

Local Development Plan 2032
Technical Supplement 9

Natural Environment



**Ards and
North Down**
Borough Council

Contents

1.0	INTRODUCTION	5
2.0	REGIONAL PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT.....	5
	Programme for Government 2024-2027	5
	Draft Programme for Government (PfG) 2016-2021.....	6
	Draft Programme for Government Outcomes 2021.....	6
	Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035.....	6
	Everyone’s Involved — NI Executive Sustainable Development Strategy (2021).....	7
	DAERA’s Climate Change and Sustainable Development Strategy 2020–2030.....	7
	Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) 2024	8
3.0	STRATEGIC PLANNING POLICY STATEMENT.....	8
4.0	PLANNING POLICY STATEMENTS AND SUPPLEMENTARY GUIDANCE.....	9
	Planning Policy Statement 2: Natural Heritage (PPS2)	9
5.0	EXTANT AREA PLANS	10
	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (dBMAP) 2015	10
	Ards and Down Area Plan (ADAP) 2015	11
6.0	ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL PLANS AND STRATEGIES	11
	Corporate Plan 2024-2028 A Sustainable Borough	11
	The Big Plan for Ards and North Down 2017-2032 (The Community Plan).....	12
	The Integrated Strategy for Tourism, Regeneration and Economic Development 2018-2030	12
	Tree and Woodland Strategy 2021-2032.....	12
7.0	OTHER RELEVANT DOCUMENTS.....	13
	Draft Strangford Lough Marine Protected Area Management Scheme	13
	The Northern Ireland Biodiversity Checklist	13
	Survey Work to inform the LDP.	13
8.0	BOROUGH PROFILE	14
9.0	BIODIVERSITY.....	15
	Biodiversity Net Gain	15
	Natural Capital	15
	Nature Positive 2030.....	15
	Nature Based Solutions.....	16
	Green/Blue Infrastructure	16
	Nature Recovery Networks.....	16
	The Wildlife and Natural Environment (NI) Act 2011	17

	Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy to 2020.....	17
	UK National Ecosystem Assessment Northern Ireland (2011)	18
	Landscape Character.....	19
10	ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGNATIONS	20
	Internationally, Nationally and Locally Designated Sites.....	20
	Ramsar Sites.....	20
	Special Protection Areas (SPAs)	20
	Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)	20
	Marine Conservation Zones.....	21
	National Nature Reserves/Nature Reserves.....	21
	Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs).....	22
11	LANDSCAPE DESIGNATIONS	23
	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)	23
	Area of High Scenic Value	23
	Rural Landscape Wedges	24
	Landscape Character.....	24
	Regional Landscape Character Areas.....	25
	Regional Seascape Character Areas.....	25
	Local Landscape Character Areas	25
	Landscape Character Area Review.....	26
	Local Nature Reserves.....	26
	Woodland.....	26
	Ancient and Long-Established Woods	27
	Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)	27
	Draft Northern Ireland Peatland Strategy 2021-2041	27
	A Green Growth Strategy for Northern Ireland - Balancing Our Climate, Environment and Economy.....	28
12.0	CROSS BOUNDARY POLICY CONTEXT	29
13.0	PREFERRED OPTIONS PAPER.....	31
	POP Representations	31
14	CONSULTEE AND COUNCILLOR ENGAGEMENT.....	33
	Consultee responses.....	33
	Council Engagement	34
	Development Management Team.....	35
15	SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL	35
16	DRAFT PLAN STRATEGY APPROACH	36
	SLINCI designation consideration	37

Biodiversity Checklist	38
17 SOUNDNESS.....	38
Appendix 1: Map 1 - International/European Environmental Designations in Ards and North Down	41
Appendix 2: Map 2 - National Environmental Designations in Ards and North Down	42
Appendix 3: Local Landscape Policy Areas.....	43
Appendix 4: SLNCIs.....	51

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This technical supplement is one of a suite of topic-based documents detailing the evidence base used to inform the preparation of the Ards and North Down (AND) Local Development Plan (LDP) draft Plan Strategy (DPS) 2032. This suite of documents should be read alongside the policies contained within the DPS in order to understand the rationale and justification for each policy.
- 1.2 In May 2019, the Council launched the Preferred Options Paper (POP), the first of three public consultation documents which will be issued through the LDP process. The POP outlined the vision and strategic objectives of the plan based upon the baseline information detailed in a suite of position papers. The technical supplements which complement the DPS will build upon the baseline information gathered in the position papers and show how this has been progressed through the LDP process to formulate the DPS.
- 1.3 This technical supplement demonstrates how the evidence base gathered through Preferred Options Paper (POP) position paper 'Natural Environment' has been used to formulate the policies in the draft Plan Strategy (DPS), including the public consultation processes and engagement with elected members. It should be noted that this is based upon the best information available at the time of compiling this position paper. Amendments may be required as new data becomes available or as a result of any changes in policy or guidance.
- 1.4 The paper refers to 'Natural Environment', these can include habitats, species, landscapes and earth science features which are afforded protection at an international, national or local level. It is widely accepted that our unique natural environment can be used for cultural, educational and leisure purposes, supporting our tourism industry and enhancing the life of our citizens. Therefore, care must be taken to ensure that development is achieved in as sustainable way, which does not cause harm to designated areas.

2.0 REGIONAL PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

[Programme for Government 2024-2027](#)

- 2.1 On 5 September 2024, the Executive agreed the Programme for Government 2024-2027 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most.' The PfG sets out the Executive's priorities for making a difference to people's lives, comprising nine immediate priorities and three long-term missions of people, planet and prosperity, with a cross-cutting commitment to peace.

[Draft Programme for Government \(PfG\) 2016-2021](#)

- 2.2 The previous draft Programme for Government 2016-2021 was the most up to date expression of the highest level of policy from the Northern Ireland Executive during much of the preparation of the draft Plan Strategy. It set out 14 strategic outcomes, some of which had implications for settlement hierarchy, particularly, ‘We connect people and opportunities through our infrastructure.’

[Draft Programme for Government Outcomes 2021](#)

- 2.3 The Executive has consulted on a new Programme for Government (PfG) that aims to bring a new focus to deliver lasting, real and positive change in people’s lives. The new draft Framework contains nine strategic outcomes which, taken together, will set a clear direction of travel for the NI Executive and provide a vision for the future of all citizens.

[Regional Development Strategy \(RDS\) 2035](#)

- 2.4 The Regional Development Strategy (RDS) provides an overarching strategic planning framework to facilitate and guide the public and private sectors. It is not limited to land use but recognises that policies for physical development have far reaching implications. The RDS addresses economic, social and environmental issues aimed at achieving sustainable development and social cohesion. The Local Development Plan (LDP) must take account of the RDS.

- 2.5 The RDS provides the following Strategic Guidance with respect to the Environment:

- Reduce our carbon footprint and facilitate mitigation and adaptation to climate change whilst improving air quality;
- Manage our waste sustainably;
- Conserve, protect and, where possible, enhance our built heritage and our natural environment; and
- Promote a more sustainable approach to the provision of water and sewerage services and flood risk management.

- 2.6 The RDS outlines that the natural environment directly supports all life and is essential to well-being. Human impacts on landscapes over the last century, as the result of increased development, have adversely affected biodiversity. The RDS recognises that ongoing land use intensification from agriculture and urbanisation has resulted in a reduction in the total area of semi-natural habitats.

- 2.7 Regional Guidance set out in the RDS RG11 directs to, ‘Conserve, protect and, where possible, enhance our built heritage and our natural environment’. The following aims are outlined with respect to the natural environment:

- Sustain and enhance biodiversity;
- 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 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;
- Protect designated areas of countryside from inappropriate development (either directly or indirectly) and continue to assess areas for designation; and
- Consider the establishment of one or more National Parks.

[Everyone's Involved — NI Executive Sustainable Development Strategy \(2021\)](#)

- 2.7. The Northern Ireland (NI) Executive launched the Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS) 'Everyone's Involved', on 27 May 2010, reissued on 20 July 2021.
- 2.8. This document is the current regional strategic framework guiding sustainable development. It encourages integration of economic, social and environmental goals into policy across all Northern Ireland Government Departments and District Councils, primarily through the Programme for Government.
- 2.9. The Strategy has been designed to provide a framework that can support and inform the decisions and actions taken by individuals, groups and organisations in progressing the sustainability agenda.
- 2.10. The SDS contains six Priority Areas for Action:
- 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; and
 - Take action to reduce biodiversity loss.

[DAERA's Climate Change and Sustainable Development Strategy 2020–2030](#)

- 2.11. Launched in March 2025 , it contains 4 strategic priorities:
- Economic Growth- To enhance our food, forestry, fishery and farming

sectors using efficient and environmentally sustainable models which support economic growth;

- Natural Environment- To protect and enhance our natural environment now and for future generations whilst advocating its value to and wellbeing for all;
- Rural Communities- To champion thriving rural communities that contribute to prosperity and wellbeing; and
- Exemplar Organisation- To be an exemplar, people focused organisation, committed to making a difference for the people we serve.

[Environmental Improvement Plan \(EIP\) 2024](#)

2.12. The Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) was published 24 September 2024. The preparation and publication of an EIP is a statutory duty placed upon the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) by Schedule 2 of the Environment Act 2021 (the Act), which came into force in July 2022 following Assembly approval.

2.13. Northern Ireland's first Environmental Improvement Plan forms the basis for a coherent and effective set of interventions that can collectively deliver real improvements in the quality of the environment. The strategic objectives of the EIP are:

- Excellent air, water and land quality;
- A healthy and accessible environment and landscapes everyone can connect with and enjoy;
- Thriving, resilient and connected nature and wildlife;
- Sustainable production and consumption on land and at sea;
- Zero waste and a highly developed circular economy, and
- Net zero greenhouse gas emissions and improved climate resilience and adaptability.

3.0 STRATEGIC PLANNING POLICY STATEMENT

3.1 The Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) was published by the Department of the Environment (DoE) in September 2015. The provisions of the SPPS must be taken into account in the preparation of Local Development Plans (LDPs) and are also material to all decisions on individual planning applications and appeals.

3.2 Para 6.172 of the SPPS sets out the following regional policy objectives with respect to the natural environment:

- Protect, conserve, enhance and restore the abundance, quality, diversity and distinctiveness of the region’s natural heritage;
- Further sustainable development by ensuring that biological and geological diversity are 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 biodiversity 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.

3.3 Furthermore, the SPSS 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.

4.0 PLANNING POLICY STATEMENTS AND SUPPLEMENTARY GUIDANCE

[Planning Policy Statement 2: Natural Heritage \(PPS2\)](#)

4.1 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”. The policy objectives for Natural Heritage are:

- To seek to further the conservation, enhancement and restoration of the abundance, quality, diversity and distinctiveness of the region’s natural heritage;
- To further sustainable development by ensuring that biological and geological diversity are conserved and enhanced as an integral part of social, economic and environmental development;
- To assist in meeting international (including European), national and local responsibilities and obligations in the protection and enhancement of the natural heritage;
- To contribute to rural renewal and urban regeneration by ensuring developments take account of the role and value of biodiversity in supporting economic diversification and contributing to a high quality

- environment;
- To protect and enhance biodiversity, geodiversity and the environment; and
- To take actions to reduce our carbon footprint and facilitate adaptation to climate change.

5.0 EXTANT AREA PLANS

5.1 The existing area plans that apply to Ards and North Down Borough Council area are:

- North Down and Ards Area Plan 1984-1995 (NDAAP);
- Belfast Urban Area Plan (BUAP); and
- draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (dBMAP).

5.2 It should be noted that Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (BMAP) was adopted in September 2014 but was subsequently quashed as a result of a judgment in the Court of Appeal delivered on 18 May 2017.

5.3 As a consequence of this, the North Down and Ards Area Plan (NDAAP) 1984-1995, the Belfast Urban Area Plan (BUAP) and Bangor Town Centre Plan (BTCP) 1995 are now the statutory Development Plans for the North Down area with draft BMAP remaining a material consideration. These plans remain extant until replaced by the new Local Development Plan (LDP) for the Borough. The existing plans are an important consideration in the LDP process, as they provide a starting point for the review of our spatial planning options.

[Belfast Urban Area Plan \(BUAP\) 2001](#)

5.4 The BMA Public Services and Utilities Strategy comprises the following elements:

- To facilitate the delivery of the infrastructure requirements of the Plan Area throughout the Plan Period; and
- To highlight infrastructure constraints and requirements as appropriate within key site requirements.

[Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan \(dBMAP\) 2015](#)

5.5 The draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015 outlines the following with respect to the natural assets of North Down:

- The Plan recognises the natural environment of the Borough as a 'significant asset' especially at areas such as the Holywood Hills, Crawfordsburn Country Park, the Lough Shore coastal path and at the

- Boroughs beaches, including Ballyholme;
- The Plan further recognises the various landscapes within so as to protect them from undesirable development;
- There are a number of important areas of nature conservation within the 11 council areas. Part of the Belfast Lough shoreline lies within the northwest of the council area, and this is recognised internationally as a Ramsar Site, a Special Protection Area (SPA) and an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI);
- There are several other ASSIs within the council area, and Local Nature Reserves at Balloo Wetland and Balloo Woodland; and
- Craigantlet Escarpment is an Area of High Scenic Value (AoHSV).

[Ards and Down Area Plan \(ADAP\) 2015](#)

5.6 The Ards and North Down Area Plan (ADAP) 2015 outlines the following with respect to the natural assets of Ards:

- The plan recognises that the Ards Borough is especially rich in varied landscapes, wildlife habitats and heritage features, which together make a positive contribution to its special character and identity;
- The district is dominated by the important environmental resource of Strangford Lough, an enclosed tranquil stretch of marine water with an indented coastline of islands and half drowned drumlins and a smoother coastline to the east, both backed by wooded estates; and
- Strangford Lough is of outstanding value as a marine habitat and the conservation of its natural environment is secured by a variety of statutory designations made under European directives and regional legislation.

6.0 ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL PLANS AND STRATEGIES

[Corporate Plan 2024-2028 A Sustainable Borough](#)

- 6.1 The priorities of the Corporate Plan are closely aligned to those within the Big Plan, the Community Plan for Ards and North Down, which sets out a long-term vision for Council, local organisations and communities to work towards. The delivery of the Corporate Plan seeks to achieve better outcomes for all the people of our Borough, towards the longer-term vision outlined in the Big Plan.
- 6.2 The core of the Corporate Plan is the vision of a sustainable Borough where environmental, social, and economic wellbeing are interdependent. The three priorities of the plan are increased economic growth, attracting more businesses and jobs, reduced carbon emissions as we transition to net zero and improved wellbeing through social inclusion and reduced inequality.

[The Big Plan for Ards and North Down 2017-2032 \(The Community Plan\)](#)

- 6.3 The Big Plan provides an overarching framework setting out a shared vision and ambition that Ards and North Down's Strategic Community Planning Partnership has agreed to work towards over the next 15 years.
- 6.4 The vision outlined in the plan states the ambition of the Big Plan is 'To have empowered resilient individuals and communities; to reduce inequality; to promote good relations and sustainability; and to improve the accessibility of all public services.'
- 6.5 The Big Plan contains five outcomes; these are ambitious statements that the Council aspire to accurately reflect the situation of the people who live in Ards and North Down by the year 2032. The conservation and protection of our natural environment assets supports the Community Plan (The Big Plan for Ards and North Down 2017- 2032) aspirations of, 'A prosperous and inclusive economy' (Outcome 4) and 'An environment that is valued, well-managed and accessible' (Outcome 5).
- 6.6 The Local Government Act 2014 through an amendment to Section 8 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 introduced a statutory requirement that the preparation of the LDP must take account of the Community Plan. The Big Plan will work in tandem with the LDP providing the spatial framework to achieve the shared vision for the Borough.

[The Integrated Strategy for Tourism, Regeneration and Economic Development 2018-2030](#)

- 6.7 The Integrated Strategy presents a vision for the pursuit of prosperity in the Borough of Ards and North Down. The vision of the strategy is translated into tangible actions, one of which is to 'nurture our assets.' This includes working to reduce the negative impact of our actions on the environment which has local, as well as global implications. The Strategy proposes, 'An ambitious program to reduce carbon emissions at the local level, contributing to wider regional and national efforts. This will involve the identification and implementation of measures that can demonstrably lower emissions within the Borough.' Target areas are likely to include switching to renewable energy sources where possible.

[Tree and Woodland Strategy 2021-2032](#)

- 6.8 In 2021 the Council agreed a Tree & Woodland Strategy that recognises the importance of trees, the many benefits they afford and the critical role they can play in mitigating the effects of climate change. This strategy is required to ensure the Council's limited budget is focused on positive planting programmes and managing tree care and risks.

- 6.9 The following are the key aims of the strategy that will guide the Council's management of trees:
- Community Engagement: to actively engage and collaborate with the community and others in valuing trees as a vital community asset;
 - Tree Planting: to increase the native tree canopy within the Borough by planting more trees to ensure a healthy balanced tree population that positively responds to the impacts of climate change and urban expansion; and
 - Managing Trees: to ensure good tree care, through sustainable management of the tree population and reducing risk.
- 6.10 The Strategy includes an initiative to ensure improved tree cover within the Borough. The STAND4TREES initiative will run until 2032 and since the start of the initiative in March 2021, 30,000 trees have been planted along with eight new community orchards. The Strategy has a target of planting 160,000 trees by 2032.

7.0 OTHER RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

[Draft Strangford Lough Marine Protected Area Management Scheme](#)

- 7.1 This draft document was produced in March 2017 by the Strangford and Lecale Marine Partnership with an aim to help statutory bodies meet their obligations and responsibilities with regard to the marine and coastal environment of the Lough. It sets a framework through which activities can be managed, so as to protect the environment while allowing it to be used sustainably. Twelve management goals are listed, and these include eradication and control of damaging and invasive species, developing sustainable aquaculture, ensuring outdoor recreation and tourism are managed and developed sustainably, and to improve water quality.

[The Northern Ireland Biodiversity Checklist](#)

- 7.2 The Biodiversity Checklist was produced by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) to act as a step-by-step tool to identify potential biodiversity impacts development proposals may have, and what ecological assessments or surveys would reasonably be required to be submitted with planning applications. The checklist contains questions relating to designated sites, priority habitats and protected species and should enable early consideration of biodiversity impacts and implementation of appropriate mitigation measures.

[Survey Work to inform the LDP.](#)

- 7.3 A review of the Landscape Character of Ards and North Down was commissioned by the Council as part of the Local Development Plan (LDP)

process to update the 2000 Assessment. It was undertaken by Ironside Farrar. It was completed in November 2022 (Document Reference 9A).

8.0 BOROUGH PROFILE

- 8.1 The Ards and North Down Borough contains a rich diversity of environmental assets, each providing unique habitats for an abundance of flora and fauna. These sites are protected using various landscape designations to ensure that the natural environment retains its special characteristics and unique biodiversity.
- 8.2 The highlights include Strangford Lough (one of Europe's most important natural environment features), the Copeland Islands, the North Down Coastal Path and Crawfordsburn Country Park. These, along with a host of other wild places, provide many opportunities to explore and enjoy the richness of our natural environment.
- 8.3 Our unique natural environment can be used for cultural, educational and leisure purposes, supporting our tourism industry and economy, and enhancing the life of our citizens. Care must be taken to ensure that development is achieved in a sustainable way which does not cause harm to designated areas.
- 8.4 A number of the environmental designations in the Borough straddle Council boundaries:
 - Strangford Lough - Ramsar, Special Protection Area and Special Area of Conservation (partly within Newry, Mourne and Down);
 - Belfast Lough - Ramsar, Special Protection Area and Special Area of Conservation (partly within Belfast City); and
 - Heron and Carrigullion Loughs, and Aughnadarragh Lough (partly within Newry Mourne and Down).
- 8.5 Similarly, some sites designated by the existing Development Plans take in lands that include areas outside Ards and North Down Borough, including Craigantlet Area of High Scenic Value (which falls partly in Lisburn and Castlereagh and Belfast City Council areas) and Comber and Newtownards Rural Landscape Wedges.
- 8.6 International and National environmental designations are reflected spatially on the maps contained within the Draft Plan Strategy. All current environmental designations except local are available on the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) website.

9.0 BIODIVERSITY

9.1 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 and 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 as a result a UK Biodiversity Action Plan was published in 1994.

9.2 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.

Biodiversity Net Gain

9.3 Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is an approach to development, and/or land management, which aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was beforehand, through habitat creation or enhancement, after avoiding or mitigating harm.

Natural Capital

9.4 Natural capital is the world's stock of natural resources, which includes geology, soils, air, water and all living organisms. Some natural capital assets provide people with free goods and services, often called ecosystem services. All of these underpin our economy and society and thus make human life possible. It is expected that biodiversity gain will result in the creation and the avoidance of loss of several thousands of hectares of habitat for wildlife each year, which represents annual natural capital benefits of around £1.4 billion.

Nature Positive 2030

9.5 In response to the crisis of biodiversity loss, many Heads of State around the world have recently made hugely significant commitments for nature, notably through the Leaders' Pledge for Nature launched at the United Nations General Assembly in 2020, and the 30by30 commitment to protect 30% of our land and seas for nature by 2030. These commitments are far reaching, requiring transformational change across sectors in the way we protect, value, use and engage with nature.

9.6 The UK has committed to become Nature Positive by 2030 which means reversing the current declines in biodiversity, so that species and ecosystems begin to recover. This is an essential first step on the path to full nature

recovery. If species populations are to begin recovering by 2030, wildlife habitats need to be restored and created now. Nature recovery is within our grasp, we know what to do and how to do it.

- 9.7 In combination with more sustainable management across Northern Ireland, 30by30 could create the foundation for recovery of habitats and species, provide the backbone of a country wide Nature Recovery Network, and foster a nature-positive economy for everyone.

Nature Based Solutions

- 9.8 'Nature Based Solutions' look to protect or enhance nature in a way that helps tackle climate change and other challenges, while benefitting biodiversity and improving human wellbeing. A wide variety of nature-based solutions, such as tree planting, peatland restoration and coastal salt marshes, have the potential to help.

Green/Blue Infrastructure

- 9.9 Green/Blue Infrastructure allows the essential benefits of nature to be provided to people. These essential benefits are known as ecosystems services and include the provision of food, clean air and water, regulating the effects of climate change, and cultural benefits such as providing opportunities for recreation and exercise.

Nature Recovery Networks

- 9.10 The previous Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) for Ards and North Down Borough Council (ANDBC) (2013-2017) was the first ever biodiversity plan for the Borough. It involved a comprehensive desk-based biodiversity audit of the local area and extensive stakeholder consultations which allowed the steering group to develop specific local habitat and species action plans.
- 9.11 The Council launched its new LBAP in December 2023.¹ This revised plan, covering the period 2022-2032 will reflect changes in the national and international approach to conservation by moving towards a Nature Recovery Approach of protecting and enhancing our local biodiversity. The plan will cover the period 2022-2032 and sets out what can be done locally to help protect, restore, and enhance our habitats and species over the next 10 years.
- 9.12 The LBAP aims to conserve biodiversity through local partnerships, considering both national and local priorities by involving local people and local community and conservation organisations through the practical delivery of biodiversity conservation. The LBAP identified Habitat Actions and Species Actions. The broad types of habitats identified across the Borough include:

¹ [aandbc - Local Bio-Diversity Action Plan - page Cover \(dashdigital.com\)](https://dashdigital.com/aandbc-local-bio-diversity-action-plan-page-cover)

- Coastal, island and marine habitats;
- Farmland Habitats (grassland, arable land, and hedgerow);
- Woodland and Parkland habitats;
- Peatland Habitats (bog and Heath);
- Wetland habitats (fens, reedbeds, lakes and rivers); and
- Urban habitats, industrial land, cemeteries, parks, and gardens.

9.13 Species selected for action within the LBAP include:

- Lower plants (bryophytes and lichens);
- Trees;
- Invasive flora and fauna;
- Pollinators bees, butterflies, wasps, flies, and beetles;
- Smooth newt;
- Common Lizard;
- Farmland birds;
- Swift;
- Sand Martin;
- Dipper;
- Barn owl;
- Kingfisher;
- Red Squirrel;
- Pine Martin;
- Bats;
- Irish Hare;
- European Hedgehog;
- Common Seal;
- Harbour Porpoise;
- Breeding seabirds; and
- Brent Geese and other wintering and breeding waders and wildfowl.

[The Wildlife and Natural Environment \(NI\) Act 2011](#)

- 9.14 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.

[Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy to 2020](#)

- 9.15 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 (PfG) and the Regional

Development Strategy (RDS). The Biodiversity Strategy for Northern Ireland builds upon the first Biodiversity Strategy published in 2002 with a 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.

- 9.16 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.
- 9.17 The Strategy makes it clear that biodiversity protection is fundamental to society and the economy. 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 \(2011\)](#)

- 9.18 The Northern Ireland National Ecosystem Assessment (NI NEA) is a major study sponsored by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). It 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.
- 9.19 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. Key recommendations from the assessment include:
- The Northern Ireland National Ecosystem Assessment (NI 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, and 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 Character

- 9.20 Northern Ireland's landscape has been appraised through the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment (NILCA). Landscape was assessed at a regional scale in The Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment (NIRLCA) which provides a strategic overview of the landscape in Northern Ireland and subdivides the countryside into 26 Regional Landscape Character Areas based upon information on people and place and the combinations of nature, culture and perception which make each part of Northern Ireland unique. The map viewer for these assessments is located on the website².
- 9.21 In 2000 the countryside was divided into 130 Landscape Character Areas (LCAs), each based upon local patterns of geology, landform, land use, cultural and ecological features. For each LCA, the key characteristics were described and an analysis of landscape condition and its sensitivity to change was made. All of the LCAs can be viewed on the DAERA website.

² [Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment \(arcgis.com\)](http://arcgis.com)

10 ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGNATIONS

Internationally, Nationally and Locally Designated Sites

10.1 Designated sites are wildlife-rich sites that have been selected for their nature conservation value. They vary in shape and size and can have important, distinctive and threatened habitats and species. Designating sites helps to ensure that the species present are properly protected. Sites that are designated tend to be the best examples of natural and semi-natural ecosystems and are managed to conserve their unique features. Habitats are designated as important when a specific area of land has an important ecosystem which helps to support a particular species, or a group of species.

10.2 There are over 60 designated sites of regional, national and international importance in the Ards and North Down area.

Ramsar Sites

10.3 Ramsar sites are wetlands of international importance, listed under the Ramsar convention, where signatories are required to conserve such areas through the highest form of protection. A wetland is defined as 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. There are three Ramsar sites designated within the Borough:

- Belfast Lough Ramsar;
- Outer Ards Ramsar; and
- Strangford Lough Ramsar.

Special Protection Areas (SPAs)

10.4 In 1979 UN Member States including the United Kingdom, adopted The Birds Directive which aimed to protect all European bird species. These sites deemed important for breeding, over wintering and migrating birds are designated as Special Protection Areas (SPAs). There are four Special Protection Area sites designated within AND:

- Strangford Lough;
- Outer Ards;
- Copeland Islands; and
- Belfast Lough.

Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)

10.5 In 1992 the European Union also adopted a directive on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild flora and fauna, often called The Habitats Directive. This required all member states, including the UK, to designate a

series of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) to protect some of the rarest or seriously threatened habitats and species in a European context. There are currently only two SACs within the Borough. Sites designated under both directives for their conservation interest were formerly known as 'Natura 2000' sites. In 1995 the EU Habitats Directive was transposed into Northern Ireland legislation as the Conservation (Natural Habitats etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended). National Sites is now appropriate.

10.6 Despite the UK exiting the EU, the level of protection to our habitats and species in the wider countryside and in our protected areas will remain unchanged. The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) (Amendment) (NI) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 limits changes, only to those needed, to ensure our legislation continues to operate effectively from 1 January 2021. Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) will become part of the UK national site network. There is no practical difference to these designated sites, and the requirements of those that manage them or make decisions related to them, remains the same. They will continue to be referred to as European sites. The 2019 Regulations have created a national site network on land and at sea, including both the inshore and offshore marine areas in the UK.

10.7 There are three Special Area of Conservation (SAC) sites designated within Ards and North Down:

- Strangford Lough SAC;
- Aughnadarragh Lough SAC (Share boundary with Newry, Mourne and Down); and
- North Channel offshore at Ards Peninsula.

[Marine Conservation Zones](#)

10.8 There are two Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ);

- Outer Belfast Lough; and
- Strangford Lough.

10.9 The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) is gathering evidence to support Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) proposals that will complete the Marine Protected Area (MPA) network. Within the Borough the following area remains an Area of Search (AoS):

- Outer Ards (linked to the Strangford Lough biogenic reef restoration plan).

[National Nature Reserves/Nature Reserves](#)

10.10 These are designated under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (NI) Order 1985 and are managed by the Department of Agriculture, Environment

and Rural Affairs (DAERA) or by agreement with another Department, a District Council, or a voluntary conservation body. Nature reserves are chosen from among the very best examples of our wildlife, habitats and geology. They contain a wide range of species, communities and geology and their designation is a public recognition by Government of their importance. These sites are reserved and managed for conservation as well as providing special opportunities for study and/or research.

10.11 There are four Nature Reserves designated within Ards and North Down:

- North Strangford Lough;
- Dorn;
- Granagh Bay; and
- Ballyquintin Point.

[Areas of Special Scientific Interest \(ASSIs\)](#)

10.12 ASSIs are sites of special interest by reason of their flora, fauna, geological and/or physiographical features and are designated under the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 (as amended). ASSIs are areas of land that have been identified through a scientific survey as being of the highest degree of conservation value, based on their flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features. They have a well-defined boundary and by and large remain in private ownership. There are nine ASSIs within the Borough, either in whole or part.

10.13 There are sixteen Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) sites designated within Ards and North Down:

- Outer Belfast Lough;
- Strangford Lough Part 1;
- Inner Belfast Lough;
- Strangford Lough Part 2;
- Scrabo;
- Strangford Lough Part 3;
- Ballymacormick Point;
- Lough Cowey;
- Whitespots;
- Blaeberry Island Bog;
- Tieveshilly;
- Copeland Islands;
- Ballyquintin Point;

- Heron and Carrigullian Loughs^{*3};
- Outer Ards; and
- Aughnadarragh Lough^{*3}.

11 LANDSCAPE DESIGNATIONS

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

- 11.1 There is one Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) designated within Ards and North Down, Strangford and Lecale (shared with Newry Mourne and Down).
- 11.2 Strangford Lough AONB and Lecale Coast AONB had been designated since the late 1960s. Designation of Strangford and Lecale AONB in 2010 followed consideration of their boundaries and the designation of one AONB. Strangford and Lecale is a coastal AONB which covers a varied landscape including drowned drumlins, mudflats, rocky bays, sweeping sandy strands and soft low cliffs. At the northern end, Scrabo Hill, capped by its tower, forms a prominent landmark.

Area of High Scenic Value

- 11.3. The Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment 2000 (NILCA) identified Areas of High Scenic Quality and defined them as landscapes of regional or local importance for their scenic quality, i.e., important landscape resources in their own right, regardless of location or setting. They are characterised by visually pleasing patterns or combinations of landscape elements and by their generally unspoilt character, free from major intrusion.
- 11.4. In addition, they may include significant sites or features of nature conservation, historical or cultural importance. Often, they are visually prominent landscapes such as ridge tops, scarp slopes above settlements, and lough shores, and therefore many of these areas are particularly sensitive to change. The Areas of Scenic Quality identified in the NILCA are considered to be of Regional significance and represent a second tier (below AONBs) in the hierarchy of landscape classifications.
- 11.5. The Planning Service commissioned the Landscape Architects Branch to undertake an assessment of the physical boundaries of these areas and a description of their landscape content and quality to be identified in the Plan as Areas of High Scenic Value.

³ *Boundary shared with neighbouring council

11.6. Craigantlet Escarpment Area of Scenic Quality (which lies within Belfast, Castlereagh and North Down Council Areas) was identified within dBMAP 2015. Craigantlet Escarpment is the undulating upland in the centre of a ring of settlements, which includes Belfast, Holywood and Dundonald, Bangor and Newtownards. dBMAP states that the, 'Proximity to these settlements makes these hills an important recreational resource and its easy accessibility, rural identity and exposed wild character are important characteristics. The well-wooded nature gives an intimacy and sense of enclosure, and the numerous reservoirs add extra visual and recreational elements to the landscape. The hills retain a relatively undeveloped character; this is in part a result of the undulating landform but also the tree and hedgerow cover which has helped to integrate dwellings into the landscape. The area is managed well with a range of land uses, but predominantly mixed farming and the presence of managed recreational estates ensures its relatively good condition. The landscape has good woodland and hedgerow networks as well as a diverse range of vegetation cover from sheltered to exposed slopes. The only negative impact comes from pressure to site more dwellings, due to good transport links to urban areas, and from the locating of telecommunication masts.'

Rural Landscape Wedges

11.7. Rural Landscape Wedges are buffer landscapes and open areas which distinguish and maintain the separate identities of the component rural areas, they prevent these component areas from merging, define and protect the setting of settlements and maintain the rural character of the countryside. It is therefore essential that they are protected from increasing development pressures and protected as landscape assets to maintain the integrity of the wedge. Analysis is undertaken to inform Local Development Plans using planning application data. Further analysis will be undertaken at Local Policies Plan Stage and will be utilised in the consideration of any boundary amendments to Landscape Wedges .

11.8. The following areas are recognised as having the necessary characteristics to justify their designation as Rural Landscape Wedges within extant plans:

- An area between Helen's Bay and Bangor;
- An area between East Belfast and Holywood;
- An area between Groomsport and Bangor;
- An area between Seahill and Cultra; and
- An area between Bangor and the Plan Area boundary, towards Newtownards.

Landscape Character

11.10 There are several character assessments relating to the Landscapes and Seascapes of Northern Ireland, which are as follows:

- The Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment (NILCA) 2000;
- The Northern Ireland Regional Seascape Character Assessment (NIRSCA) 2014; and
- The Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment (NIRLCA) 2016.

Regional Landscape Character Areas

11.11 The Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment (NIRLCA) 2016 identifies three Regional Landscape Areas within the Borough, as follows:

- Belfast Lough and Islandmagee (No. 20);
- Down Drumlins and Holywood Hills (No. 22); and
- Strangford, Ards and Lecale (No.26).

Regional Seascape Character Areas

11.12 A total of 24 different regional seascape character areas have been identified round the coast of Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Regional Seascape Character Assessment (NIRSCA) 2014 identifies three Regional Landscape Areas within the Borough, as follows:

- No 13 Belfast Lough;
- No. 15 Ards Peninsula; and
- No. 16 Strangford Lough (which is also partly in Newry Mourne and Down District Council area).

Local Landscape Character Areas

11.13 The Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment (NILCA) 2000 identifies a number of Landscape Character Areas in the Borough and some which are pertinent to setting:

- No. 93 Portaferry and North Lecale;
- No. 94 Strangford Drumlins and Islands;
- No.95 Ballygowan Drumlins;
- No. 99 Outer Ards Coast;
- No. 100 Ards Farmlands and Estates;
- No. 101 Scrabo;
- No. 102 Holywood Hills;
- No. 103 Bangor Coastline; and
- No. 104 Craigantlet Escarpment.

11.14 The administrative boundary of the Council area is such that the adjoining LCA

No. 92 Ballyquintin and Lecale Coast is also of relevance.

Landscape Character Area Review

- 11.16 The Council identified a need for a comprehensive review of existing local Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) within the Ards and North Down Borough Council area, and included a survey of all existing local Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) pertaining to the Ards and North Down Borough Council area. This includes LCAs that are wholly within the Borough as well as those traversing the boundaries of our neighbouring councils.
- 11.17 The LCA Review for the LDP updates the NILCA and Regional LCA and was undertaken by Ironside Farrar and is published alongside the LDP DPS (DPS Reference 9A).
- 11.18 The LCA Review updated guidance for each identified LCA, identifying key characteristics, landscape description, landscape condition and sensitivity to change; identifying medium to low, medium to high and highly vulnerable. The LCA Review also included Principles of Landscape Management and Principles for Accommodating New Development. A review of the names of existing LCAs, with particular reference to their geographic location and landscape character type with suggested amalgamation/sub-division, were deemed appropriate.
- 11.19 The LCA Review retained that Landscape Character Areas defined previously with the subdivision of the Outer Ards Character Area into two to reflect the difference in character between the northern, predominantly urban area and rural peninsula.

Local Nature Reserves

- 11.20 Local Nature Reserves can be provided by councils for nature conservation under powers conferred to them under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985. They are particularly appropriate for educational, recreational or public information services. Local nature reserves in the council area include Balloo Wetland Nature Reserve and Balloo Woodland Nature Reserve.

Woodland

- 11.21 Trees are a very important and vital resource of landscape throughout urban and rural Northern Ireland. They provide us with oxygen, improve air quality, stabilise soil, give life to a variety of wildlife, support flora and fauna and ultimately contribute to the health and well-being of us all. They provide both aesthetic and amenity values which contribute to the character of a place, provide screening and privacy, add colour and seasonal interest and provide

attractive green vistas. Trees can also act as important landmark features creating a sense of place and contributing to the character of both urban settlements and rural areas.

- 11.22 Approximately 352 Ha of woodland in Ards and North Down is managed by the Forest Service, leaving approximately 2177 Ha of woodland not managed by the Forest Service. The total woodland recorded in the Borough is 2529 Ha (DAERA 2021).

Ancient and Long-Established Woods

- 11.23 Small areas of Ancient and/or Long-Established Woodland are dispersed throughout the Borough. Many of these areas can be viewed via the Woodland Trust's Interactive Map accessible on the Woodland Trust's [website](#).

Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)

- 11.24 Trees can be protected through Tree Preservation Orders (TPO) 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. A TPO provides protection for trees considered to be of special value in terms of amenity, history or rarity. It 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 local planning authorities consent to do so.
- 11.25 There are a large number of TPOs throughout the Ards and North Down. An online map of current TPOs within the Borough can be accessed on the Council website via the Tree Protection and Conservation Area designation web viewer.
- 11.26 Ards and North Down Borough Council's website also contains a tree map which aims to catalogue and display the diverse array of trees within the Borough Woodlands, Parks, and Urban areas, promoting awareness of the region's rich biodiversity. The tree map serves as an interactive tool, allowing residents to explore and learn about individual tree species.

Draft Northern Ireland Peatland Strategy 2021-2041

- 11.27 Between 9 June and 1 September 2021, DAERA launched a consultation document for public consultation. The Strategy identifies the ecosystem services provided by healthy peatlands, including climate regulation and adaptation, specialised biodiversity, good water quality, flood alleviation and a historical archive. Peatlands also provide a unique landscape for recreation and education. The Strategy stresses the importance of Peatlands value as an ecosystem.

- 11.28 Peatlands make a significant contribution to current emissions and as a potential carbon sink and important habitat are part of the solution to NI meeting its New Decade New Approach and UK Net Zero commitments and Programme for Government Outcomes. As such it will be a key component of Green Growth, and a Peatland Strategy should aim to align closely with its aims. However, most of our peatlands have been damaged to some degree, are in poor condition and will require more sustainable management and restoration. In Northern Ireland, semi-natural peatland can be divided into three broad habitat types: lowland raised bogs, blanket bogs and fens.
- 11.29 The best areas of semi-natural peatland habitats in Northern Ireland are designated and protected under National, European and International nature conservation legislation to afford them the greatest protection. However, site designation only covers around 10% of semi-natural peatland habitat in Northern Ireland.
- 11.30 The vision of this Strategy is to ensure that all semi-natural peatlands are protected, managed and where possible, prioritised for restoration, so that they can maintain their natural functions, biodiversity and ecosystem services.
- 11.31 The overarching aim of this Strategy will be to ensure that, where possible, all semi-natural peatlands in Northern Ireland are conserved or restored to healthy, functioning ecosystems by 2040 and that the ecosystem services that they provide are acknowledged and appreciated.
- 11.32 The Strategy contains the following targets:
- By 2040, all peatlands supporting semi-natural vegetation are being managed for their peatland biodiversity and ecosystem function;
 - By 2030, degraded peatland habitats are prioritised for restoration to favourable conservation status. By 2040, all high priority degraded peatlands will be under restoration management;
 - By 2040 – High Priority degraded peatlands in Northern Ireland are under sustainable management;
 - By 2025, stakeholders understand the need for peatland conservation and restoration and have the capacity to deliver the Strategic Objectives and Actions contained within the Northern Ireland Peatland Strategy;
 - Peatlands are recognised for their unique biodiversity and ecosystem services provision; and
 - The necessary structures are in place to deliver on the Strategic Objectives and Actions contained within the Northern Ireland Peatland Strategy.

[A Green Growth Strategy for Northern Ireland - Balancing Our Climate, Environment and Economy](#)

- 11.33 The Green Growth Strategy is the Northern Ireland Executive's multi-decade strategy, balancing climate, environment and the economy in Northern Ireland.

11.34 It sets out the long-term vision for tackling the climate crisis in the right way. The Green Growth Strategy sets out an ambitious vision and a framework for delivery with which, all other NI Government policies and strategies must align. It provides us with a vitally important opportunity to embed wider climate change, a green economy and environmental considerations into decision making. This will ensure that new policies and programmes align with the need to address climate change, develop green jobs and address biodiversity commitments, thereby delivering on the stated commitment, ‘To ensure climate action and environment responsibility is at the heart of all government policy making.’

12.0 CROSS BOUNDARY POLICY CONTEXT

12.1 In developing our natural environment policies, account has been taken of the local policy context as it relates to the emerging LDP’s of our three neighbouring Councils as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 - Neighbouring Councils’ position in relation to Natural Environment

Neighbouring Council	Position
<p>Newry, Mourne and Down District Council (NMDDC)</p>	<p>NMDBC launched their draft Plan Strategy on the 27 June 2025.</p> <p>The Council’s preferred approach is to adopt policies which are in line with existing planning policy with the addition of an additional Policy NH6 Protection of Main River Corridors and Open Water Bodies.</p> <p>During previous discussions, the LDP team advised that the designation of SLNCIs would not be retained within the DPS. The Council has however opted to retain the existing SLNCIs and have added Policy NH7 Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance (SLNCIs). Additional policy for Landscape Assets is contained within Policy LA1 Special Countryside Areas, Policy LA2 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Policy LA3 Local Landscape Policy Areas, and Policy LA4 Areas of High Scenic Value.</p>
<p>Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council (LCCC)</p>	<p>Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council adopted its Local Development Plan 2032 Plan Strategy on 26 September 2023.</p> <p>Strategic Policy 19 Protecting and Enhancing Natural</p>

	<p>Heritage: The Plan will support development proposals that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Protect, conserve and, where possible, enhance and restore our natural heritage; b) Maintain and where possible enhance landscape quality and the distinctiveness and attractiveness of the area; c) Promote the highest quality of design for any new development affecting our natural heritage assets; and d) Safeguard the Lagan Valley Regional Park allowing appropriate opportunities for enhanced access at identified locations thereby protecting their integrity and value.
<p>Belfast City Council (BCC)</p>	<p>BCC Plan Strategy (PS) was adopted on 2 May 2023.</p> <p>Policy NH1 states that: ‘The council will adopt the precautionary principle when considering the impacts of a proposed development on local, national or international natural heritage resources, including designated sites, protected species and the other important interests of biodiversity and geodiversity...’.</p> <p>TRE1 Trees: ‘The Council will seek to protect existing trees from new development, particularly those that are of visual, biodiversity or amenity quality and significance, and there will be a presumption in favour of retaining and safeguarding trees that make a valuable contribution to the environment and amenity. The council will adopt the precautionary principle when considering the impacts of a proposed development on trees of visual, biodiversity or amenity quality and significance...’.</p> <p>LC1 Landscape requires that, ‘New development should seek to protect and, where appropriate, restore or improve the quality and amenity of the landscape. The Council will adopt the precautionary approach in assessing development proposals in any designated landscape...’.</p> <p>This policy includes: LC1a – AONB, LC1b AHSV, LC1c LLPAs, LC1d Landscape Wedges</p> <p>Policy LC2 – Lagan Valley Regional Park (LVRP) Policy LC3 – Belfast Hills.</p>

- 12.2 The Council has engaged with each neighbouring Council's POP consultation as well as the DPS consultations of Belfast City Council and Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council.
- 12.3 Professional officers from the LDP team also took part in a number of cross council forums including the Metropolitan Spatial Working Group and the Development Plan Working Group.
- 12.4 Most recently, online engagement on the Council's draft Plan Strategy was held with the three neighbouring councils in March 2025. This included discussion around the proposed growth strategy, strategic housing and employment land allocation, settlement hierarchy, strategic approach to climate change and mitigation, alongside operational policies. This included the identification of specific cross-boundary issues.

13.0 PREFERRED OPTIONS PAPER

- 13.1 The Council's Preferred Options Paper, (POP) published in 2019 was the first formal stage in the preparation of the LDP for the Borough. It was designed to promote debate in relation to key strategic planning issues arising in the area. The POP identified forty-two key planning issues and examined options for addressing these issues. In each case, a preferred option was highlighted and the rationale for selection of this option was given.
- 13.2 The POP includes a review of the existing operational planning policies, largely contained within the suite of Planning Policy Statements. This review stimulated public debate on whether the existing policies are still suitable or whether a different approach would be more appropriate to meet local circumstances.
- 13.3 Following a minor revision to the online version of the POP, the 12-week consultation period was relaunched and therefore the total consultation period from the official launch was 19 weeks.

POP Representations

- 13.4 **Key Issue 23:** Protecting international and national nature conservation interests (designated outside of the LDP process).
- 13.5 The only suggested option is **Option 23:** Adopt an approach in line with existing regional policy with regards to protecting and enhancing international and national conservation sites that are not LDP designations.
- 13.6 The regional direction set out in the SPPS is clear with respect to international

and national designations in that they should be afforded the highest level of statutory protection from inappropriate development proposals. Only those developments that are proven to not have a significant effect upon the natural heritage asset(s) in question will be permitted. The option is the only way forward in terms of acknowledging the essential role that the natural environment has in maintaining and enhancing biodiversity. No alternatives are being put forward for this issue as they are outside the LDP process.

- 13.7 Of those who responded to the relevant questions on the POP questionnaire, 58.33% felt that this an appropriate response to dealing with elements of natural heritage.
- 13.8 **Key Issue 24:** Protecting and enhancing local nature conservation sites and scenic landscapes.
- 13.9 **Option 24a:** Review local nature conservation sites and scenic landscapes and formulate appropriate accompanying policy for their protection and enhancement.
- 13.10 This preferred option allows for the review of existing LDP designations and also for new designations as appropriate. The existing designations could then be updated and amended as necessary. This option would also address any inconsistencies in approach across the existing Development Plans in terms of the level of protection afforded to these areas.
- 13.11 Of those who responded to the relevant questions on the POP questionnaire, 59.46% felt that this an appropriate response to dealing with elements of natural heritage.
- 13.12 **Key Issue 25:** Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB'S). **Option 25a:** Bring forward bespoke policies to guide future development and protection of Strangford and Lecale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- 13.13 The preferred option would permit the Council to recognise the unique characteristics of the AONB that falls within our district and tailor bespoke policies to address the unique challenges it faces. It also provides the opportunity for cross-council co-operation as part of the AONB falls within Newry, Mourne and Down District Council area.
- 13.14 Of those who responded to the relevant questions on the POP questionnaire, 73.91% felt that this an appropriate response to dealing with elements of

natural heritage.

- 13.15 For further details on the POP consultation, please see the Preferred Options Consultation Report,

14 CONSULTEE AND COUNCILLOR ENGAGEMENT

- 14.1 In order to meet the requirements of Planning Act relating to the need for the Plan Strategy to take account of the RDS, other policy and guidance issued by the Department and other relevant government strategies and plans; Council has engaged key consultees representing relevant central government departments and agencies.

Consultee responses

- 14.2 The DFI Planning response to the POP was largely positive, with the following key points raised:
- Key Issue 25: The Department welcomes the preferred option 25a to tailor policy to recognise the unique characteristics of the AONB. It may be helpful to identify parts of the AONB which are known to be sensitive to certain types of development and bespoke policies could then be developed from this information.
- 14.3 Other comments of note from statutory consultees are referenced below:
- Forest Service – There are several Forest Service forests in the ANDBC area but only one forest (Mount Steward) in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). As this is a low-lying forest the likelihood of negative visual impacts due to forestry activities will be low. However, more elevated areas within the AONB would be more sensitive to development as their impact may be more visible;
 - Belfast City Council – The approach, which is in line with the Strategic Planning Policy (SPPS) and seeks to ensure the protection of cross boundary nature conservation and landscape assets, such as the Craigtanlet Escarpment Landscape Character Area (LCA), landscape wedges and other local designations is supported. This matter should be considered in liaison with adjoining authorities to inform the detailed designation stages;
 - Natural Environment Division – Protecting and enhancing local nature conservation sites and scenic landscapes. The Council's proposed approach in Key Issue 24 concerning local nature conservation and scenic

landscapes refers only to 'planning designations'; Site of Local Nature Conservation Importance (SLNCIs), Local Landscape Policy Area (LLPA), Areas of High Scenic Value (AoHSV) and Landscape Wedges. The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) supports the approach in principle, subject to sufficient policy being put in place to protect the sites.

Council Engagement

- 14.4 Representatives from relevant Council departments have also been engaged to ensure that due account has been taken of the Council's Community Plan, as well as other Council strategies and initiatives. Officers from the Local Development Plan (LDP) team have taken part in a series of Community Plan Thematic Group meetings and engagement events. Furthermore, members of the Community Plan team have also attended LDP workshops and sustainability appraisal meetings.
- 14.5 The Planning Act requires the Plan Strategy (PS) to be adopted by resolution of the Council, following approval by the Department for Infrastructure (DFI). Accordingly, Elected Members have also been engaged in the development of draft Plan Strategy (DPS), to ensure that the document is generally aligned with Council's strategic priorities. This engagement was facilitated through two separate workshops. The first workshop on the 21 November 2017 introduced natural heritage and the links to the planning system and the LDP. The second event was centred around policy development and took place on the 16 September 2019. Associated topic papers were produced for members to consider in respect of all of these events.
- 14.6 Members were largely positive regarding the suggested policy wording for the Natural Environment. There was considerable appreciation expressed about the importance of the natural environment, notable number of sites recognised at both International and National level and the Strangford and Lecale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The policy approach within the retained Planning Policy Statement 2 (PPS2): Natural Heritage was considered to be working well and didn't require considerable change.
- 14.7 It was discussed that the policy should be in more clear and precise language with clarity on wording, e.g. reasonable, significant, importance, natural beauty, historic, proportionate). Costs, reasons for decisions and thresholds were all discussed with the Members. Members did welcome an addition to NH5 - Habitats, Species or Features of Natural Heritage Importance, to include additional trees protection.
- 14.8 An initial draft of the Plan Strategy, which included policies for natural

environment, was presented in confidence to full Council in September 2022. It was agreed in principle by Members.

Development Management Team

- 14.9 Building upon the discussions that informed the Preliminary Policy review published alongside the POP, the LDP team engaged with Development Management colleagues. The members of the development management planning team were of the opinion that the existing policies contained within PPS2 Natural Heritage were working well. The question was posed as to whether consideration of merging policy NH1: European and Ramsar Sites – International, and policy NH 2: Species Protected by Law. However, within informal engagement on policy drafting, NIEA: NED advised that the existing policy suite contained a distinction between NH1 International Designations and NH2 Species Protected by Law which should be retained.

15 SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL

- 15.1 The formal sustainability Appraisal process was undertaken by the LDP team and Shared Environmental Services in March and April 2024. The Council's preferred policies and proposals were appraised against reasonable alternatives. The process proved useful in further refining policies in relation to sustainability objectives.
- 15.2 As part of the SA process the alternative option of retaining Sites of Local Nature Conservation Interest was also appraised. Both options scored similarly within the SA appraisal. It was perceived that there could be a risk that features will be lost if the SLNCIs designated in the extant Plans are not carried forward. However, where they encompass habitats or species of conservation importance, the SLNCIs identified in the extant Plans would instead receive policy protection through NE 1 International/European Designations, NE 2 Species Protected by Law, NE3 Sites of Nature Conservation Importance - National Designations, NE 4 - Sites of Nature Conservation Importance - Local Designations and NE5 Habitats, Species or Features of Natural Heritage Importance.
- 15.3 Some sites would also receive indirect protection through relevant CS and HE policy. Option 1 to remove the SLNCIs was considered to be appropriate. Therefore, SLNCIs designated in extant plans will not be brought forward as a designation and a policy-based approach will instead be applied.
- 15.4 Since SA is a high-level process that does not go into the fine detail of the policy wording and also because the strategic objectives of the policy remained the same, a new SA was not required for these policies. Instead, slight amendments to the SA report were made to ensure that the amended

policy wording was accurately reflected.

- 15.5 Original fieldnotes and survey information was sought from DAERA by the LDP team. The council was however advised that DAERA had very limited information on SLNCIs above and beyond what is publicly available. No additional information was provided.
- 15.6 The publicly available information in dBMAP and ADAP is contained within the respective Countryside Assessments which accompanied these plans. This information has been distilled into a data layer on the council's GIS and is available to assist planning officers
- 15.7 Post Sustainability Appraisal (SA), a number of amendments to policy were made and brought before Planning Committee for agreement in 2024, with final approval secured at a Special Planning Committee meeting held on 20 January 2025 and ratified at the full Council meeting on 29 January 2025.

16 DRAFT PLAN STRATEGY APPROACH

- 16.1 The fundamental approach of the draft Plan Strategy (DPS) is to support the aims and objectives of the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) and the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) by providing a strategic policy framework that conserves, protects and where possible enhance the natural environment, landscape, and biodiversity of Ards and North Down. The Local Development Plan (LDP) recognises the protection afforded to the Borough's natural environment, species, landscape and seascape and endorses this protection.
- 16.2 The draft plan strategy (DPS) has been informed by the Preferred Options Paper (POP) responses and all of the other methods of engagement that are described above. The following is a summary of the policy amendments and additions that are being put forward in consideration of all of the evidence gathered to date:
- **NE 1 International Designations**
The policy approach contained within Planning Policy Statement 2 - Natural Heritage has been continued within the DPS.
 - **NE 2 - Species Protected by Law**
The policy approach contained within Planning Policy Statement 2- Natural Heritage has been continued within the DPS.
 - **NE 3 - Sites of Nature Conservation Importance - National**

Designations

The policy approach contained within Planning Policy Statement 2 - Natural Heritage has been continued within the DPS.

- **NE 4 - Sites of Nature Conservation Importance - Local Designations**

The policy approach contained within Planning Policy Statement 2 - Natural Heritage has been continued within the DPS. However, SLINCI's designated in extant plans have not been retained within the DPS.

- **NE 5 - Habitats, Species or Features of Natural Heritage Importance**

The policy approach contained within Planning Policy Statement 2 - Natural Heritage has been continued within the DPS.

- **NE 6 - Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty**

The policy approach contained within Planning Policy Statement 2 - Natural Heritage has been continued within the DPS.

SLINCI designation consideration

16.3 Exploration of the approach taken in the DPS considered a range of factors such as;

- Discussion with the Council's biodiversity officer;
- Discussion with development management colleagues;
- The implementation of the Biodiversity Checklist;
- The policy approach within NE 5 : Habitats, Species or Features of Natural Heritage Importance;
- Retention of SLINCI description within a data layer for internal use;
- Sustainability Appraisal of both SLINCI options (retain and not retain);
- Consideration of the protection offered to sites outside the planning process;
- The Location of 14/47 SLNCIs overlap an area with [at least] a national-level nature conservation designation and will receive protection via NE 3 or NE 1. 46/47 of the SLNCIs are identified on the NIEA Natura Environment Mapviewer as containing priority habitat. These habitats will therefore receive an equivalent level of protection through Gardens policy NE 5; and
- Some of the SLINCI also receive additional, indirect, protection through HE policy where they are coincident with a Historic Park or CS policy where they are coincident with a Local Landscape Policy Area.

16.4 Consideration of a range of information is suggested by DAERA to assist the use of the Biodiversity Checklist, including Council Officers using data layers. SLINCI description information contained within both ADAP and dBMAP, Technical Supplements and the Earth Science Conservation Review

database⁴, have been compiled into a data layer for officers to be able to have access to this information as part of the Development Management process.

- 16.5 This is considered to be advantageous, as fieldwork and supporting documentation pertaining to the designation of SLNCIs, has not been available from DAERA. The Council's Biodiversity Officer advised that a considerable period has elapsed since the surveys which informed the SLNCI designations were undertaken (approximately 25 years ago), and ground conditions for some sites and adjacent sites could be very different today.
- 16.6 Consideration has also been given to the relationship between the Borough and neighbouring councils which have taken a different approach to SLNCI's. Belfast City Council, Lisburn City and Castlereagh Council and Newry Mourne and Down have retained the designation with extant plans to be reviewed at LPP stage.
- 16.7 Appendix 4 details the three SLNCIs that are located across council boundaries, It is considered that whilst there is a different approach taken within the DPS, neighbouring councils are not precluded from reviewing the boundaries of Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance which are contained within their boundaries and basing designation decisions upon the evidence base available to them at LPP stage.

Biodiversity Checklist

- 16.8 The Biodiversity Checklist⁵ was introduced in 2017, post the publication of ADAP and dBMAP. It is a 'step by step' tool which can be used by applicants and their agents to help identify if a development proposal is likely to adversely affect any biodiversity and natural heritage interests and whether further ecological assessments/surveys may be required. The checklist contains questions relating to designated sites and priority habitats (Part 1) and contains questions relating to priority species and protected species (Part 2). Part 3 requires the submission of an ecological statement and Part 4 requires the consideration of a qualified ecologist.
- 16.9 The level of detail required for the Biodiversity Checklist is site specific and are dependent upon the response to Part 1 and 2.

17 SOUNDNESS

- 17.1 The Local Development Plan (LDP) has been prepared to meet the tests of soundness as set out in the Department for Infrastructure (DFI) Development

⁴ [Earth Science Conservation Review database](#)

⁵ [NI Biodiversity Checklist documents | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)

Plan Practice Note 6: Soundness (Version 2, May 2017). The draft Plan Strategy (DPS) insofar as, it relates to natural heritage policies and other relevant policies in the document is regarded as sound, as it is considered to have met the various tests of soundness as summarised below:

Table 3: Consideration of Soundness

Procedural Tests	
P2	The natural environment policies have evolved from the POP, POP consultation Report, and consultee, development management and councillor engagement as described in earlier sections of this document.
P3	The natural environment policies have been subject to Sustainability Appraisal. Further details are included in the Sustainability Appraisal Report.
Consistency Tests	
C1	The natural environment policies have taken account of the RDS in particular RG11 as it relates to the natural environment, paras 2.7 of this document.
C2	The natural environment policies have taken account of the Community Plan, particularly Outcomes 4 and 5. Refer to paragraph 7.6 of this document.
C3	The natural environment policies have taken account of regional strategic objectives as contained within the SPPS paras 6.172 - 6.198 relating to natural environment. The policies have taken account of existing planning policies as contained within PPS2. Regard has been had to other Central Government documents, such as, the Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy and the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy, paras 2.8 and 4.15 of this document.
C4	The natural environment policies have taken account of the existing development plans within Ards and North Down, ongoing Council initiatives and the neighbouring council context.
Coherence and Effectiveness Tests	
CE1	The natural environment policies have taken account of the emerging LDP's

	of the 3 neighbouring councils, it is not considered to be in conflict with them.
CE2	The natural environment policies are founded on a robust evidence base which includes the baseline information, natural environment position paper, the POP and responses to it and subsequent engagement with statutory consultees.
CE3	The monitoring framework within chapter 26, section 4 illustrates how the natural environment objectives will be managed throughout the Borough.
CE4	Natural Environment policies will be reviewed at Plan Review stage.

Appendix 1: Map 1 - International/European Environmental Designations in Ards and North Down

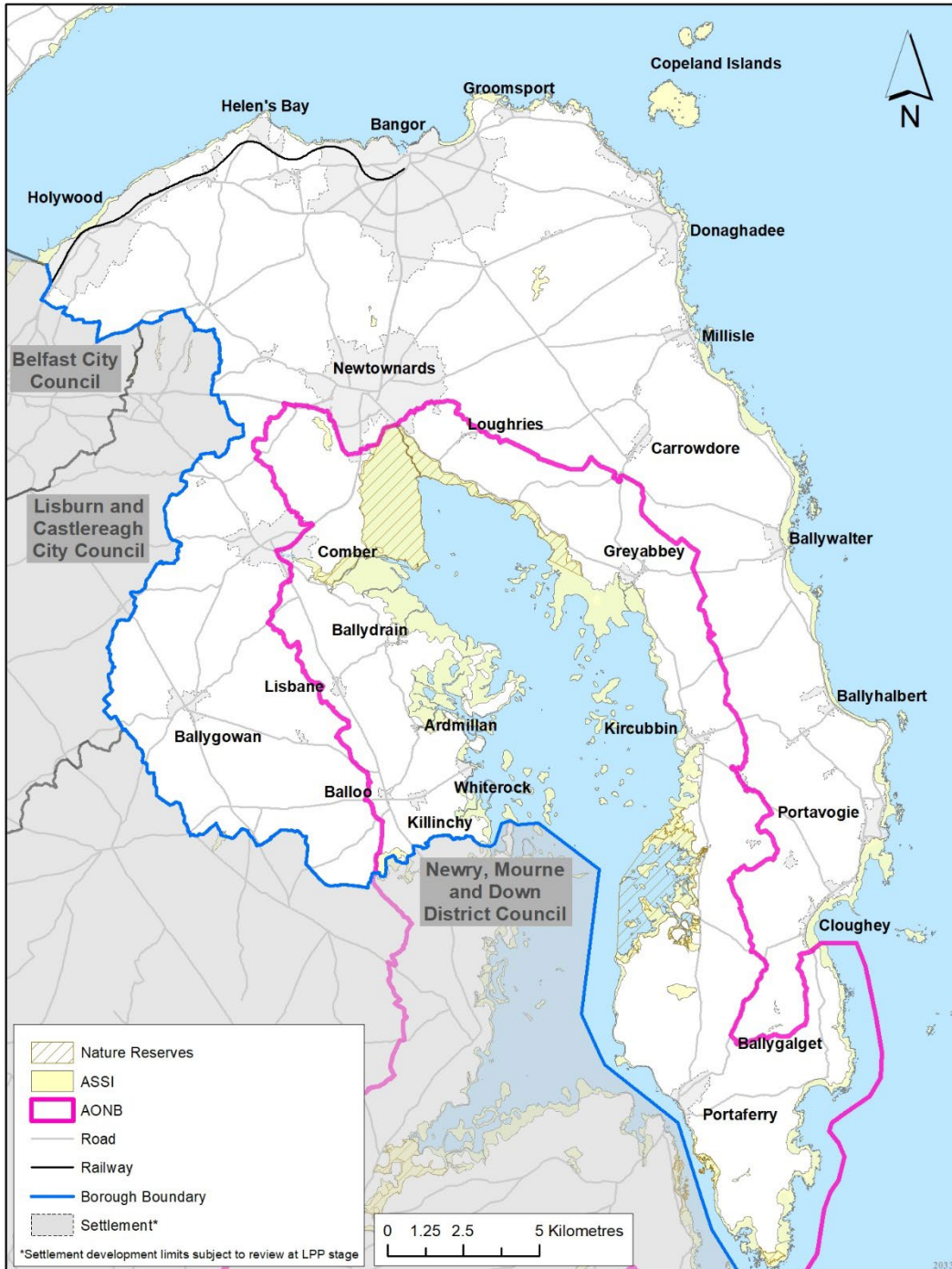
Environmental Designations (International)



This 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 right 2024 CS&LA156

Appendix 2: Map 2 - National Environmental Designations in Ards and North Down

Environmental Designations (National)



This 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 right 2024 CS&LA156

Appendix 3: Local Landscape Policy Areas

REF	Plan	Location	Address
CY 3/LLPA 4	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Cloughey	Caravan Park and Adjoining Lands
BO 03/LLPA 2	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Balloo	Killinchy Presbyterian Church, River Blackwater, and surrounding lands
NS 38/LLPA 5	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Newtownards	Scrabo Tower and Landform
PY 03/LLPA 1	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Portaferry	Portaferry House, Grounds and Associated Plantings
BR 04/LLPA 2	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Ballywalter	Holy Trinity Church and Setting
NS 38/LLPA 2	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Newtownards	Lieutenant Hill, Slopes and Properties on Belfast Road
DE 16/LLPA 1	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Donaghadee	Portavo House and Demesne
DE 16/LLPA 8	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Donaghadee	The Commons and Coastline
GY 03/LLPA 1	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Greyabbey	Greyabbey House / Rosemount, Abbey, Church, and Demesne
ME 03/LLPA 1	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Millisle	Woburn House and Wooded Estate
DE 16/LLPA 3	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Donaghadee	Water Tower and Associated Land
DE 16/LLPA 6	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Donaghadee	Listed Buildings and Gardens
PE 03/LLPA 1	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Portavogie	Area of Rough Grassland South of New Harbour Road
NS 38/LLPA 3	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Newtownards	Whitespots, Lead Mines, Golden Glen, and Associated Lands
ME 03/LLPA 2	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Millisle	Shoreline and Amenity Area

CY 03/LLPA 3	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Cloughey	Presbyterian Church, Shoreline and Headland
GSY 02/LLPA 1	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Glastry	Presbyterian Church, Glastry House, and Surroundings
BO 03/LLPA 1	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Balloo	Killinchy Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church, River Blackwater, and Rath
GY 03/LLPA 2	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Greyabbey	Cottage Hill and Surroundings
NS 38/LLPA 1	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Newtownards	Kiltonga and Surrounding Vegetation
DE 16/LLPA 4	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Donaghadee	Croagh Patrick Nursing Home, St Patrick's Graveyard, Standing Stone and Associated Vegetation
PY 03/LLPA 3	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Portaferry	Rectory and Large Houses and Associated Vegetation
DE 16/LLPA 2	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Donaghadee	Donaghadee Parish Church, Moat Farm and Surrounding Lands
CR 13/LLPA 4	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Comber	Comber River and Former Settlement
KN 03/LLPA 3	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Kircubbin	Tubber Na Carrig and Associated Lands
BDN02/LLPA 1	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Ballydrain	Ringneill House and River Corridors
BR 04/LLPA 3	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Ballywalter	Dwellings on Dunover Road and Vegetation
CR 13/LLPA 2	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Comber	Comber Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church and Surroundings

KN03/LLPA 4	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Kircubbin	Rectory and Grounds
KN03/LLPA 1	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Kircubbin	Monaghan Bank
NS 38/LLPA 6	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Newtownards	Drumlins and Slopes on Bowtown Road
BST02/LLPA 1	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Ballystockart	Ballystockart River
BT 03/LLPA 1	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Ballyhalbert	Motte, Standing Stone, and Church Site
CR 13/LLPA 1	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Comber	Euler River Corridor and Mount Alexander
KD 02/LLPA 1	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Kilmood	St Mary's Church, Graveyard, Old Courthouse and School
PY 03/LLPA 2	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Portaferry	Windmill Hill and Environs
BN 04/LLPA 1	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Ballygowan	Magherascouse Lough and Ballygowan River
BG 02/LLPA 1	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Ballycranbeg	St Joseph's Rc Church, Parochial House, and Surroundings
KY 02/LLPA 1	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Killinchy	Fields Northwest Of Killinchy Parish Church
CR 13/LLPA 3	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Comber	Clattering Ford and Surroundings
CE 03/LLPA 1	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Carrowdore	Carrowdore Castle and Christ Church
DE 16/LLPA 5	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Donaghadee	Donaghadee Motte
GY 03/LLPA 3	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Greyabbey	Hill Behind Main Street
BR 04/LLPA 1	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Ballywalter	Ballywalter Park and Coastline
KN 03/LLPA 2	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Kircubbin	Nunsquarter and Associated Lands

PE 03/LLPA 2	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Portavogie	Landform Between Portavogie and Cloughey
KY 02/LLPA 3	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Killinchy	Windmill on Rath and Surroundings
CY 03/LLPA 1	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Cloughey	Kirkistown Castle, Windmill, Rath, and Associated Lands
CY 03/LLPA 2	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Cloughey	Landform Between Portavogie and Cloughey
NS 38/LLPA 4	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Newtownards	Beech Hill House, Portaferry Road
DE 16/LLPA 7	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Donaghadee	Lands To South of Newtownards Road
BY 02/LLPA 1	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Ballyboley	Mourne View
BR 04/LLPA 4	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Ballywalter	Harbour Area and Shoreline
KY 02/LLPA 2	Ards And Down Area Plan 2015	Killinchy	Killinchy Parish Church and Surroundings
HD 18	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Hollywood	Maryfield, Hollywood
SL 06	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Seahill	Seahill Road, Seahill
OK 02	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Orlock	West of Orlock, Orlock
HY 04	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Helen's Bay	Crawfordsburn Country Park, Helen's Bay
HD 14	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Hollywood	Ballymenoch, Hollywood
BR 18	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Bangor	Balloo, Bangor
BR 24	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Bangor	Clandeboye, Bangor

GT 07	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Groomspart	Bangor Road, Groomspart
SL 07	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Seahill	Carney Hill, Seahill
HD 20	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Hollywood	Seapark, Hollywood
SS 02	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Six Road Ends	Six Road Ends
CT 03	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Craigantlet	Hollywood Road, Craigantlet
HD 16	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Hollywood	Glenlyon/ Twiselburn, Hollywood
CFN 05	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Crawfordsburn	Crawfordsburn River, Crawfordsburn
BR 27	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Bangor	Luke's Point, Bangor
HY 04	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Helen's Bay	Crawfordsburn Country Park, Helen's Bay
HD 19	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Hollywood	Redburn, Hollywood
GT 09	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Groomspart	Main Street, Groomspart
HD 15	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Hollywood	Folk Park/ Creighton, Hollywood
CT 02	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Craigantlet	Whinney Hill, Craigantlet
BR 21	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Bangor	Bangor Cemetery, Bangor
OK 04	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Orlock	Orlock Lane, Orlock

BR 23	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Bangor	Carnalea, Bangor
OK 03	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Orlock	South of Orlock, Orlock
GT 09	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Groomspport	Main Street, Groomspport
HD 16	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Hollywood	Glenlyon/ Twiselburn, Hollywood
BR 30	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Bangor	Whitehill, Bangor
OK 04	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Orlock	Orlock Lane, Orlock
OK 02	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Orlock	West of Orlock, Orlock
CT 02	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Craigantlet	Whinney Hill, Craigantlet
OK 03	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Orlock	South of Orlock, Orlock
HD 20	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Hollywood	Seapark (Hollywood), Hollywood
BR 29	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Bangor	Strickland's Glen, Bangor
GT 08	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Groomspport	Groomspport Shoreline, Groomspport
GT 08	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Groomspport	Groomspport Shoreline, Groomspport
BR 28	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Bangor	Rathgael, Bangor
SL 06	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Seahill	Seahill Road, Seahill

CT 03	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Craigantlet	Hollywood Road, Craigantlet
HD 18	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Hollywood	Maryfield, Hollywood
HD 14	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Hollywood	Ballymenoch, Hollywood
BR 31	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Bangor	Wilson's Point, Bangor
BR 22	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Bangor	Brice Park, Bangor
GT 07	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Groomsport	Bangor Road, Groomsport
HD 15	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Hollywood	Folk Park/ Creighton, Hollywood
SL 05	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Seahill	Seahill Coastal Area, Seahill
BR 25	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Bangor	Clandeboye Cemetery, Bangor
CFN 06	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Crawfordsburn	Crawfordsburn/ Helen's Bay, Crawfordsburn
SL 05	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Seahill	Seahill Coastal Area, Seahill
HD 19	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Hollywood	Redburn, Hollywood
SL 07	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Seahill	Carney Hill, Seahill
SS 02	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Six Road Ends	Six Road Ends
OK 05	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Orlock	Coastguard Lane, Orlock

BR 19	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Bangor	Ballycrochan, Bangor
BR 20	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Bangor	Bangor Central, Bangor
BR 26	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Bangor	Kilcooley Wood, Bangor
GT 06	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Groomsport	Donaghadee Road, Groomsport
GT 06	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Groomsport	Donaghadee Road, Groomsport
OK 05	Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	Orlock	Coastguard Lane, Orlock

Appendix 4: SLNCIs

BMAP 2015 SLNCI Ref	Adjacent council that boundary shared with	Habitat
ND 01 Redburn	Belfast City Council, Boundary shared is indicated on GIS. However, this appears to be a mapping error.	Woodland
<p>Extract from the Countryside Assessment:</p> <p>Areas of woodland in Redburn Country Park together with Nun’s Wood, presents one of the larger woodland blocks in the metropolitan area. It is planted in origin predominantly Beech (<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>), also conifer species, although abundant regeneration of Sycamore (<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>), Ash (<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>) and Hazel (<i>Corylus avellana</i>) has leant a more natural aspect to the stand which has a well-developed ground flora, especially on the lower slopes. The park also includes small pockets of grassland and a number of Glens. West of the Old Holywood Road, a small area of relatively unimproved grassland and wet woodland adds to the site diversity.</p>		
ND 02 Belfast Harbour Estate	Belfast City Council	Mature ruderal, Ornithological, Fen
<p>Extract from the Countryside Assessment:</p> <p>Part of the Belfast Harbour Estate to wildfowl has long been recognised. Central to this site is the man-made ‘D2Lagoon’, a shallow lagoon which is managed as a bird reactions, and the ‘South Foreshore Nature Conservancy Area’, an unmanaged grassland and scattered scrub with occasional old pools with growth, vegetation, including Sea Club-rush (<i>Bolboschoenus maritimus</i>), Grey Bulrush (<i>Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani</i>), and Common Reed-mace (<i>Typha latifolia</i>), scrapes with wetland vegetation, newly created reed beds, recently excavated small ponds all designed with wildfowl in mind. In addition, a small un-infilled remnant with saltmarsh including Reflexed Saltmarsh Grass (<i>Puccinellia distans</i>) and Distant Sedge (<i>Carex distans</i>). Between Bangor Road and the Harbour Estate at Tillysburn, there is a complex of wetlands, scrub, and species-rich mature ruderal grassland. This sort of habitat mosaic is not found to this extent elsewhere in the Belfast area.</p>		

COU5/26 Craigantlet Woods	Lisburn City and Castlereagh District Council	Woodland
---------------------------------	---	----------

Extract from the Countryside Assessment:

The importance of the woods occupying several narrow valleys in the Craigantlet Hills has been recognised in their designation as Areas of Special Scientific Interest. The proposed SLNCI designation includes a few small areas of semi-natural habitat at the ASSI edges, plus an additional two small glens to the east that are of more local importance. The cover is mainly of Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), woodland and scrub.

ADAP 2015 SLNCI Ref	Adjacent council that boundary shared with	Habitat
COU5/20	Newry Mourne and Down District Council	Fen, woodland

Extract from the Countryside Assessment:

Mosaic of habitat types include pond, fen, carr, cut-over bog and Birch woodland. A wetland/peatland complex of a mosaic of open water, swamp, fen, carr woodland, acid grassland, heath, and bog. The peat influence is evident in the incorporation of Sphagnum mosses into the fen communities. There has been some land claim and nutrient enrichment, but this remains an extensive area of well-developed unspoilt semi-natural habitat. The lake has local amenity value.