix B) carried out for this Countryside Assessment assessed the spatial distribution of dwellings (residential development), wind turbines (wind energy development) and solar energy development in the countryside and the cumulative impacts of such development. This

study assessed development pressure patterns at the Borough-wide level and for each individual LCA. For detailed information on the methodology of this study, please refer to the Development Pressure Analysis in Appendix B.

- 4.7 Given the high number of applications for dwellings in the countryside in the recent past, and more recently for wind turbines, it was considered appropriate to assess the level of development pressure in the open countryside for such types of development, particularly considering the adverse visual impacts that have resulted from the cumulative impact of new dwellings in the countryside and the proliferation of wind turbines. It is considered that any significant increase in the demand for solar energy development has the potential to lead to issues of 'integration' or 'cumulative impacts' as this type of development has the potential to be an obtrusive element in the landscape. Therefore, the development pressure from this form of energy development was assessed, despite the fact that any pressure was expected to be at a relatively low level. However, including the analysis of pressure from solar energy development within this study meant that a baseline for future assessments was set.
- 4.8 The development pressure analysis identified areas of the countryside that experienced significant development pressure from dwellings, wind energy development and solar energy development, and highlighted any impacts resulting from this development pressure and analysed the vulnerability of sensitive landscapes to the impacts of such development. Through this spatial analysis, this study contributed to an evidence base which informed decisions on where in the MEA open countryside it was deemed appropriate to provide additional policy protection from the adverse impacts of development.
- 4.9 The outworking of this Development Pressure Analysis has been used to highlight any issues around the demand for dwellings, wind energy and solar energy in the countryside and any impacts emanating from the pressure for such development types. The Development Pressure Analysis highlighted that after the introduction of PPS 21 in 2010, there was a significant and sustained reduction in the number of 'approved' applications for residential development in the open countryside. However, issues around linear development and impacts on rural character were still matters of concern. In regard to wind energy development, the number of applications for single wind turbines increased from 2005 after the introduction of the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation (NIRO) in 2005 and peaked in 2015. There has since been a decline in the number of applications. The pressure for single wind turbines and wind farms in sensitive landscapes has been an issue of concern and such development has led to adverse visual impacts in some areas of the Borough. This study highlighted that the demand for solar energy development has been relatively low.

Settlement Setting Appraisal

- 4.10 A Settlement Setting Appraisal (see Settlement Setting Appraisal section of this Technical Supplement) was conducted to give a general overview of the 'main' landscape considerations around the edge of towns and villages (any Main Town, Small Town or Village included within the designated settlement hierarchy for Mid and East Antrim Borough Council draft Plan Strategy). The aim of this appraisal was to summarise settlement-specific landscape considerations that are significant for their setting.
- 4.11 Landscapes around settlements have an important role to play in maintaining the distinction between urban areas and the countryside, in preventing coalescence between adjacent urban areas and in providing a setting for settlements. However, these important functions can conflict with the demand for outward expansion of settlements or to develop land for uses which may have an adverse impact on the landscape around a settlement's edge. In the context of spatial planning, due consideration of landscape elements and their relationship with urban areas and the urban-rural fringe is imperative, so that the quality of the landscape, its aesthetic attributes and its contribution to meeting wider planning objectives can be taken fully into account in reaching balanced decisions in regard to development proposals at the edges of settlements.
- 4.12 The Settlement Setting Appraisal has given an appreciation of how key landscape features, natural heritage assets and historic environment assets have combined to create a distinctive setting for each settlement included within the appraisal. This in turn has informed the development of policy within the Countryside

Strategy and been used to assist in the identification of areas that would benefit from additional policy protection to protect key features significant for a settlement's setting.

Candidate Sensitive Landscape Report

- 4.13 The Candidate Sensitive Landscape Report contains a report on each identified candidate Sensitive Landscape Area brought forward from the 'scoring matrix'. The Landscape Character Assessment was used to identify the most sensitive areas within their extent and these vulnerable areas were appraised using the 'scoring matrix' which assessed each area against the following criteria:
- high landscape quality,
 - scenic quality,
 - visually exposed or prominent landscape features,
 - distinctive features that contribute significantly to the setting of a settlement(s),
 - sites of natural heritage conservation importance,
 - historic environment features which make a significant contribution to landscape value, and
 - unique amenity value.
- 4.14 The 'scoring justification table' provides information for the basis of each score. The areas which scored '5 points or more' based on the criteria in the scoring matrix were brought forward to be assessed within the Candidate Sensitive Landscape Report. The purpose of this report was to determine whether these highly sensitive landscape areas could benefit from additional policy protection in order to safeguard their landscape character, natural heritage and historic environment assets and their 'function', for example, as an area of exceptional scenic quality or to provide a unique setting for a settlement or to contribute to an area of unique amenity value etc. It should be noted that the areas of extant Rural Landscape Wedges adjacent to Carrickfergus and Greenisland were brought forward for appraisal in the Candidate Sensitive Landscape Report despite not scoring highly in the scoring matrix: this was due to the fact that the 'function' of these areas to protect the setting of Carrickfergus and Greenisland is so important, that it was considered to override the fact that these areas had a low score.
- 4.15 The Candidate Sensitive Landscape report for each candidate Sensitive Landscape Area brought forward from the scoring matrix was assessed using a holistic approach which considered factors such as the significance of the landscape as a whole and its specific landscape assets, the impact, or potential impact, of development pressure from dwellings, wind energy and solar energy, and whether the area would benefit from additional policy protection in the form of a spatial policy designation. These reports drew on the evidence base contained within the Landscape Character Assessment, the Development Pressure Analysis and the Settlement Setting Appraisal.
- 4.16 The following eleven areas were brought forward for an appraisal within the Candidate Sensitive Landscape Report:
- Larne Coast and Headlands,
 - Glenarm Glen,
 - Lough Beg and Lower Bann River corridor,
 - Larne - Glenarm Ridge and Coastal Lowlands,
 - Garron Plateau: Eastern Summits, Scarp Slops and Fringes (west and north of Carnlough),
 - Islandmagee and Gobbins Coast (Ferris Bay to Whitehead),
 - Belfast Lough Shore,
 - Slemish and Surrounds,
 - Carrickfergus Escarpment,
 - Garron Plateau: south-western ridge and hills east of Cargan,
 - Rural Landscape Wedges (Carrickfergus and Greenisland).
- 4.17 It was recommended that all of the aforementioned candidate Sensitive Landscape Areas, with the exception of the 'Garron Plateau: south-western ridge and hills east of Cargan' area, would benefit from additional policy protection. Where it was considered that the candidate Sensitive Landscape Area would benefit from additional policy protection, a recommendation was made on the type of spatial policy area that would be appropriate for that area.

5.0 Preferred Options Paper

- 5.1 Council published its Preferred Options Paper (POP) in June 2017. The main purpose of the POP is to inform the next stage in the LDP process, i.e. the Plan Strategy.
- 5.3 Building on the emerging evidence base¹, the POP identified some 36 key strategic planning issues relevant to Mid and East Antrim, set out alternative options for addressing most of these key issues, and highlighted Council's preferred option. The POP also included an initial policy review of the operational policies contained in the suite of Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) published by the former Department of Environment, now Department for Infrastructure (DfI), also taking account of the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS).
- 5.4 The POP was subject to 12 weeks public consultation which resulted in 132 responses from members of the public and statutory consultees. A public consultation report on the POP was published by Council in November 2017.
- 5.5 Key Issues 29-31 of the POP highlighted issues in relation to the 'Mid and East Antrim Coast'.

Key Issue 29 - The Southern Glens Coast (between Larne and Garron Point)

- 5.6 Our preferred option was to retain the existing Special Countryside Area (SCA) designation and associated policy, and accommodate spatial and policy amendments to the designation if considered appropriate.
- 5.7 The POP also provided two alternative options: (b) to retain the existing SCA designation and associated policy; or (c) remove the SCA designation and rely only on carried forward regional policies (such as PPS2, PPS18 and PPS21) for protection of the exceptional coastal landscape and its environment.
- 5.8 Some 85% of respondents supported our Preferred Option to retain the existing Special countryside Area (SCA) designation and to consider potential spatial and policy amendments through the LDP. Most statutory consultees who responded were also supportive of the Preferred Option with DfI confirming this option was in line with the SPPS.

Key Issue 30 - The Islandmagee Peninsula and Gobbins Coast

- 5.9 Our preferred option provided increased policy protection for this section of the MEA coast with an emphasis on the eastern and north eastern parts of the peninsula. Suggesting increased policy protection could be provided through designation of a Special Countryside Area, an Area of Constraint on particular types of development, an extension of the BMA Coastal Policy Area or a designated Area of High Scenic Value.
- 5.10 The POP alternative option was to rely on carried forward regional planning policies such as PPS2, PPS18 and PPS21 for protection of the landscape and natural environment
- 5.11 All public respondents supported the Preferred Option. However, some respondents also recognised the important strategic role of Islandmagee in meeting regional energy needs. Some respondents argued for increased policy protection through the LDP for sites of international and national importance at Larne Lough and the surrounding area.
- 5.12 The majority of statutory consultees who responded were supportive of the Preferred Option with comments from NIEA highlighting the importance for clarification within policy and HED highlighting the value the historic environment makes to landscapes in justifying the designation. DfI confirmed the approach was in line with the direction of the SPPS.

¹ A series of 14 topic based position papers informing the POP, plus our annual housing monitor and bi-annual industrial monitor are available on the Council website.

- 5.13 A representation from the energy sector was unsupportive of the preferred option, but did not provide a justification for this position.

Key Issue 31 - The Belfast Lough Shoreline (Mid and East Antrim)

- 5.14 Our preferred option proposed to retain the existing BMA Coastal Area (to be renamed the Belfast Lough Shoreline (Mid and East Antrim) Policy Area) designation and associated policy, and accommodate spatial amendments to the designation if considered appropriate.
- 5.15 The POP also provided 2 alternative options; (b): Retain the existing BMA Coastal Area designation and associated policy or, (c): Remove the existing BMA Coastal Area designation and rely only on regional planning policies carried forward to provide protection for this important coastal landscape and environment
- 5.16 Some 91% of public respondents supported our Preferred Option to retain the existing Belfast Metropolitan Area (BMA) Coastal Policy Area designation. The Preferred Option also made provision for spatial and policy amendments through the LDP if considered appropriate. Most statutory consultees who responded were also supportive of the Preferred Option.
- 5.17 Key Issues 32-36 of the POP highlighted issues in relation to 'Other Sensitive Landscapes'.

Key Issue 32 - Lough Beg and the Lower River Bann Corridor

- 5.18 Our preferred option was to provide increased policy protection for the most scenic and environmentally important areas associated with Lough Beg and the Lower River Bann corridor.
- 5.19 The alternative option was to rely only on carried forward regional planning policies (such as PPS 2, PPS 18 and PPS 21) to protect the landscape and natural environment.
- 5.20 Statutory consultees whilst generally supportive, stressed the need for joined up working between Councils bordering on the Lough Neagh/Lough Beg/ River Bann environs. It was suggested that this could be facilitated through the Lough Neagh and Lough Beg Forum. A representation from the energy sector was unsupportive of the preferred option, but did not provide a justification for this position.

Key Issue 33 - Antrim Coast and Glens Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

- 5.21 Our preferred option was to provide increased policy protection to protect exceptional landscapes and areas considered highly sensitive to particular types of development within the AONB.
- 5.22 The alternative option was to rely on carried forward regional policies (such as PPS2, PPS 18 and PPS 21) for protection of the AONB.
- 5.23 Some 92% of public respondents supported our Preferred Option. Statutory consultees were also generally supportive, some highlighting particular areas within the AONB that would benefit from protective policies, while others cautioned that remaining areas within the AONB could be rendered more vulnerable to development pressure. Wind energy respondents were opposed to the Preferred Option

Key Issue 34 - Areas of Scenic Quality

- 5.24 Our preferred option to retain the existing designated Areas of High Scenic Value and associated policy, and designate other areas within the Borough as Areas of High Scenic Value if considered appropriate.
- 5.25 An alternative option was offered to retain the existing Areas of High Scenic Value and associated policy or remove these designation and rely on carried forward regional policies (such as PPS2, PPS18 and PPS 21)
- 5.26 96% of public respondents supported our Preferred Option to retain these designations and associated policy, while considering new designations elsewhere in the Borough linked to Areas of Scenic Quality. Most statutory consultees who responded were supportive of the Preferred Option. DFI stated the preferred

option was in line with the SPPS. NIEA commented that any designation and policy for the sensitive landscape will need further consideration and clarification along with a review of the boundaries of existing designations.

Key Issue 35 - Local Landscape Policy Areas

- 5.27 Our preferred option was to retain the existing designated Local Landscape Policy Areas and associated policy, and identify and designate other Local Landscape Policy Areas (LLPA's) where appropriate. The alternative options were to retain the existing LLPA and associated policy or remove the designations and rely on regional planning policy being carried forward.
- 5.28 All public respondents supported our Preferred Option to retain these designations and associated policy, while considering new designations elsewhere in the Borough. Most statutory consultees who responded were supportive of the Preferred Option, recognising the value of these designations in safeguarding heritage assets within settlements as well as securing other social and environmental benefits for local communities.

Key Issue 36 - Landscape Wedges

- 5.29 Our preferred option was to retain our existing designated Rural Landscape Wedges and associated policy, and designate other areas within the Borough as Rural Landscape Wedges if considered appropriate.
- 5.30 The POP also provided 2 alternative options. (b) to retain the existing Rural Landscape Wedges and associated policy or (c) remove these designations and rely on carried forward regional planning policies.
- 5.31 91% of public respondents supported our Preferred Option to retain these designations and associated policy, of which 64% were of the opinion that there are no areas outside of existing Rural Landscape Wedges that should be considered for designation. Those statutory consultees who responded were also supportive of the Preferred Option, recognising the value of rural landscape wedges in retaining visual separation between settlements and thereby assisting them to maintain their distinctive identities.

Key Issue 13 – Safeguarding Against Potential Subsidence and the Effects of Land Instability

- 5.32 Our preferred option was to retain the existing BMAP Areas of Potential Subsidence within the former Carrickfergus Borough and retain Policy CE 06 (which sets out a presumption against development). Also, assess if there are any other known areas of potential subsidence within the Borough that should be identified. Also, rely on existing Policy PSU 10 of PSRNI to prevent development in all areas known to be at risk from land instability – including from mining, coastal erosion, landslides and other relevant causes.
- 5.33 Our alternative options were to retain the BMAP Areas of Potential Subsidence in Carrickfergus, retain Policy CE 06 and assess other known areas of potential subsidence within the Borough or rely on Policy PSU 10 of PSRNI to prevent development in all areas known to be at risk from land stability.
- 5.34 92% of respondents supported the preferred option. Statutory consultees acknowledged the issue as a significant concern in Mid and East Antrim and broadly supported the preferred option

Existing Planning Policy Review

- 5.35 In addition to these key issues, the POP included a review of the existing Natural Heritage policies contained within the existing Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) and retained policies within 'A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland' (PSRNI). The review made recommendations as to whether to bring these policies forward with or without amendments. The public/consultees were also asked for their opinion on the recommendations made in the review and to assist with formulation of policy wording for the Plan Strategy.
- 5.36 For full details of the responses on Key Issues regarding Protecting and Accessing our Natural Environment please refer to the POP Public Consultation Report (November 2017).
https://www.midandeantrim.gov.uk/downloads/POP_Public_Consultation_Report.pdf

6.0 Consultee and Councillor Engagement

- 6.1 In order to meet the requirements set out in the Planning Act relating to the need for the Plan Strategy to take account of the RDS , other policy and guidance issued by the DfI and other relevant government strategies and plans; Council has engaged key consultees representing relevant central government departments and agencies. Representatives from relevant Council departments have also been engaged to ensure that due account has been taken of Council's Community Plan, as well as other Council strategies and initiatives. This engagement was undertaken by way of a series of eight 'Project Management Team' meetings held between April 2018 and April 2019 and has had a significant influence on the development of the strategic policies and proposals.
- 6.2 The Planning Act requires the Plan Strategy to be adopted by resolution of the Council, following approval by the DfI. Accordingly, elected members have also been engaged in the development of draft Plan Strategy, to ensure that the document is generally aligned with Council's strategic priorities. This engagement was facilitated through a series of six councillor workshops held between November 2018 and March 2019.
- 6.3 The draft Plan Strategy Natural Environment Policies were presented at the Councillor workshop held on 14 February 2019 and the Project Management Team meeting held on 22nd November 2018. The draft Plan Strategy Countryside Strategy and supporting policies on Strategic Countryside Designations were presented at the Councillor Workshop held on 14 March 2019 and the Project Management Team meeting held on 7 May 2019.
- 6.4 The draft Plan Strategy Policy in relation to Safeguarding Against Potential Subsidence and the Effects of Land Instability were presented at the Project Management Team meeting held on 8 May 2019 and the Councillor workshop held on the 14 March 2019.
- 6.5 There was general agreement with the proposed approach. Minor amendments were made to the strategic and subject policies following comments made at or following these meetings (see Appendix H for Evolution of relevant draft Plan Strategy policy – General Policy, The Coast, Countryside Strategy and Natural Heritage policies)

7.0 Draft Plan Strategy Policy Approach

- 7.1 The SPPS defines the Countryside as land lying outside of settlement development limits as identified in LDPs. As has been explained in this Technical Supplement, the countryside is recognised as a key environmental and landscape asset within our Council area. Given these qualities, our countryside is also an important resource which contributes significantly to tourism, recreation, health and wellbeing and creating a sense of place. It also underpins our agricultural and minerals sectors. Therefore, in line with the RDS and SPPS, the draft Plan Strategy takes a sustainable approach to development in the countryside in order to maintain and enhance the attractiveness of the countryside as a place to invest, live, visit and work. The overarching approach of the draft Plan Strategy is to strike a balance between protection of the environment from inappropriate development, whilst supporting and sustaining rural communities.
- 7.2 Within this context it is possible to distinguish four main strands to the policy approach embedded within the draft Plan Strategy, as follows:
- To facilitate appropriate development in sustainable locations in the countryside in order to contribute to a sustainable rural economy;
 - To protect, conserve, and where possible enhance the rural environment and landscapes, with a bespoke approach for our sensitive areas such as important natural habitats, the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB and other areas of high scenic quality, landmark landscape features, the coast and significant river corridors;
 - To protect the setting of settlements, particularly where there are landscape features that are highly significant for the setting of a settlement; and
 - To address issues of risk to development from land instability or coastal erosion.
- 7.3 The draft Plan Strategy strategic proposals and policies relating to the countryside, coast and identified key river corridors are the outworking of the approach outlined above. The remainder of this section summarises the supporting evidence base for these proposals and policies. Much of this evidence is derived from the survey work and studies listed under Section 4.0 of this technical supplement. In addition, evidence is drawn from the POP and responses to it in regard to selected key issues and the policy review as it relates to development in the countryside.

The Countryside: Facilitating Appropriate Development in Sustainable Locations

- 7.4 Within the draft Plan Strategy, the type of development which is acceptable in principle in the countryside is outlined in Policy CS1 – ‘Sustainable Development in the Countryside’. This policy is a ‘directional policy’ which signposts the reader to other applicable policies within the draft Plan Strategy which will be used to assess development proposals located in the countryside.
- 7.5 The evidence informing this policy is largely derived from the regional direction set out in the SPPS and PPS 21. Within the POP, the responses from consultees and the public, in relation to key issues and other issues raised through that consultation document, were given due consideration when drafting Policy CS1. These key issues and other issues raised included the following: Key Issue 12 – Balancing the need for Minerals Development with safeguarding of Landscape and Environmental Assets, Key Issue 23 – Facilitating Renewable Energy (and associated Q63 & Q64), Key Issue 26 – Protecting regionally significant archaeological sites and remains (and their settings) from harmful development. The POP also included questions that sought to address other issues relating to particular forms of development considered under Policy CS1. These include Q39 - Replacement Dwellings, Q18 & Q40 – Conversion and Reuse of Existing Buildings, Q18 & Q42 – Ribbon Development, Q43 – Dwellings on Farms and Q23 – Vulnerable and Sensitive Tourism Opportunity Areas. Consideration of all responses to these issues and questions has served to inform the policy direction contained in the relevant strategic subject policies relating to the various forms of development that are in principle acceptable in the countryside under Policy CS1.

Strategic Subject Policies: Protecting Highly Sensitive Landscapes

- 7.6 The strategic approach to protecting our Borough's most sensitive landscapes is based on the regional direction set out in the SPPS and PPS 21 and an evidence base generated through the following studies specific to our Borough: an Environmental Assets Appraisal, a Landscape Character Assessment, a Development Pressure Analysis, a Sensitive Landscape Scoring Matrix and Justification and a Candidate Sensitive Landscape Report.
- 7.7 The Environmental Assets Appraisal, the Landscape Character Assessment and Development Pressure Analysis provided a detailed evidence base for the countryside in relation to topics such as natural heritage, the historic environment, landscape, and development pressure trends relating to housing, wind energy and solar energy. This evidence base enabled the Borough's most sensitive landscapes to be identified using a scoring matrix, whereby points were given by meeting criteria which are linked to factors that 'add public value' to a landscape. Based on this scoring, and taking due regard of exceptional circumstances, the most sensitive candidate Sensitive Landscape Areas (cSLAs) were selected and assessed (Candidate Sensitive Landscape Area Report) to determine if additional policy protection should be provided to protect their key environmental assets and scenic quality and/or their unique amenity value.
- 7.8 The outworking of the Candidate Sensitive Landscape Area Report identified discreet areas of our Borough that are so special due to their landscape characteristics, heritage assets and/or unique amenity value, that additional policy to protect these distinctive qualities is considered appropriate and justifiable. In cases where a settlement was adjacent to, or within, one of these discreet areas, the Edge of Settlement Analysis was used to ensure that the most important landscape features for settlement setting were given due regard. The identified discreet areas are included within one of the five types of designated policy areas in the countryside, as listed below:
- Special Countryside Areas (Policy CS2);
 - Areas of Constraint on High Structures (Policy CS3);
 - Rural Landscape Wedges (Policy CS4);
 - Developed Coast (Belfast Lough Shore) (Policy CS6); and
 - Main River Corridors (Policy CS8).
- 7.9 Areas of Constraint on Minerals Development (ACMD) and associated policy are also defined in the draft Plan Strategy. However, these are carried over with minor amendments from the Larne Area Plan 2010, for reasons outlined in Technical Supplement 8 relating to minerals development.
- 7.10 The regional direction of the SPPS and PPS 21 and the evidence base generated through the various studies has informed the identification and demarcation of the designated policy areas and the development of the bespoke policy approach for each. Countryside Strategy policy areas CS2 – CS6 have also been informed by responses to the POP (see below). The following paragraphs outline the policy approach within each of the five types of designated policy area and refers to their general location.

Designation CS2 Special Countryside Areas

- 7.11 These are areas identified as being of exceptional landscape quality and/or of unique amenity value in Mid and East Antrim. Four areas have been identified – the Larne Coast, the Gobbins Coast, Slemish Mountain and Lough Beg. These areas are considered so special that there is a presumption against all new development other than in exceptional circumstances. The policy approach for such areas was informed by the POP (Key Issues 29, 30, 32 and 33 were particularly relevant) and consultation responses from the public and consultees.

Designation CS3 Areas of Constraint on High Structures

- 7.12 These are landscapes that are of exceptional scenic quality and/or are important for the setting of landmark features or settlements. These areas are considered highly vulnerable to the adverse impacts of high structures or other types of energy infrastructure that are visually prominent or obtrusive in the landscape. Therefore, within these designated policy areas, there is a presumption against the development of wind turbines, electricity pylons or telecommunications masts/equipment that exceed 15 metres in height or any other forms of energy infrastructure development that will adversely impact on the landscape character by virtue of their visual prominence and/or the environmental integrity of the designated area. However, in recognition of the need to accommodate rural needs and to facilitate regional energy strategies, the policy does allow for exceptions to this policy approach if certain criteria are met. These areas coincide with areas of the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB or Areas of Scenic Quality (NILCA 2000). The policy approach in such areas was considered through the POP (Key Issues 30, 32, 33 and 34 were particularly relevant) and consultation responses from the public and consultees.

Designation CS6 Developed Coast (Belfast Lough Shore)

- 7.13 This strategic designation is intended to protect the setting of the coast and waterfront areas between Greenisland and Whitehead and also the special natural habitats, natural heritage and historic environment assets associated with this stretch of coast. This predominantly developed coastline is sensitive to inappropriate development that would adversely impact on these features. Further, this area of coastline is highly valued by the general public as a recreational resource within a distinctive coastal setting. Therefore, this policy seeks to protect these important features, whilst facilitating appropriate and sympathetic forms of development. The policy approach of such areas was considered through the POP (Key Issue 31 and consultation responses have informed this policy approach).

Designation CS8 Protection of Main River Corridors

- 7.14 This strategic designation is intended to protect the four 'main' river corridors in MEA. These river corridors include the following: Lower River Bann (east bank), River Maine, River Braid and River Kells Water. The extent of these designations will be demarcated through the Local Policies Plan at the next stage of the LDP process. The policy approach seeks to protect, conserve and enhance river corridors as significant environmental assets, in ways which bring benefits to local communities. The need to afford protection to river corridors arose through the outworking of the Landscape Character Assessment, through which it was recognised that the main river corridors provide, or have the potential to provide, areas of unique amenity value to the public. It was also recognised that river corridors are important for biodiversity and often contain features of historical or cultural significance.

Policy CS5: Protecting the Key Characteristics of the Antrim Coast and Glens Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

- 7.15 The AONB was designated in 1988 through the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (NI) Order 1985. The draft Plan Strategy contains a strategic subject policy to protect the exceptional scenic quality, distinctive character, heritage and wildlife of that portion of the AONB that falls within the MEA borough. The Environmental Assets Appraisal, the Landscape Character Assessment and Development Pressure Analysis provided a detailed evidence base which identifies the key features of the AONB and potential threats arising from development. Some of these issues were addressed through the POP (Key Issue 29 and Key Issue 33) and responses to these issues have informed the policy approach adopted in the draft Plan Strategy, along with the regional policy direction set out in the SPPS, PPS21 and PPS 2. It is notable that some areas within the AONB scored highly in the 'Scoring Matrix' and were therefore, included within the designated policy areas covered by the designations made under CS2 and CS3.

Protecting the Setting of Settlements

Policy CS7 Local Landscape Policy Areas

- 7.16 The draft Plan Strategy contains a strategic subject policy: Policy CS7 Local Landscape Policy Areas to protect the setting of settlements. This policy approach seeks to protect those areas within or adjoining settlements which are considered to be of greatest amenity value, landscape quality or local significance. The extent of these designations will be demarcated through the Local Policies Plan at the next stage of the LDP process. This issue was addressed through the POP Key Issue 35 and responses to this issue have informed the policy approach adopted in the draft Plan Strategy, along with the regional policy direction set out in the SPPS and PPS 6.

Designation CS4 Rural Landscape Wedges

- 7.17 The draft Plan Strategy designates Rural Landscape Wedges to protect the settings of key coastal settlements which are considered part of the Belfast Metropolitan Area, namely Carrickfergus, Greenisland and the Jordanstown area of Newtownabbey. These designations also seek to prevent the coalescence of these settlements through policy to manage development so as to maintain the open character of the intervening countryside. The policy approach in such areas was considered through the POP (Key Issue 36) and consultation responses have informed this policy approach.
- 7.18 Protecting the setting of settlements is also addressed through other designations previously referred to, particularly:
- Designation CS6 – Developed Coast (Belfast Lough Shore), and
 - Designation CS3 – Areas of Constraint on High Structures

Addressing Issues of Risk to Development from Land Instability or Coastal Erosion

- 7.19 The draft Plan Strategy contains a strategic policy (Policy CS9) that sets out a presumption against development in areas of 'known' risk of coastal erosion or land instability. This strategic approach reflects the regional direction set by the SPPS. Given the prevailing level of uncertainty around risk and a lack of a robust evidence base, it has not been possible to identify areas of 'known' risk. Therefore, these areas have not been identified within the draft Plan Strategy. However, these areas can be designated as 'areas of known risk' when supporting data becomes available.

8.0 Soundness

- 8.1 The draft Plan Strategy has been prepared so as to take due regard to meeting the tests of soundness as set out in the DfI Development Plan Practice Note 6: Soundness (Version 2, May 2017). The draft Plan Strategy approach insofar as it relates to the Countryside Strategy is regarded as sound, as it is considered to have met the various tests of soundness as summarised below:

Table 1.2 Consideration of Soundness

Procedural Tests	
P2	The Countryside Strategy has evolved from the POP, POP consultation Report and Consultee and Councillor Engagement as described in sections 4 and 5 of this document.
P3	The Countryside Strategy has been subject to a Sustainability Appraisal. Further details are included in the Sustainability Appraisal Report.
Consistency Test	
C1	The Countryside Strategy has taken account of the RDS in particular RG5 and RG11 as it relates to rural landscape, coast and natural environment. Refer to section 2 (Regional Development Strategy) of this document.
C2	The Countryside Strategy has taken account of our Community Plan, particularly in relation to the themes of Protecting Our Environment. (see para 2.66 Pg 15 of this document)
C3	The Countryside Strategy has taken account of existing planning policies as contained within the SPPS in particular paragraphs 6.168 – 6.198, 6.35 – 6.51 and 6.61 - 6.758. Regard has also been had to the PSRNI, PPS2 Natural Heritage, PPS18 Renewable Energy and PPS21 Sustainable Development in the Countryside.
C4	The Countryside Strategy has had regard to the existing development plans within Mid and East Antrim, Mid and East Antrim Council Local Biodiversity Action Plan and Marine Policy to 2020, and the emerging LDPs of the 3 neighbouring Councils.
Coherence and the effectiveness tests	
CE1	While the Countryside Strategy has taken account of the emerging LDP's of our three neighbouring Councils and it is not considered to be in conflict with them, there are important cross boundary issues in regard to landscape and natural heritage which will require ongoing engagement with these Councils.
CE2	The Countryside Strategy is founded on a robust evidence base including a detailed Landscape Character Assessment and other studies, councillor workshops, stakeholder engagement and has taken account of comments from the POP consultation.
CE3	<p>The Monitoring Framework within Technical Supplement 1 in particular indicators 21, 23, 24 and 25 commits to monitoring planning decisions within those areas designated for their landscape or natural environment qualities.</p> <p>Indicator 21 monitors the number and height of new or re-powered wind turbines approved / operational within SCAs and ACHS. A review trigger will be applied if there are any wind turbine proposal approved in an SCA, or in the case of ACHS, when more than 1 application above 15 metres, but less than 25 metres in height is approved in any one year or when more than 1 application above 25 metres in height approved in any one year.</p> <p>Indicator 23 monitors new development within the AONB, SCAs, ACHS and Rural Landscape Wedges. A review will be triggered if more than 1 application for a new single dwelling is approved in any one year within an SCA.</p> <p>Indicator 24 - A review will be triggered if more than 1 application is approved under exceptional circumstances in any one year within an International Site or more than 2 applications approved in any one year with a National or Local Site.</p> <p>Indicator 25 monitors new development within the Larne Coast SCA with a review triggered if more than one application not constituting an exception to the policy is approved in any one year or more than one application approved under exceptions (a) or (f) in any one year.</p>
CE4	The Countryside Strategy will be reviewed at Plan Review stage, with the potential for additional areas to be designated or policy to be amended within strategic designations, to take account of changing circumstances. The Local Policies Plan will bring forward Local Landscape Policy Areas (as provided for by Strategic Policy CS7) and will define the extent of Main River Corridors (as provided for by Strategic Policy CS8). Arrangement for monitoring and review for these designations will be provided at that stage.

Note the following Appendices A-G can be found in separate documents:

Appendix A *Landscape Character Assessment*

Appendix B *Development Pressure Analysis*

Appendix C *Candidate Sensitive Landscape Scoring Matrix*

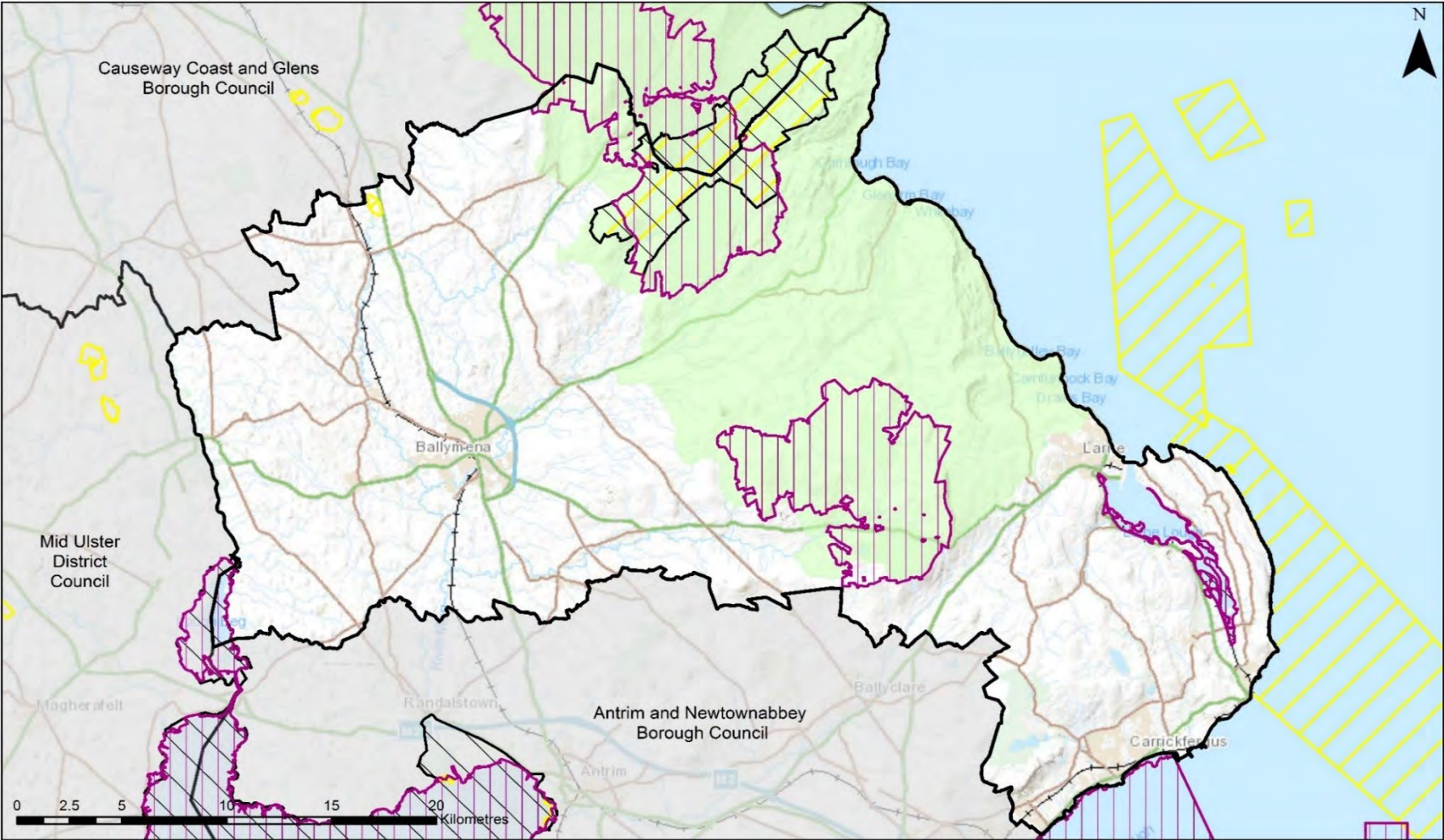
Appendix D *Candidate Sensitive Landscape Scoring Matrix Justification*

Appendix E *Candidate Sensitive Landscape Report*

Appendix F *Strategic Settlement Evaluation (See Position Paper 11)*

Appendix G *Maps*

APPENDIX G.1 Maps **Map G1** Sites of International Nature Conservation Importance

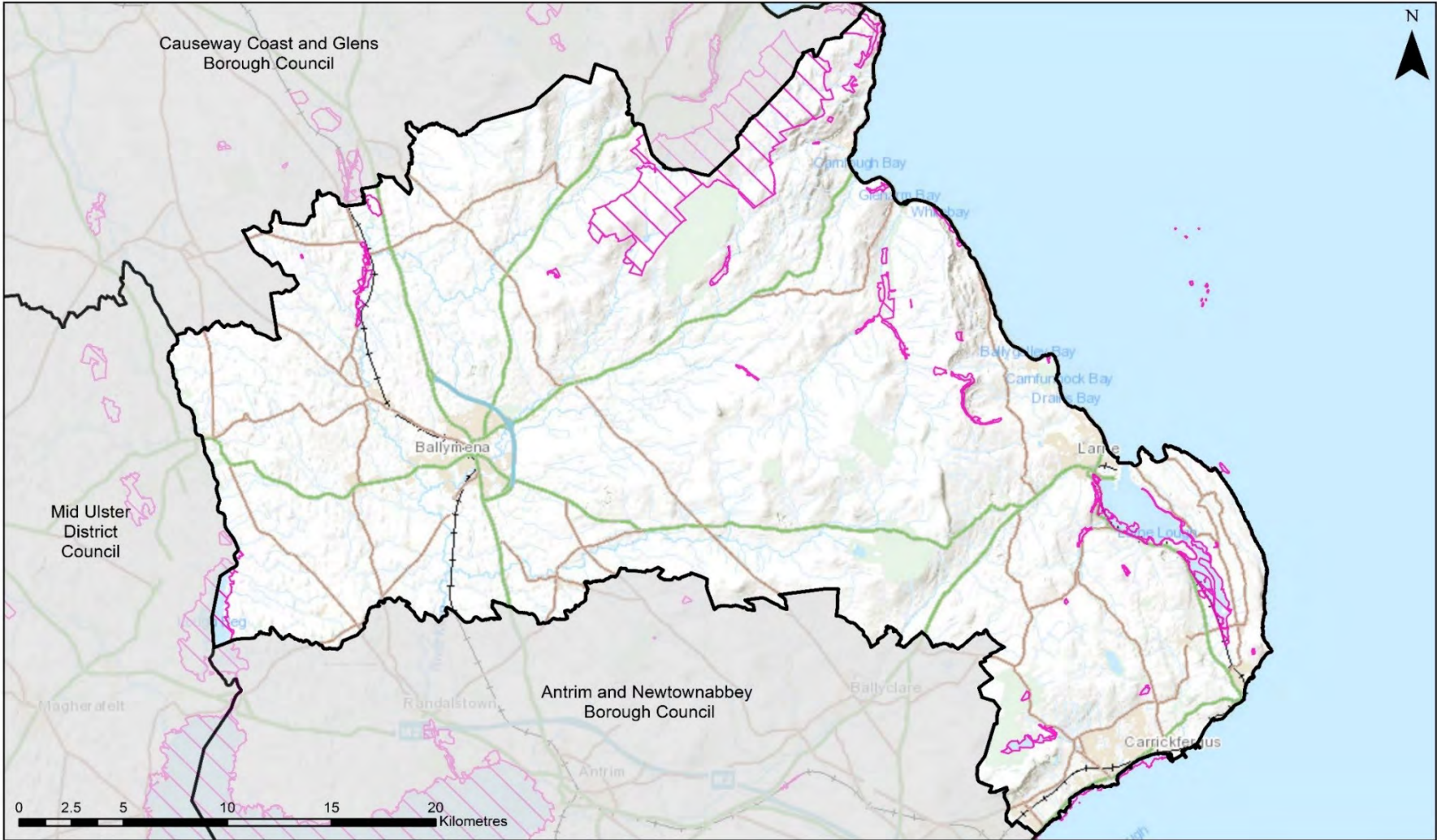


Legend



- | | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| Special Protection Area (SPA) | Special Area of Conservation (SAC) | Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Boundary |
| Ramsar | Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty | |

This material is based upon Crown Copyright and is reproduced with the permission of Land & Property Services under delegated authority from the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Crown Copyright and Database Rights. Authority Licence No: CS & LA 156

Map G2 Sites of National Nature Conservation Importance – Areas of Special Scientific Interest

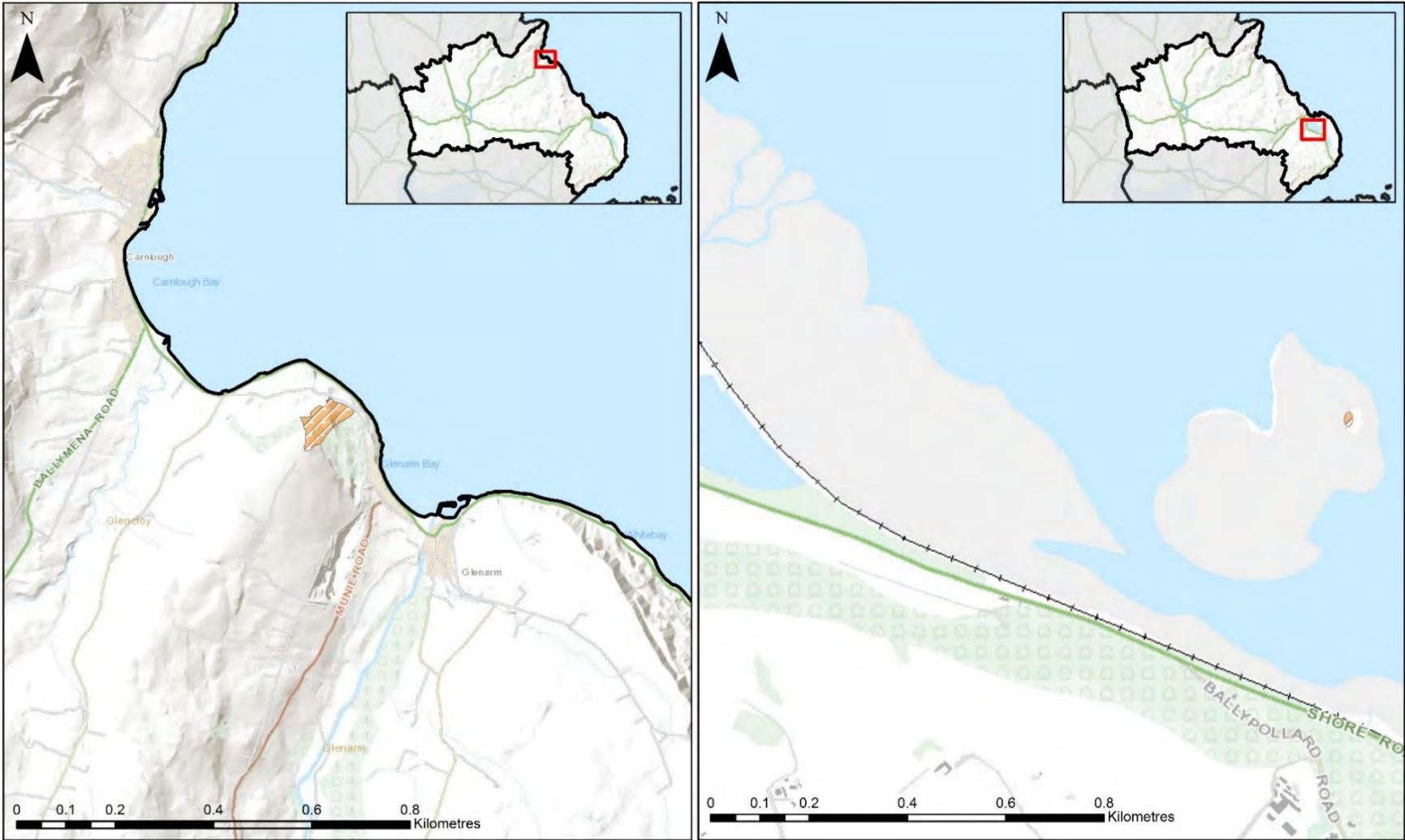


Legend



-  Area of Special Scientific Interest
-  Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Boundary

This material is based upon Crown Copyright and is reproduced with the permission of Land & Property Services under delegated authority from the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Crown Copyright and Database Rights. Authority Licence No: CS & LA 156

Map G3 Sites of National Nature Conservation Importance – Statutory Nature Reserves

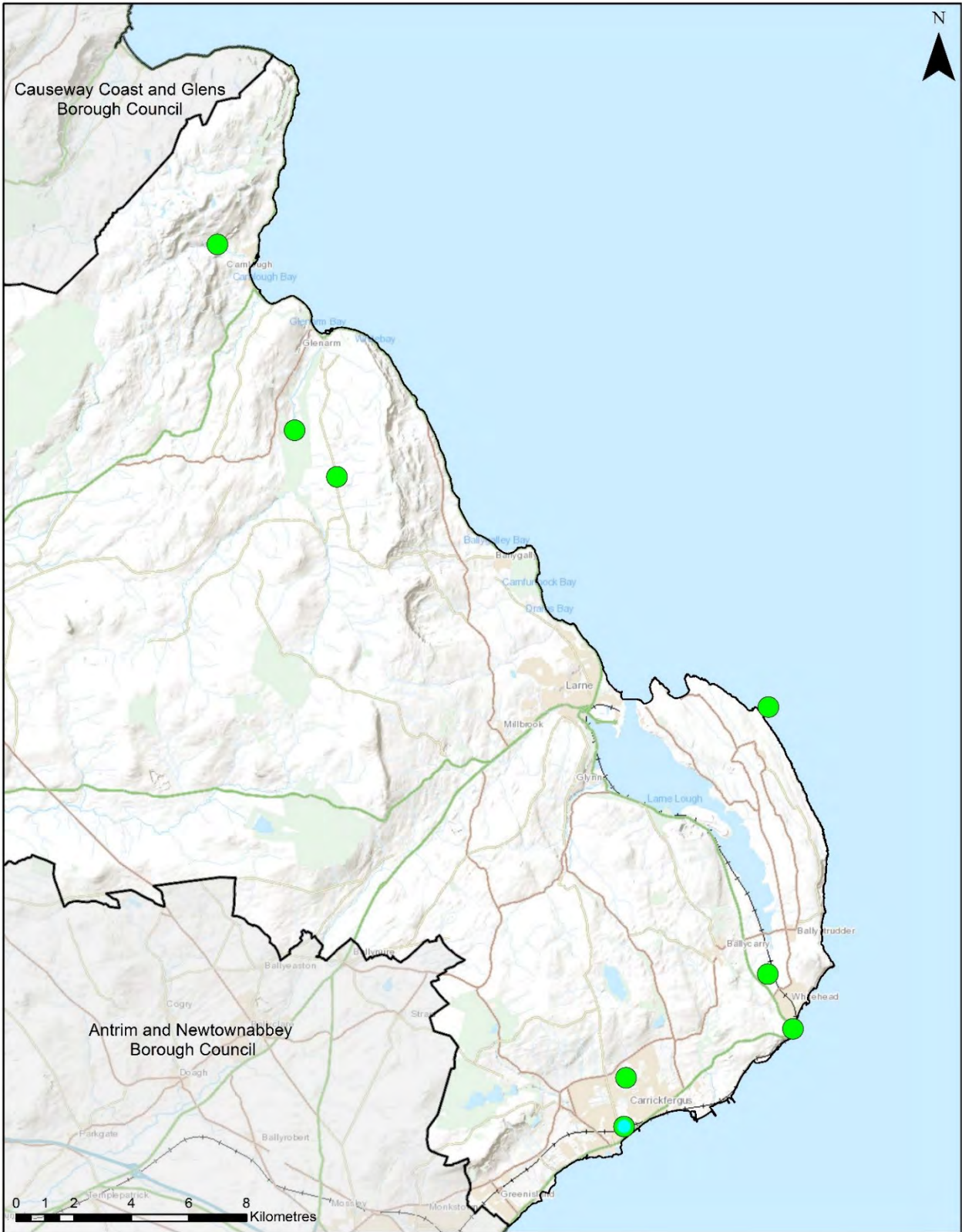


Legend



-  Statutory Nature Reserves
-  Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Boundary

This material is based upon Crown Copyright and is reproduced with the permission of Land & Property Services under delegated authority from the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Crown Copyright and Database Rights. Authority Licence No. CS & LA 156

Map G4 Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance

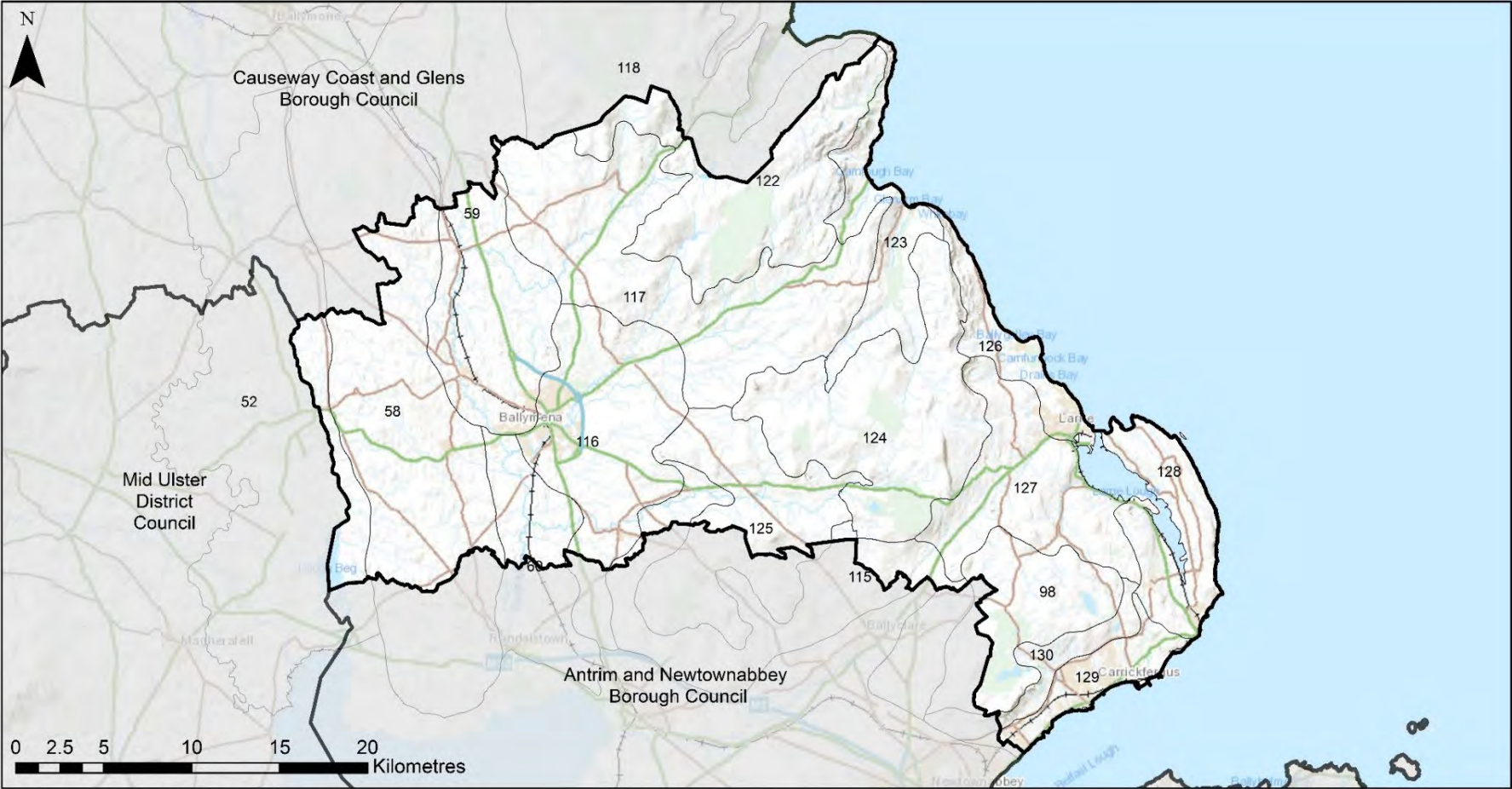


Legend

-  Local Nature Reserves
 Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Boundary

This material is based upon Crown Copyright and is reproduced with the permission of Land & Property Services under delegated authority from the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.
Crown Copyright and Database Rights. Authority Licence No: CS & LA 156

Map G5 Northern Ireland Landscape Character Areas

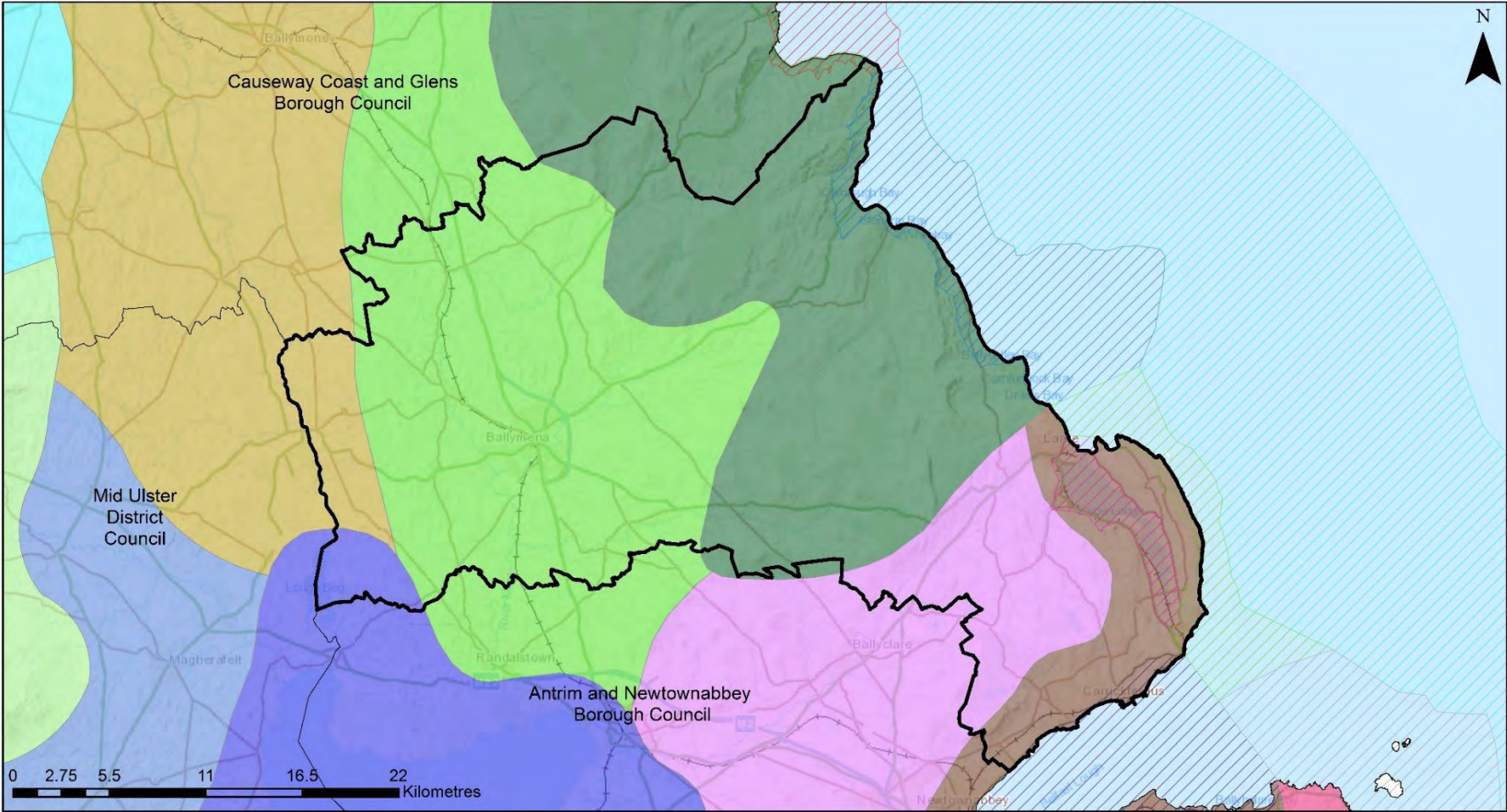


Landscape Character Assessment Areas

52 - Lower Bann Valley	115 - Tardree and Six Mile Water Slopes	123 - Larne Glens	128 - Island Magee
58 - Long Mountain Ridge	116 - Ballymena Farmland	124 - Larne Basalt Moorland	129 - Carrickfergus Shoreline
59 - Cullybackey and Clogh Mills Drumlins	117 - Central Ballymena Glens	125 - Tardree Upland Pastures	130 - Carrickfergus Farmed Escarpment
60 - River Main Valley	118 - Moyle Moorlands and Forest	126 - Larne Coast	
98 - Carrickfergus Upland Pastures	122 - Garron Plateau	127 - Larne Ridgeland	

Based upon Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland's data with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Crown Copyright and database rights NIMA CS&LA156. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings

Map G6 Regional Landscape Character Areas and Seascape Character Areas



Regional Landscape Character Assessment Areas

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Antrim Plateau and Glens | Maine and Braid River Valleys |
| Belfast Lough and Islandmagee | South Antrim Hills and Six Mile Water |
| Binevenagh Ridge | Sperrins |
| Lough Neagh Basin | Strangford, Ards and Lecale |
| Lower Bann Valley | West Lough Neagh Drumlins |

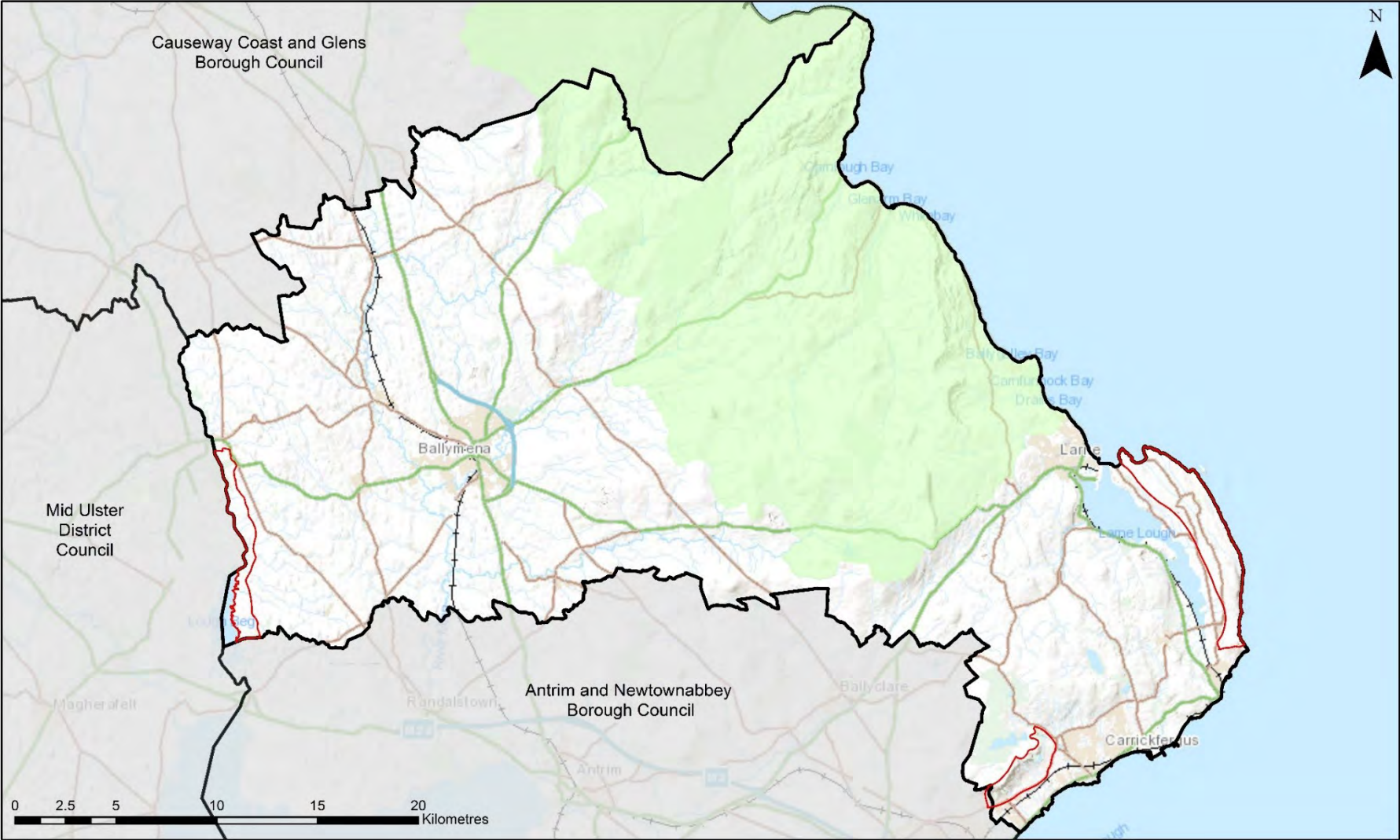
Seascape Character Assessment Areas

- | | |
|----------------------|-----------------|
| Northern Glens Coast | Belfast Harbour |
| Southern Glens Coast | Ards Peninsula |
| The Gobbins | |
| Larne Lough | |
| Belfast Lough | |

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Boundary

This material is based upon Crown Copyright and is reproduced with the permission of Land & Property Services under delegated authority from the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Crown Copyright and Database Rights. Authority Licence No: CS & LA 156

Map G7 Antrim Coast and Glens Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Areas of Scenic Quality









- Legend**
- Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
 - Area of Scenic Quality (NILCA 2000)
 - Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Boundary

This material is based upon Crown Copyright and is reproduced with the permission of Land & Property Services under delegated authority from the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Crown Copyright and Database Rights. Authority Licence No: CS & LA 156

Map G8 Existing Local Development Plan Landscape Designations



Legend

-  Area of High Scenic Value
  Rural Landscape Wedge
  Area of Constraint on Mineral Development
  Countryside Policy Area (Undeveloped Coast)
  BMA Coastal Area
  Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Boundary

This material is based upon Crown Copyright and is reproduced with the permission of Land & Property Services under delegated authority from the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.
Crown Copyright and Database Rights. Authority Licence No: CS & LA 156

APPENDIX H Evolution of relevant draft Plan Strategy policy (General Policy, Countryside Strategic Policies CS1-CS9 and Natural Heritage Policies NAT1-NAT5)

Current Operational Policy

PPS 1: General Principles	SPPS	POP Recommendation/Comment	POP Responses and Post Consultation Consideration	Final Wording for Draft Plan Strategy
<p>Paragraph 3 - The public interest requires that all development is carried out in a way that would not cause demonstrable harm to interests of acknowledged importance.</p>	<p>Under the SPPS, the guiding principle for planning authorities in determining planning applications is that sustainable development should be permitted, having regard to the development plan and all other material considerations, unless the proposed development will cause demonstrable harm to interests of acknowledged importance.</p> <p>The SPPS provides five core planning principles as well as strategic policy under 16 overarching subject matters. Across these principles and policies there are a number objectives such as good design and protecting amenity that apply to all development types.</p>	<p>It was recognised in the POP that there were a number of overlapping criteria across the various policies therefore it was suggested that these may be included within a General Policy in order to prevent duplication.</p> <p>It is recommended that consideration is given to bringing forward a General Policy in the LDP Plan Strategy.</p>	<p>No definitive comments received either for or against the inclusion of a General Policy.</p> <p>Post consultation consideration It is recommended that consideration is given to bringing forward a General Policy in the LDP Plan Strategy.</p>	<p>Policy GP1: General Policy for all Development</p> <p>New policy wording developed following the amalgamation of general policy criteria from across a number of existing policies such as PPS 3 AMP 1 and AMP 6, PPS 4 PED 9, PPS 7 QD1, PPS 16 TSM 7, PPS21 CTY 13, 14 &15, PPS 18 RE 2 as well as policies DES 2 and DES 10 in the PSRNI. The policy also takes account of planning principles included within PPS 12 and PPS 13.</p> <p>The proposed General Policy seeks to ensure that all development (except minor proposals) is sustainable, accords with the LDP and will not result in demonstrable harm to interests of acknowledge importance. This policy also provides operational policy for specific forms of development e.g. schools, which are not specifically catered for through other subject policies.</p> <p>The General policy sets out criteria under five headings that all development (except minor proposals) must meet, where relevant. Development within the countryside must also meet a number of additional criteria which are particularly relevant to the rural context.</p> <p>Councillor & PMT Comments Some of the original policy criteria have been amended to take account of comments raised through Councillor workshops and meetings with consultees. However, this engagement did not change the overall shape or thrust of the General Policy.</p>

PPS 2: Natural Heritage	SPPS	POP Recommendation/Comment	POP Responses and Post Consultation Consideration (see Chapter 10)	Final Wording for Draft Plan Strategy
<p>Policy NH 1: European and Ramsar Sites – International</p> <p>Under Policy NH 1, planning permission will only be granted for a development proposal that is not likely to have a significant effect on a European or Ramsar site. Where a development proposal is likely to have a significant individual or cumulative effect, an appropriate assessment needs to be carried out by the planning authority. Mitigation measures in the form of planning conditions may be imposed.</p> <p>Where a development proposal could adversely affect the integrity of a European or Ramsar site, development may only be permitted in exceptional circumstances where it is required for imperative reasons of overriding public interest and subject to other stringent tests.</p>	<p>SPPS (para 6.176, 6.177, 6.178) accords with Policy NH 1 in regard to assessing proposals that may impact on European or Ramsar sites.</p> <p>SPPS does not set out exceptions but refers to these in the relevant statutory provisions.</p>	<p>Policy NH 1 appears to be working well and there is no evidence to suggest that it needs to be substantially amended.</p> <p><i>It is recommended that the wording of Policy NH 1 is brought forward in the LDP Plan Strategy with a minor amendment to bring forward the stronger wording used in SPPS (para 6.177), in regard to the requirement by law for the Planning Authority to carry out an appropriate assessment in cases where a development proposal is likely to have a significant effect on an international site or where there is reasonable scientific doubt.</i></p>	<p>Broad support for Council's approach to reviewing and bringing forward policies contained within PPS 2.</p> <p>In a general comment, DfI highlighted the "precautionary principle" and stated that Council must ensure they take account of policy in relation to natural heritage detailed in paragraphs 6.172 - 6.198 of the SPPS.</p> <p>Post consultation consideration Bring forward POP recommendation.</p>	<p>Policy NAT1: European and Ramsar Sites – International</p> <p>The wording of NAT1 is carried forward from NH1 with no changes save from replacing 'Department' with 'Council'.</p> <p>The stronger wording of SPPS is not included in policy wording – see explanation below.</p> <p>Councillor & PMT Comments</p> <p>NIEA advised wording of existing Policy NH1 should remain as it ensures that it meets the very high level of statutory provision for European and RAMSAR sites.</p> <p>NIEA confirm that policy does not have to say 'required by law' as long as council recognise that it is a legal requirement.</p>
<p>Policy NH 2: Species Protected by Law</p> <p>Under Policy NH 2, planning permission will only be granted for a development proposal that is not likely to harm a European protected species (listed under Annex IV of the Habitats Directive). In exceptional circumstances a development proposal that is likely to harm these species may only be permitted if it meets the 4 specified criteria.</p> <p>Under Policy NH 2 planning permission will only be granted for a development proposal that is not likely to harm any other statutorily protected species (including national) and which can be adequately mitigated or compensated against.</p>	<p>SPPS (para 6.180, 6.181, 6.182) accords with Policy NH 2.</p> <p>SPPS (para 6.179) sets out guidance on the actions that must be carried out by the planning authority in order to inform decision making on a development proposal.</p>	<p>Policy NH 2 appears to be working well and there is no evidence to suggest that it needs to be substantially amended.</p> <p><i>It is recommended that the wording of Policy NH 2 is brought forward in the LDP Plan Strategy, with wording amended as necessary to reflect the SPPS (para 6.179).</i></p>	<p>Broad support for Council's approach to reviewing and bringing forward policies contained within PPS 2.</p> <p>In response to, PPS 8 policies OS 3: Outdoor Recreation in the Countryside and OS 7: The Floodlighting of Sports and Outdoor Recreational Facilities, NIEA requested that the impact of floodlighting on bats is highlighted.</p> <p>Post consultation consideration Bring forward POP recommendation and include reference to the impact of floodlighting on bats in amplification text.</p>	<p>Policy NAT2: Species protected by Law</p> <p>The wording of NAT2 is carried forward from NH2 with no changes. The J&A wording has been updated to reflect SPPS wording.</p> <p>Councillor & PMT Comments</p> <p>Following NIEA comments, minor changes were made to J&A to remove reference to the list of protected species being found on DAERA as they are listed under legislation.</p> <p>Marine Division were supportive of keeping the distinction between European and National Protected species in line with the SPPS.</p>

<p>Policy NH 3: Sites for Nature Conservation Importance – National</p> <p>Under Policy NH 3, planning permission will only be granted for a development proposal that is not likely to have an adverse effect on the integrity, including the value of the site to the habitat network, or special interest of a site of national nature conservation importance.</p> <p>Development proposals which could adversely affect a site of national nature conservation importance may only be permitted where the benefits of the proposed development clearly outweigh the value of the site.</p>	<p>SPPS (para 6.183, 6.184) accords with Policy NH 3.</p> <p>SPPS (para 6.183) states that, “There is a legal duty to take reasonable steps to further the conservation and enhancement of the features by which the ASSI is of special scientific interest.”</p> <p>In the SPPS (para 6.183) Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) replace Marine Nature Reserves (MNRs) in the list of National Sites of Nature Conservation Importance, in accordance with the Marine Act (NI) 2013.</p>	<p>Policy NH 3 appears to be working well and there is no evidence to suggest that it needs to be substantially amended.</p> <p><i>It is recommended that the wording of Policy NH 3 is brought forward in the LDP Plan Strategy, with wording amended as necessary to align more closely with SPPS.</i></p> <p><i>MCZs will substitute MNRs in the list of National Sites of Nature Conservation Importance in accordance with the Marine Act (NI) 2013.</i></p>	<p>Broad support for Council’s approach to reviewing and bringing forward policies contained within PPS 2.</p> <p>NIEA welcome the substitution of MNRs with MCZs in the list of National Sites of Nature Conservation Importance.</p> <p>Post consultation consideration Bring forward POP recommendation.</p>	<p>Policy NAT3: Sites of Nature Conservation Importance - National</p> <p>The wording of NAT3 is carried forward from NH3 with minor changes to replace MNRs with MCZs.</p> <p>Councillor & PMT Comments Following comment from NIEA weblink was updated in J&A.</p>
<p>Policy NH 4: Sites for Nature Conservation Importance – Local</p> <p>Under Policy NH 4, planning permission will only be granted for a development proposal that is not likely to have a significant adverse impact on a site of local nature conservation importance.</p> <p>Development proposals which could have a significant adverse impact on a site of local importance may only be permitted where the benefits of the proposed development outweigh the value of the site.</p>	<p>SPPS (para 6.190) accords with Policy NH 4.</p> <p>It is noted that neither the SPPS nor Policy NH 4 make reference to the designation of Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance through the LDP.</p>	<p>Policy NH 4 appears to be working well and there is no evidence to suggest that it needs to be substantially amended.</p> <p><i>It is recommended that the wording of Policy NH 4 is brought forward in the LDP Plan Strategy.</i></p> <p>BMAP 2015 designated Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance (SLNCIs) within the former Carrickfergus Borough. There are no designated SLNCIs within the former Ballymena and Larne Boroughs due to the age of their plans. The issue of ensuring a consistent approach across the Borough will be addressed through the POP. Environmental consultees have indicated that the features of nature conservation interest within existing SLNCIs can be sufficiently protected under Policy NH 5.</p>	<p>Broad support for Council’s approach to reviewing and bringing forward policies contained within PPS 2.</p> <p>Post consultation consideration Bring forward POP recommendation with amendments to reflect the wording of SPPS.</p>	<p>Policy NAT4: Sites for Nature Conservation Importance – Local</p> <p>The wording of NAT4 is carried forward from NH4 with no changes. The Justification adds in detail of the number of local nature reserves and wildlife refuges in the borough and signposts to the Countryside Assessment Technical Supplement for further detail</p> <p>Councillor & PMT Comments One Councillor was in favour of retaining Carrick SLNCIs and designating new ones in Ballymena and Larne.</p> <p>NIEA advised Council to decide to either identify natural heritage features and ecological networks for information purposes only or designate them as SLNCIs. If the latter was proposed they should be supported by a robust evidence base e.g. by updating and verifying this information through a combination of desktop surveys followed by field surveys.</p> <p>SES advised that it is time consuming to identify and justify SLNCIs in a plan and keep that information up to date. It is also difficult to be comprehensive in recording such sites, it risks devaluing those that are not listed as they could</p>

				<p>also be at risk as they are only protected in the planning context. NAT5 affords all such sites protection allows development proposals to be assessed on a case by case basis using available information to identify local biodiversity, priority habitats and species and blue/green networks.</p> <p>Taken these considerations into account SLNCI designations will not be proposed in the LDP and it is proposed to remove those currently designated in the Carrickfergus area through draft BMAP, at LPP stage. NIEA confirmed they will share any information they hold on the 100 wildlife sites and 23 SLNCIs in MEA for Development Management purposes in implementing existing policy NAT 5.</p>
<p>Policy NH 5: Habitats, Species or Features of Natural Heritage Importance</p> <p>Under Policy NH 5, planning permission will only be granted for a development proposal which is not likely to result in the unacceptable adverse impact on, or damage to, known habitats, species or features of natural heritage importance listed under this policy.</p> <p>Development proposals which are likely to result in an unacceptable adverse impact may only be permitted where the benefits of the proposed development outweigh the value of the habitat, species or feature.</p>	<p>SPPS (para 6.192, 6.193) accords with Policy NH 5.</p> <p>SPPS (para 6.192) explicitly states that other natural heritage features worthy of protection include “trees and woodland”.</p>	<p>Policy NH 5 appears to be working well and there is no evidence to suggest that it needs to be substantially amended. Environmental consultees have stressed the importance of protecting trees and woodland.</p> <p>It is recommended that the wording of Policy NH 5 is brought forward in the LDP Plan Strategy, and that the following natural heritage features which are of particular importance in Mid and East Antrim, be added to the list brought forward with Policy NH 5:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Significant groups of trees and woodland ▪ Species-rich grasslands ▪ Green and Blue Infrastructure ▪ Undeveloped Coastal areas 	<p>Broad support for Council’s approach to reviewing and bringing forward policies contained within PPS 2.</p> <p><u>Additional Features</u></p> <p>There was strong support for including the proposed additional features to be listed for protection under Policy NH 5.</p> <p>NIEA welcomed the addition of “trees and woodland”, however, they highlighted the following issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ unsure of the definition of “species-rich grasslands” as it differs to the grassland priority habitats. They stress that if an additional category is being considered, it is advisable for Council to review the Habitat Action Plans (HAPS) to ensure there is no or little overlap with existing categories and to provide an equivalent level of detail at species level to support this category; ▪ note that “green and blue infrastructure” can include manmade infrastructure, and stress that it will be important to 	<p>Policy NAT5: Habitats, Species or Features of Natural Heritage Importance.</p> <p>The wording of NAT 5 is carried forward from NH5 with one minor addition – see NIEA comment below. The J&A emphasises that policy seeks to conserve protect and enhance local biodiversity regardless of legal protections. It also outlines the aims of the NI and EU Biodiversity Strategies and explains how the NI Biodiversity Checklist helps identify if a development proposal is likely to adversely affect biodiversity and natural heritage interests and what info may need to accompany applications to comply with relevant legislation and planning policy.</p> <p>Councillor and PMT Comment</p> <p>Following comment from NIEA additional wording was added to last bullet point to include ‘trees and woodland’ as per SPPS and they supported the retention of the entire list of habitats, species or features of natural heritage listed in NH5.</p>

provide a definition of what features this category will protect; and

- further consideration should be given to what features the “Undeveloped Coastal Areas” category is aiming to protect as there is likely to be significant overlap with this category and priority habitats.

SLNCIs

The majority of respondents agreed that sites containing features of local nature conservation importance and not designated in our LDP, can be afforded sufficient protection under Policy NH 5.

NIEA stated that the policy approach within Policy NH 5 would be sufficient to protect natural heritage interest of local sites if they are identified. They stressed that it is therefore likely to be highly beneficial to identify these areas within the LDP in a consistent manner to allow for this policy approach. They also highlighted that they have identified local wildlife sites which could be used as a basis for SLNCI designation.

Post consultation consideration

Bring forward wording of Policy NH 5 in Plan Strategy with the potential addition of the following categories:

- Trees and woodland; and
- Green and Blue Infrastructure.

We will engage in further consultation with DfI and NIEA to clarify and define features to be addressed under the “Green and Blue Infrastructure” category.

Taking account of comments received from NIEA, Council will not bring forward the categories “Species-rich grasslands” and

			<p>"Undeveloped Coastal areas".</p> <p>We will engage in further consultation with NIEA regarding the identification and designation of SLNCIs.</p>	
<p>Policy NH 6: Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty</p> <p>Under Policy NH 6, planning permission for new development within an AONB will only be granted where it is of an appropriate design, size and scale for the locality and where additional tests are met in regard to respecting the special character of the AONB and the conservation of its heritage assets.</p>	<p>SPPS generally accords with Policy NH 6 and reflects the guidance therein.</p>	<p>Policy NH 6 essentially seeks to regulate the siting, scale and design of new development within AONBs, and the retention of natural and man-made features that characterise the particular AONB. It is considered that the greater level of detail (compared to SPPS) referred to under Policy NH 6 is advantageous, in that it identifies the key characteristics to be taken in to account in assessing proposals for new development within AONBs. <i>It is therefore recommended that the wording of Policy NH 6 is brought forward in the LDP Plan Strategy.</i></p> <p>Consultees raised concerns about the cumulative impacts of development within the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB. Policy NH 6 may not be robust enough to protect against the cumulative impacts of development, particularly certain types of development, in highly visually sensitive areas within the AONB. SPPS (para 6.188) explicitly states that "cumulative impacts" are a material consideration when assessing development proposals, and as such this wording would strengthen Policy NH 6 in regard to mitigating against the harmful impacts of cumulative development on the special character of the AONB. <i>Therefore, it is recommended to bring forward the wording of SPPS (para 6.188).</i></p> <p>Key Issue 33 addresses the protection of the special character and environment of the AONB and considers the visual sensitivity of some areas of the AONB to the cumulative impacts of development, particularly in regard to highly obtrusive</p>	<p>Broad support for Council's approach to reviewing and bringing forward policies contained within PPS 2.</p> <p>NIEA welcomed the proposal to include an assessment of the cumulative impacts of development within Policy NH 6. However, they are concerned that it is only proposed to do this for "certain types of development" in "highly sensitive areas within the AONB". They indicated that this approach suggests there are areas of greater and lesser importance within the AONB, which consequently, could diminish protection of some areas within the AONB. They advocate that the whole of the AONB should be assessed.</p> <p>NIEA stated that SCA designations will require specific policy to be brought forward in line with the requirements of the SPPS.</p> <p>Post consultation consideration Bring forward POP recommendation. (see Key Issues 26, 29 and 33 for reference to issues that may require amendments to this policy in respect of any potential spatial designations within the AONB).</p>	<p>Policy CS5: Antrim Coast and Glens Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty</p> <p>Policy wording largely brought forward with amendments to include additional criteria requiring;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) the nature and intensity of the proposed use is compatible with the landscape and distinctive character of the AONB. (b) public views of key features, ridge lines and coastal headlands within the AONB are protected. (c) development proposals that are outside but closely interlinked with the AONB must have regard to the sensitivity of the setting and the visual relationship with the designated area. <p>Additional policy wording has been introduced addressing the concerns raised by consultees at POP stage relating to the potential impacts of cumulative development on the AONB.</p> <p>Development proposals are required to meet General Policy and accord with other provisions of the LDP.</p> <p>Councillor and PMT Comment Following comments from DfI additional wording was added to the policy, "heritage and wildlife".</p>

		<p>forms of development. The Preferred Option is to bring forward Areas of Constraint on particular types of development within the AONB, and to consult on where any Special Countryside Area (SCA) designation would be appropriate within the AONB.</p> <p>It is recommended that the wording of Policy NH 6 is brought forward in the LDP Plan Strategy with amendments to recognise any spatial designation of Areas of Constraint and further SCAs that may be introduced through the LDP.</p>		
--	--	--	--	--

A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland	SPPS	POP Recommendation/Comment	POP Responses and Post Consultation Consideration	Final Wording for Draft Plan Strategy
Public Services and Utilities			(see Chapters 7 & 8)	
<p>Policy PSU 10: Development at Risk</p> <p>This policy states that development will not normally be permitted in areas known to be at serious risk from flooding, coastal erosion or land instability.</p> <p>Under this policy new development in coastal areas will not normally be permitted where expensive engineering works would be required to either protect development on land subject to coastal erosion, or defend land at risk from coastal flooding.</p> <p>Under this policy, development proposals will be determined with account being taken of known hazards of land instability which would affect the development of the site or would as a result of development pose a potential threat to neighbouring areas. In certain circumstances specialist assessments may be required to</p>	<p>SPPS (para 6.42, 6.46) accords with Policy PSU 10 in regard to a presumption against development in major at risk areas. However, SPPS explicitly states that development will not be permitted in areas of the coast known to be at risk from flooding, coastal erosion, or land instability.</p> <p>SPPS does not explicitly state that new development in coastal areas will not normally be permitted where expensive engineering works would be required in coastal locations.</p> <p>In relation to land instability, the SPPS does not explicitly address specialist assessments or circumstances where planning permission will be refused.</p> <p>SPPS (6.46) reinforces Policy PSU 10 by stating that LDPs should identify areas of the coast known to be at risk from flooding, coastal erosion, or land instability where new development should not be permitted.</p>	<p>Superseded by PPS 15 insofar as it relates to flooding.</p> <p>Policy PSU 10 seems to be working well and there is no evidence to suggest that it needs to be amended.</p> <p>It is recommended that the wording of Policy PSU 10 is brought forward in the LDP Plan Strategy subject to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exclusion of flood risk as this is dealt with in revised PPS 15; Further consultation with Department of Infrastructure in regard to alignment with SPPS; Further information that may enable the LDP to spatially identify areas at risk (e.g. from coastal erosion) and to bring forward associated policy to align with SPPS. 	<p>Broad support for Council's approach to reviewing and bringing forward Policy PSU 10.</p> <p>DfE recommended that this policy should be carried forward through the LDP.</p> <p>Post consultation consideration Bring forward POP recommendation.</p>	<p>This Policy is accounted for under new Policy CS9 – Development at Risk from Land Instability or Coastal Erosion.</p> <p>Policy developed in accordance with SPPS and DfI/ GSNi guidance.</p> <p>Link provided by GSNi of known and historic land instability inserted in policy introduction text.</p> <p>The J&A sites that, while the policy applies to areas of 'known' risk of land instability and coastal erosion, but information in regard to coastal erosion in particular is currently lacking</p> <p>Councillor and PMT Comments Development proposals must have regard to the Marine Policy Statement and the Draft Marine Plan for NI – covered in regional policy context at start of PS and reference added into Introductory text to this policy</p> <p>Following comment from HED, reason for refusal added where the nature of the investigative work and/or the remedial measures to be employed would have significant adverse impact on biodiversity, landscape or archaeology.</p>

determine the stability of the ground and identify any remedial measures required to deal with any instability. The policy also outlines the circumstances when planning permission will normally be refused in regard to issues around land instability.

The Coast

PSRNI Policy CO 1: The Undeveloped Coast

Policy CO 1 states that development proposals may only be permitted on the undeveloped coast in the following circumstances:

- (i) where the proposed development is of such national or regional importance as to outweigh any potential detrimental impact to the coastal environment; and
- (ii) where no feasible alternative site within an existing urban area exists.

Within the undeveloped coastal zone, the policy aims to minimise the visual and physical impact of development, maintain high design standards, and keep important public views of the coast free from development.

In assessing development proposals which involve coastal protection schemes, particularly on the undeveloped coast, account will be taken of the visual and physical impact of such schemes.

The policy will not normally permit development in major risk areas. New development will

The undeveloped coast policy contained within the SPPS accords with Policy CO 1. Further, SPPS emphasises that LDPs and future adopted Marine Plans should be complementary, particularly with regard to the inter-tidal area.

Bespoke policies tailored to different stretches of the undeveloped coast are an important policy tool to preserve and enhance distinctive heritage assets and landscape quality.

It is recommended that the undeveloped coast is defined within the LDP and appropriate policies brought forward in the Plan Strategy taking account of the SPPS. It is also recommended that the Council bring forward bespoke policies that recognise any spatial designations that may be introduced through the LDP.

(see Chapter 10)

Broad support for our approach to extant coastal policies contained within a PSRNI.

Some comments from the public stressed that impacts of climate change need consideration e.g. flood risk.

In a general comment, NIEA stated that there should be a wider acknowledgement of the potential impact both on and from the marine area, in relation to social and economic policy considerations. They stressed that Council must also have regard to the UK Marine Policy Statement (UK MPS) and the Marine Plan for Northern Ireland (when adopted).

Post consultation consideration

In developing coastal policy, we will consult with DfI Marine Planning Division and engage with adjoining councils, potentially via future coastal forums.

Bring forward POP recommendation.
(see Key Issues 29 - 31 for reference to issues regarding potential spatial policy designations along the MEA coast).

Policy CS2: Special Countryside Areas (Specifically Larne Coast and The Gobbins SCAs)

New Policy wording developed to ensure an approach that is tailored to meet the needs of our Borough.

Policy states that there will be a presumption against all new development other than in exceptional circumstances and that development MUST fully demonstrate that it meets one of the exception tests.

Councillor & PMT comments

No changes further to Councillor consultation. DfI made comment regarding the potential for the exceptional circumstances criteria to undermine the intent of the SCA Policy. Council content that the nature of these exceptional circumstances criteria is such to not undermine the intent of the policy.

Minor amendments to the J&A following DfI comments to provide clarity on the permitted volume of proposed extensions

generally not be acceptable where it would require the provision of expensive engineering works to protect the development from erosion or coastal flooding.

PSRNI Policy CO 2: The Developed Coast

This policy states that the Developed Coast includes urban areas and other major developments such as ports, isolated industrial units and power stations.

This policy seeks to encourage and support development proposals for the enhancement and regeneration of urban waterfronts.

This policy lists a set of criteria applicable to coastal development proposals within existing urban areas. The listed criteria seek attractive landscaping, the retention and enhancement of public access to the coast, protection of open space, preservation and conservation of natural and built heritage assets, protection and enhancement of views of the sea, and encourages uses which help promote a vibrant and attractive urban waterfront.

The developed coast policy contained within the SPPS accords with Policy CO 2.

Further, SPPS states that development along the developed coast is subject to all other relevant planning policies and emphasises that LDPs and future adopted Marine Plans should be complementary, particularly with regard to the inter-tidal area.

Bespoke policy tailored to different stretches of the coastline are an important policy tool to preserve and enhance distinctive heritage assets and landscape quality along the coast, and within developed sections, to promote the enhancement and regeneration of urban waterfronts.

It is recommended that policy is brought forward in the LDP Plan Strategy to take account of the SPPS (Coastal Development) policy in regard to development within the developed coast. It is also recommended that the Council bring forward bespoke policies that recognise any spatial designations that may be introduced through the LDP.

Broad support for Council's approach to extant coastal policies contained within a PSRNI.

In a general comment, DfI noted that Chapter 10 of the POP does not include information relating to the Port of Larne. They stated that sea ports present both major economic and environmental issues which should be addressed through the LDP.

Post consultation consideration

In developing coastal policy, we will consult with DfI Marine Planning Division and engage with adjoining councils, potentially via future coastal forums.

Bring forward POP recommendation and appropriate policy to facilitate any need for tourism development, port activity and infrastructure requirements, whilst taking account of environmental issues.

CS6: Developed Coast (Belfast Lough Shore)

Policy CS6 is an amalgamation of CO 2 and COU 4. The general intent of these policies has been carried forward through to Policy CS6, whereby permission for development proposals will only be allowed if the development proposal is:

- (a) of overriding regional or sub-regional economic importance
- (b) for the provision of new flood defences or upgrading of existing flood defences to safeguard against coastal flooding
- (c) demonstrated that the proposed development will not have an unacceptable effect, either directly, indirectly, or cumulatively on the coastal setting and / or environment, including any heritage asset associated with the natural or historic environment

Policy CS6 supports the creation or enhancement of public access to the coast, the enhancement of public enjoyment of the coast and the delivery of environmental benefit.

Councillor & PMT comments

DfI indicated that criterion (b) was in conflict with SPPS para SPPS 6.109 and PPS15 FLD 1. Additional wording is now contained within a footnote which limits such works to DfI Rivers or another statutory body.

DfI indicated that the wording 'potential detrimental impact' had been omitted, this text has now been carried forward into the final policy wording.

SPPS does not preclude this form of development within coastal flood plains and states within para 6.109 that *"Such operations within the coastal flood plain will have a negligible effect on its extent and therefore much less likely to cause flooding elsewhere. Land raising to facilitate development at an appropriate level above the coastal flood plain may therefore be*

				<p><i>possible” and further states in para 6.110 that “Other flood protection / management measures involving new flood defences or flood compensation storage works will not be acceptable unless carried out by Rivers Agency or other statutory body”</i></p>
<p>Policy CO 3: Areas of Amenity or Conservation Value on the Coast</p> <p>This policy seeks to protect from development, the parts of the coast, within urban areas, which are important in terms of their amenity or nature conservation.</p> <p>Under this policy there will be a presumption against inappropriate development on green areas and open space along the coast within existing urban areas. Appropriate development would be considered to be small scale tourist or recreational development in association with existing open space uses.</p> <p>This policy encourages the enlargement and enhancement of existing amenity open space along the coastline within existing settlements, and promotes the introduction of new amenity areas or habitats in waterfront redevelopment schemes.</p>	<p>SPPS (para 6.39) accords with Policy CO 3.</p> <p>However, the SPPS does not explicitly encourage the enlargement and enhancement of existing amenity open space along the coast within settlements, neither does it explicitly encourage the introduction of new amenity areas or habitats in waterfront redevelopment schemes.</p>	<p>Superseded by PPS 16 Tourism insofar as it relates to tourism development or the protection of tourism assets from inappropriate development.</p> <p>Superseded by PPS 2 where the policy refers to Policy CON 1 and CON 2 of the PSRNI which relate to the protection of nature conservation interests.</p> <p>Superseded by PPS 6 where the policy refers to Policy CON 5 of the PSRNI which relates to the protection of historical and archaeological maritime heritage.</p> <p>Although not formally superseded by PPS 8 where Policy CO 3 relates to areas of public open space, the provisions of PPS 8 would be afforded significant weight in considering development proposals with implications for public open space.</p> <p>Taking all of the above considerations into account, it is recommended that Policy CO 3 is not brought forward in the LDP.</p>	<p>No comments received from statutory consultees or public respondents regarding this policy.</p> <p>Post consultation consideration As per POP recommendation do not bring forward wording of CO 3.</p>	<p>As per POP recommendation do not bring forward wording of CO3.</p>
<p>Policy CO 4: Access to the Coastline</p> <p>This policy seeks to encourage schemes which provide or extend public access to the coastline.</p> <p>This policy states that development which would result in the closure of existing access points will normally only be</p>	<p>SPPS (para 6.41) accords with Policy CO 4, however does not refer to safeguarding the amenity of the local area.</p>	<p>Policy CO 4 appears to be working well and there is no evidence to suggest that it needs amended.</p> <p>It is recommended that the wording of Policy CO 4 is brought forward in the LDP Plan Strategy.</p>	<p>Broad support for Council’s approach to extant coastal policies contained within a PSRNI.</p> <p>Post consultation consideration It is recommended that the general thrust of Policy CO 4 is brought forward in the LDP Plan Strategy.</p>	<p>Policy CS2 Special Countryside Areas & CS6 Developed Coast (Belfast Lough Shore)</p> <p>The intent of Policy CO 4 has been carried forward under Policies CS2 & CS6 which support the protection and the creation or enhancement of public access to the coast, the enhancement of public enjoyment of the coast and the delivery of environmental benefits.</p> <p>Councillor & PMT comments</p>

acceptable where a feasible alternative is provided. Under this policy development proposals to provide or extend access to the coastline will normally be permitted provided that natural and built heritage conservation interests, landscape quality and amenity of the local area are safeguarded.

No changes further to above consultations.



**Mid & East
Antrim**
Borough Council

Local Development Plan Team
County Hall
182 Galgorm Road
Ballymena
BT42 1QF

Tel: 0300 124 5000
planning@midandeantrim.gov.uk

www.midandeantrim.gov.uk/planning