

Ards and North Down Open Space and Outdoor Recreation Strategy



2022 - 2032

by

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CONTENTS

SUMMARY

1.0	INTRODUCTION	1
1.1	Purpose of the Strategy	1
1.2	Ards and North Down	1
1.3	Award Winning Parks & Open Spaces	2
1.4	Investment in Parks	2
1.5	The Benefits of Outdoor Recreation	3
2.0	POLICY CONTEXT	4
2.1	Northern Ireland Regional Context	4
2.2	Local Policy Context	5
3.0	VISION FOR OPEN SPACE	7
3.1	Vision for Ards and North Down's Open Space	7
3.2	Strategic Principles & Aspirations	7
4.0	OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION	9
4.1	Ards and North Down Open Spaces	9
4.2	Main Beaches	11
4.3	Recreation Activities	13
5.0	OPEN SPACE PROVISION	16
5.1	Open Space Standards	16
5.2	Quantity and Type of Open Space	16
5.3	Quality of Open Space	19
5.4	Open Space Accessibility	20
6.0	RECOMMENDATIONS	23
6.1	Enablers & Barriers to Outdoor Recreation	23
6.2	Delivery of Strategic Principles	23
7.0	ACTION PLAN	25
7.1	Introduction	25
7.2	The Open Space Action Plan	25
7.3	Opportunities for Outdoor Recreation	27
8.0	NEXT STEPS	30
8.1	Delivery of the Action Plan	30
8.2	Protection of Special Place Qualities	30
8.3	Partnership Working	30

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SUMMARY

Ards and North Down Open Space Strategy

Ards and North Down is known for its rich diversity of scenic countryside and coastline and extends from Holywood on the shores of Belfast Lough, to Portaferry on the southern tip of the Ards Peninsula and Killinchy to the west of Strangford Lough.

The Borough contains a wealth of parks, amenity open spaces, sports pitches and natural spaces, making it a popular place to enjoy a wide variety of outdoor recreation activities. There are numerous playgrounds and seaside parks spread across the Borough, providing children with the opportunities to learn and play in a safe environment. The benefits of open space to tourism and recreation are recognised, as the community and visitors to the area enjoy a range of events and activities based in our open spaces.

The Council continues to invest in its parks and open spaces to protect our environment, improve biodiversity and make Ards and North Down an attractive place to live in and visit. In 2021 / 2022 five parks were awarded Green Flags, by Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful, including Castle Park in Bangor. Five beaches were awarded the Seaside Award in 2020.



Bangor Castle

Strategy Development

In 2021 we carried out an open space audit which assessed open space provision, accessibility and future actions based on the Borough's Corporate Plan, The Big Plan and the Local Development Plan. To help us produce this strategy we have facilitated workshops with Elected Members and Council officers and ran a targeted online consultation with community groups, relevant external stakeholders and the Community Planning Partnership.

Subsequently, we held a follow up workshop. The consultations have helped set an ambitious vision for open space.

The Vision is that...

"The residents and visitors of Ards and North Down will feel pride as they enjoy access to attractive parks, open spaces, coastal hubs and natural places. Good quality open spaces play a major role in enhancing the quality of life for local communities, providing spaces for learning, socialising, playing and active sports.

Engaging in outdoor recreation (sports, passive recreation, water sports, cycling and walking) in the open spaces in towns and villages and along the coastline of the Borough will encourage people to enjoy good health and wellbeing.

Existing open spaces will be protected and enhanced to diversify urban habitats and managed sustainably to help mitigate climate change. Where possible, open spaces will be linked by a network of paths and green corridors to encourage active travel, promote active lifestyles and exploration of the outdoors."

Strategy Delivery

The Strategy has identified a range of actions and recommendations, which will be reviewed on a regular basis, identifying the tasks required for implementation of the Strategy, in conjunction with Service Plans and the Community Plan. To achieve the vision, open spaces must be managed collaboratively, and we will continue to work closely with our partners and stakeholders to help realise our vision for Ards and North Down open spaces.



1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Strategy

The Open Space and Outdoor Recreation Strategy for Ards and North Down sets out the Council’s approach to the protection, enhancement and management of open space in the council area. The vision for open space and outdoor recreation is supported by a series of priorities for Ards and North Down Borough Council (ANDBC), and partners over the next 10 years. The strategy will inform the Local Development Plan.

Understanding the role and function of Ards and North Down’s open spaces, is key to the setting of priorities and local standards for provision. The strategy will enable the Council to make the most of its assets, identify deficiencies, secure new provision, improve quality through better accessibility and provide infrastructure to facilitate outdoor recreation. It focusses on ANDBC owned and managed open space but takes cognisance of publicly accessible privately owned space.

A key purpose is to ensure that, at a strategic level, outdoor recreation operates in as sustainable way as possible, protecting the scenic and environmental value of the area, whilst building on the health and economic benefits it can bring.

1.2 Ards and North Down

ANDBC is located in the east of Northern Ireland, covering the Ards Peninsula, most of Strangford Lough and the southern shore of Belfast Lough. It comprises an area of 228 square miles, which combines around 115 miles of scenic coastline. The area is known for its rich diversity of scenic countryside and extends from Holywood on the shores of Belfast Lough to Portaferry on the southern tip of the Ards Peninsula and Killinchy to the west of Strangford Lough.



“The natural landscape of sea, loughs and land – a blue green space...provides a home to nature, beautiful scenery, natural produce and a place of inspiration...” (Integrated Strategy for Tourism, Regeneration and Economic Development)

The natural resources of the area provide a wealth of opportunities for active outdoor pursuits such as watersports, angling and walking. Strangford Lough forms the central geographical and landscape feature of the area and is a designated Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Area (SPA), Area of Special Scientific Interest and the wetland is a Ramsar site.

Belfast Lough and the east coast of the Ards Peninsula are also designated as Special Protection Areas and Ramsar sites and the latter is also a Special Area of Conservation (North Channel). The eastern and western edges of Strangford Lough, extending to include the southern portion of the Ards Peninsula comprise the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). There are many Natural Heritage designations throughout the Borough including 1 Special Area of Conservation, 3 Special Protection Areas, 15 Areas of Special Scientific Interest, 3 RAMSAR sites, 3 National Nature Reserves, and two Marine Conservation Zones.



1.3 Award Winning Parks & Open Spaces

ANDBC owns and maintains a wide variety of open space including parks, amenity open spaces, play areas, sports pitches and beaches throughout the Council area. There are privately owned areas of open space including playing fields in sports clubs and the education sector, glens, parks, walkways and amenity green space in housing areas.

The standard of the council parks has been independently judged and benchmarked by Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful, the environmental charity that runs the Green Flag Award scheme. It is an internationally recognised certification scheme based on a range of criteria including horticulture, cleanliness, management, biodiversity, community involvement and safety standards.

In 2021 / 2022 there were 5 Green flags awarded:



- Castle Park, Bangor
- Ballymenoch Park, Holywood
- Kiltonga Nature Reserve, Newtownards
- Linear Park Bangor
- Londonderry Park, Newtownards



1.4 Investment in Parks

The Council continues to invest in its parks and open spaces to protect our environment, improve biodiversity and make Ards and North Down an attractive place to live in and visit. Recent initiatives include:

- The Greenways Network
- Portaferry Community Orchard
- STAND4TREES
- Queen's Green Canopy tree planting
- Cairn Wood improvement scheme
- Living Sculptures installation

¹ Sustainable Outdoor Recreation Plan for Strangford and Lecale AONB and Strangford Lough Marine Protected Area (2018)

Outdoor Recreation in our Open Spaces

Ards and North Down is popular for a wide variety of outdoor recreation activities. Hill walking, rambling, cycling and angling are among the most popular countryside recreational pursuits. There is also a growing number of people taking part in activities such as horse riding, golf, orienteering, mountain biking and water based sports. The inland water bodies and the Irish Sea coast also offer a place to relax and enjoy the health benefits of being outdoors. Rock pooling, beach games, fishing, sun and sea bathing are popular activities.



The Open Space Audit that accompanies this report focusses on the parks and open spaces owned and managed by ANDBC, and on the more traditional uses (e.g. walking, cycling, sports played on pitches and children's play). As many of the open spaces are located along the coastline, close to harbours and beaches, the connections and shared facilities are important. The Strategy embraces the wide range of informal and formal activities taking place in these spaces, including:

- Swimming (recreational and open water)
- Water sports: kayaking, canoeing and paddle boarding (SUP), coastal rowing
- Sailing (dinghy, cruising and motorised)
- Coaststeering, diving and snorkelling
- Power boat activities: jet-skiing / other boating

In 2018 an Outdoor Recreation Strategy for Strangford Lough was prepared¹, and which this Strategy does not seek to replicate. The focus of this Strategy therefore, in respect of outdoor recreation, is the remaining area of the Borough not covered by the 2018 Strategy. Going forward, a detailed survey of the potential of the multi-use open spaces for a variety of recreation activities should be undertaken, to determine future needs, and to assess costs and / or feasibility of provision of specialised structures or facilities.

1.5 The Benefits of Outdoor Recreation

ANDBC has always recognised the need to nurture the environment and the way in which people have reconnected with outdoor spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic reinforces this priority. The pandemic has placed a renewed emphasis on the importance of good quality and easily accessible open space – particularly for physical exercise and health, mental health and wellbeing, social and recreational purposes (including meeting others due to restrictions on meeting indoors), improved air quality, active travel and green infrastructure.

Well managed and sustainable open spaces can bring a range of benefits to communities and individuals², including:

- Physical health and wellbeing, social inclusion and cohesion, and enjoyment for everyone
- Cultural and community benefits
- Attracting business and tourism, benefitting the local economy, rural regeneration and jobs
- Promoting natural resource tourism
- Group activities and education opportunities
- Connection with and protection of the natural environment and heritage

Research carried out in May 2020 by Outdoor Recreation NI found that more people are getting outdoors and feeling the mental and physical benefits in Northern Ireland³ as a result of the restrictions on movement during the lockdowns.

- 63% of the respondents reported going outdoors for exercise every day during lockdown, a much higher proportion than the 28% reported in the annual household survey (CHS 2017/18)
 - 89% of respondents felt calm, relaxed, refreshed and revitalised and 84% felt physically fitter and healthier.
 - 44% of people reported having to walk on roads and roadside pavements due to a lack of off-road trails.
 - 51% of respondents expect to spend more of their free time outdoors than they did pre-lockdown
- (Source: Outdoor Recreation NI)



² The Outdoor Recreation Action Plan for Northern Ireland, Sport NI

³ Engaging with the Outdoors during COVID-19 Lockdown in Northern Ireland, Outdoor Recreation NI

2.0 POLICY CONTEXT

2.1 Northern Ireland Regional Context

Open space provision and management has become a key feature of planning policy over the last few decades due to increased recognition of the multiple benefits of the diverse range and type of open spaces. The Programme for Government⁴ (PfG) tasked the Northern Ireland Executive with delivering improved wellbeing for all citizens. The provision of open space can actively contribute to a range of health, economic, social, environmental and cultural benefits.

One of the key aims of the **Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035** is to 'Protect and enhance the environment for its own sake'. It states that protecting the environment is essential for enhancing the quality of life of current and future generations. Northern Ireland's environment is one of its greatest assets, with its stunning landscapes, an outstanding coastline, a complex variety of wildlife and a rich built and cultural heritage.

The Strategy also seeks to create healthier living environments and to support healthier lifestyles by facilitating access to a range of opportunities for recreational and cultural activities and by promoting physical recreation as a basis for good health for all.

Specific measures are highlighted including:

- Maintaining and enhancing sporting facilities
- Developing cycle and pedestrian networks
- Facilitating access to the countryside
- Enhancing the range of sports and leisure facilities enabling accessibility by all citizens

Regional planning policy as set out in the **Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS)** states that open space, whether or not there is public access to it, is important for its contribution to the quality of urban life by providing important green lungs, visual breaks and wildlife habitats in built-up areas. Open space can enhance the character of residential areas, civic buildings, conservation areas, listed buildings and archaeological sites. It can also help to attract business and tourism, stimulating the local economy and thereby contribute to the process of urban and rural regeneration.

There is a policy presumption against the loss of open space to competing land uses irrespective of its physical condition and appearance. Further

provision is required to provide adequate and well-designed open space as an integral part of new residential developments.

The SPPS specifies objectives for open space, sport and outdoor recreation that include:

- Facilitate appropriate outdoor recreational activities in the countryside that do not negatively impact on the amenity of residents
- Ensure that new facilities are convenient and accessible for all, particularly children, older people and those with disabilities
- Ensure that new facilities are in keeping with the principles of environmental conservation, helping sustain and enhance biodiversity

Currently supporting the regional policy approach are a suite of **Planning Policy Statements (PPSs)** which will cease to have effect when the Council has adopted its new Plan Strategy. PPS 8 'Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation', refers to the assessment of open space as part of the preparation of a LDP.

PPS 8: Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation defines open space as "all open space of public value, including not just land, but also inland bodies of water such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs which offer important opportunity for sports and outdoor recreation and can act as visual amenity."

Northern Ireland now has a **Climate Change Act (2022)**. Amongst other actions, the Act includes an overall net zero target by 2050 (with related targets for the years 2040 and 2030), and sets a target that at least 80% of electricity consumption is to be generated from renewable sources by 2030.

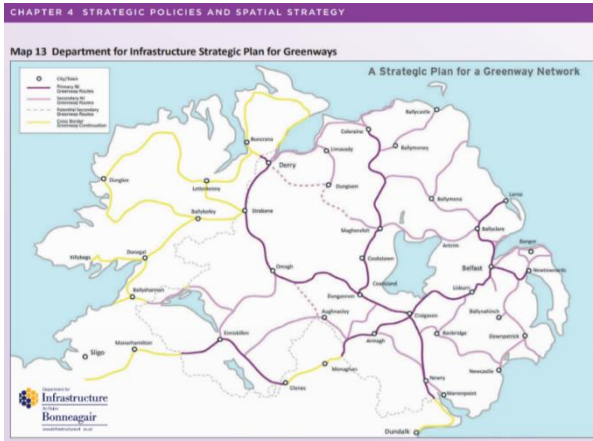
The **Outdoor Recreation Action Plan for Northern Ireland⁵** highlights the importance of the countryside for recreation and acknowledges the contribution this can make to the rural economy and the promotion of tourism. The outdoor environment provides a resource that has potential for supporting the delivery of long-term social and economic transformation. The Strategy aims to deliver:

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

⁴ Between 25 January and 22 March 2021, the Executive held a public consultation on its [Programme for Government draft Outcomes Framework](#)

⁵ Our Great Outdoors - the Outdoor Recreation Plan for Northern Ireland, Sport NI 2014

In 2016, the Department for Infrastructure developed **Exercise Explore Enjoy: A Strategic Plan for Greenways**, setting out a series of greenways in Northern Ireland as traffic-free routes connecting communities to all kinds of destinations for commuting, everyday journeys for leisure and recreation.



The **Northern Ireland Changing Gear: Bicycle Strategy** aims to set out progressively how Northern Ireland can be transformed into a place where travelling by bicycle is a healthy, everyday activity. Measures will include improvements to cycling infrastructure in urban areas, rural routes and greenways.



2.2 Local Policy Context

The themes within the Council’s **Corporate Plan 2020 - 2024** have direct relevance to open space, which is identified as one of the Plans opportunities. *“We will improve our open spaces and facilities to make them accessible for everyone”*. The Council will provide safer and accessible public spaces for everyone and promote the use of outdoor spaces. One of the KPIs is the £ invested in maintaining public open spaces.

The **Community Plan: The Big Plan for Ards and North Down 2017 - 2032** sets out an integrated

approach in the delivery of its aims and objectives in particular health, education, community safety the voluntary sector arts and leisure. The Community Plan includes three relevant primary outcomes with specific relevance to open space. All people in Ards and North Down will:

- Enjoy good health and wellbeing.
- Live in communities where they are respected, are safe and feel secure.
- Feel pride as they have access to a well-managed sustainable environment.



The Ards and North Down LDP Preferred Options Paper (POP) and accompanying position paper provides an overview of open space, sport and outdoor recreation provision in the Ards and North Down Borough Council area to assist in identifying the key future direction for the Local Development Plan (LDP) up to 2030.

The POP reflects the regional planning context in respect of its aim and preferred option to safeguard existing open space and to identify and provide new areas of open space, including the development of Community Greenways and improving links between parks and natural areas and local communities, to provide places for both recreation and exercise alongside opportunities for pedestrian and cycle routes.

Ards and North Down **Integrated Strategy for Tourism, Regeneration, Economic Development** (2018-2030) aims to create jobs, increase economic productivity, increase visitor overnight trips and expenditure. One of the Strategy’s key experiences includes water’s edge encounters, including access to water for walking, cycling, swimming, boating, sailing, racing or just enjoying the view. With a beautiful landscape of land, loughs and sea, a key objective of the strategy is to facilitate sustainable access for all residents and visitors. This will be achieved through a network of blueways and greenways.

The Council's **Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) 2013-2017** recognises that, at a local level, biodiversity and the environment are vitally important to future health, well-being and prosperity. The key aims of the LBAP include to:

- Conserve and enhance the rich biodiversity of the area for both current and future generations
- Raise awareness of the variety and importance of biodiversity
- Encourage local ownership and stewardship of our biodiversity
- Align the LBAP to the obligations of the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (NI) 2011 Act

The LBAP is currently under review and it is expected that the Council will consult on the new plan within the year.

Sustainability and Climate Change Policy (2022) commits Ards and North Down Borough Council to reduce its impact on the local and global environment by demonstrating clear leadership, providing high quality services, whilst preventing pollution, reducing waste and greenhouse gas emissions and saving energy and water. Natural resources will be conserved, biodiversity enhanced and the quality of life and the sense of well-being for all residents will be further improved. The Council will promote sustainability and work constructively with external partners to further sustainable development by ensuring the integration and balancing of social, economic and environmental factors when plan-making and decision-taking, in order to support the long-term public interest.

The **Roadmap to Sustainability (2021-2028)** formalises the commitment of the Council to sustainability through key actions in key areas such as:

- Natural asset protection and enhancement
- Health, safety and wellbeing
- Delivering a sustainable economy through economic development support
- High quality shared spaces
- Climate change adaptation and mitigation/carbon emissions reduction
- Sustainable development of the Council's physical infrastructure and shared spaces
- Resident employability, education and employment provision and support
- Community resilience

The Roadmap also seeks to improve the implementation of actions across all Council strategies. This includes collaborative working and

the evaluation of all policy, strategy and investment decisions to ensure the Council isn't locked into unsustainable choices that will affect the Borough over several decades.

The Ards and North Down Borough Council **Sports Facility Strategy 2016 – 2026**, reflects the wider Northern Ireland Framework for Sports Facilities Development 2016-2026 and provides a framework for the future prioritisation, development and provision of sports facilities at a local level, to meet identified community need. The aim is to develop a strategic framework for the future provision of sports facilities in Ards and North Down Borough Council. This identifies the need for provision, and the priorities for investment into sports facilities, informed by evidence of need, consultation with key stakeholders and a supply and demand analysis.

The Council have developed an ambitious and outcome-driven **Play Strategy** with a 10-year Action Plan for the period 2021-2032. The Strategy seeks to enable children and young people's development within the Borough as part of wider social, physical, cognitive, creative, cultural and wellbeing driver that provides opportunities for participation in and access to, play provision and outdoor recreation activity and facilities.

The following policy has been considered in the development of the Open Space Strategy:

- Ards and North Down Borough Draft Council Corporate Plan (2020 - 2024)
- The Big Plan for Ards and North Down (Community Plan) (2017 - 2032)
- Local Biodiversity Action Plan: North Down and Ards Area (2013 – 2017)
- Integrated Strategy for Tourism, Regeneration & Economic Development, AND (2018-2030)
- Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation - A New Framework (2011 - 2015)
- Biodiversity Strategy for NI (2020)
- The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009 - 2019
- A Fitter Future for All - Framework for Preventing and Addressing Overweight and Obesity in Northern Ireland (2012 - 2022)
- Our Passion, Our Place, NIEA Strategic Priorities (2012 - 2022)
- NI Draft Programme for Government Framework (2016 - 21)
- ANDBC Food Growing Strategy
- ANDBC Tree & Woodland Strategy 2021-2032

3.0 VISION FOR OPEN SPACE

3.1 Vision for Ards and North Down's Open Space

Protecting, enhancing and managing our open spaces to provide places for outdoor recreation for the community to enjoy.

The Council recognises that good quality and easily accessible open space can contribute to a better quality of life. Open spaces contribute to a range of national and local commitments and policies, such as sustainable development, climate change adaptation, carbon management, outdoor learning, healthy living, sustainable transport, biodiversity and social equity.

The vision for open space is built upon the council Corporate Plan and the Community Plan: The Big Plan and will help deliver the Plan Objectives in relation to Open Space. Its key purpose is to ensure that, at a strategic level, outdoor recreation operates in as sustainable way as possible, protecting the scenic and environmental value of the area, whilst building on the health and economic benefits.

The Open Space Strategy Vision is that...

"The residents and visitors of Ards and North Down will feel pride as they enjoy access to attractive parks, open spaces, coastal hubs and natural places. Good quality open spaces play a major role in enhancing the quality of life for local communities, providing spaces for learning, socialising, playing and active sports.

Engaging in outdoor recreation (sports, passive recreation, water sports, cycling and walking) in the open spaces in towns and villages and along the coastline of the Borough will encourage people to enjoy good health and wellbeing.

Existing open spaces will be protected and enhanced to diversify urban habitats and managed sustainably to help mitigate climate change. Where possible, open spaces will be linked by a network of paths and green corridors to encourage active travel, promote active lifestyles and exploration of the outdoors."

The outstanding opportunities for recreation and enjoyment that the Borough and its coastal communities offers will be protected and enhanced, whilst a balanced approach to management will safeguard the special landscape qualities of the Borough that draws visitors to the area.

3.2 Strategic Principles & Aspirations

The Big Plan is aspirational and sets out the future we want to achieve for the people of Ards and North Down. The Plan includes three relevant primary outcomes with specific relevance to open space. All people in Ards and North Down will:

- Enjoy good health and wellbeing.
- Live in communities where they are respected, are safe and feel secure.
- Feel pride as they have access to a well-managed sustainable environment.



To ensure that open spaces are fit for the future, 4 guiding principles have been set to help achieve the vision for open space:

1. Protect and enhance open space, recognising its role in improving people's mental and physical health and promoting active lifestyles

Open spaces can provide platforms for community activities, social interaction and physical recreation, as well as reducing social isolation, improving community relations and positively affecting the wider determinants of health. The provision of a range of parks, amenity spaces and natural places provide opportunities for socialising, children's play, participation in sport and enjoyment of the natural environment.



2. Provide high quality, well-managed, clean, and safe open spaces close to where people live, that meet the needs of people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds

Everyone living in the towns and villages of ANDBC should have access to attractive, good quality open space, providing opportunities for a wide range of users and abilities, close to where they live. Well designed, useable, clean, safe and accessible spaces are vital to encouraging healthier lifestyles and tackling inequality. Good quality open spaces lead to higher satisfaction levels, greater feelings of safety and higher levels of activity in the outdoors.



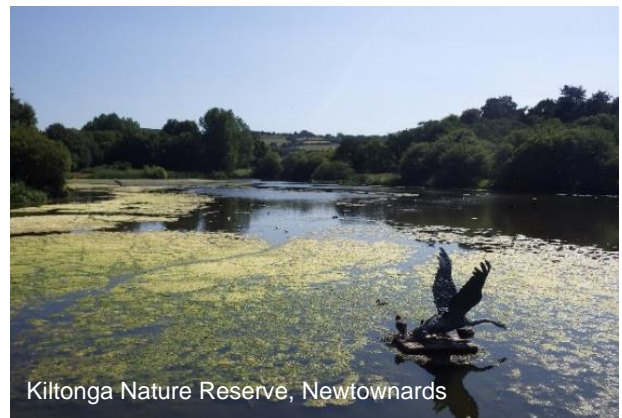
3. Increase opportunities for people to be active by investing in open spaces, outdoor recreation facilities and better connected active travel networks

Provision of a network of diverse, well managed and resourced open spaces offer a wide range of opportunities for sport and outdoor recreation (water sports, cycling, dog walking, running, active play etc.). Better connected places (e.g. strategic greenways) support walking, cycling and public transport use. Promote opportunities for sustainable travel through development of active travel networks to lead to healthier more active lifestyles by reducing the need to travel by private car.



4. Protect and enhance the natural environment, helping to improve climate resilience and help create a more sustainable environment

The special landscape qualities of the area's towns, countryside and coastline will be protected and enhanced, to strengthen a connected network of diverse woodlands and open spaces, helping to enhance biodiversity and sustain ecological habitats. The benefits of well managed open spaces are extensive, providing attractive and diverse places for recreation and enjoyment of the outdoors, whilst helping mitigate and adapt to climate change.



4.0 OPEN SPACE & RECREATION

4.1 Ards and North Down Open Spaces

Ards and North Down Borough contains a wealth of parks, amenity open spaces, play areas, sports pitches, outdoor recreational areas and beaches throughout the Council area. There are privately owned areas of open space including private playing fields in sports clubs and the education sector and grassland areas, glens, parks, walkways and amenity green space located within areas of housing.

The map extract below illustrates how the open space resource has been mapped in Geographical Information Systems (GIS), each site has been allocated an identification reference and a typology.

This Strategy focuses on the following nine open space typologies, each having a variety of uses and secondary uses and characteristics.

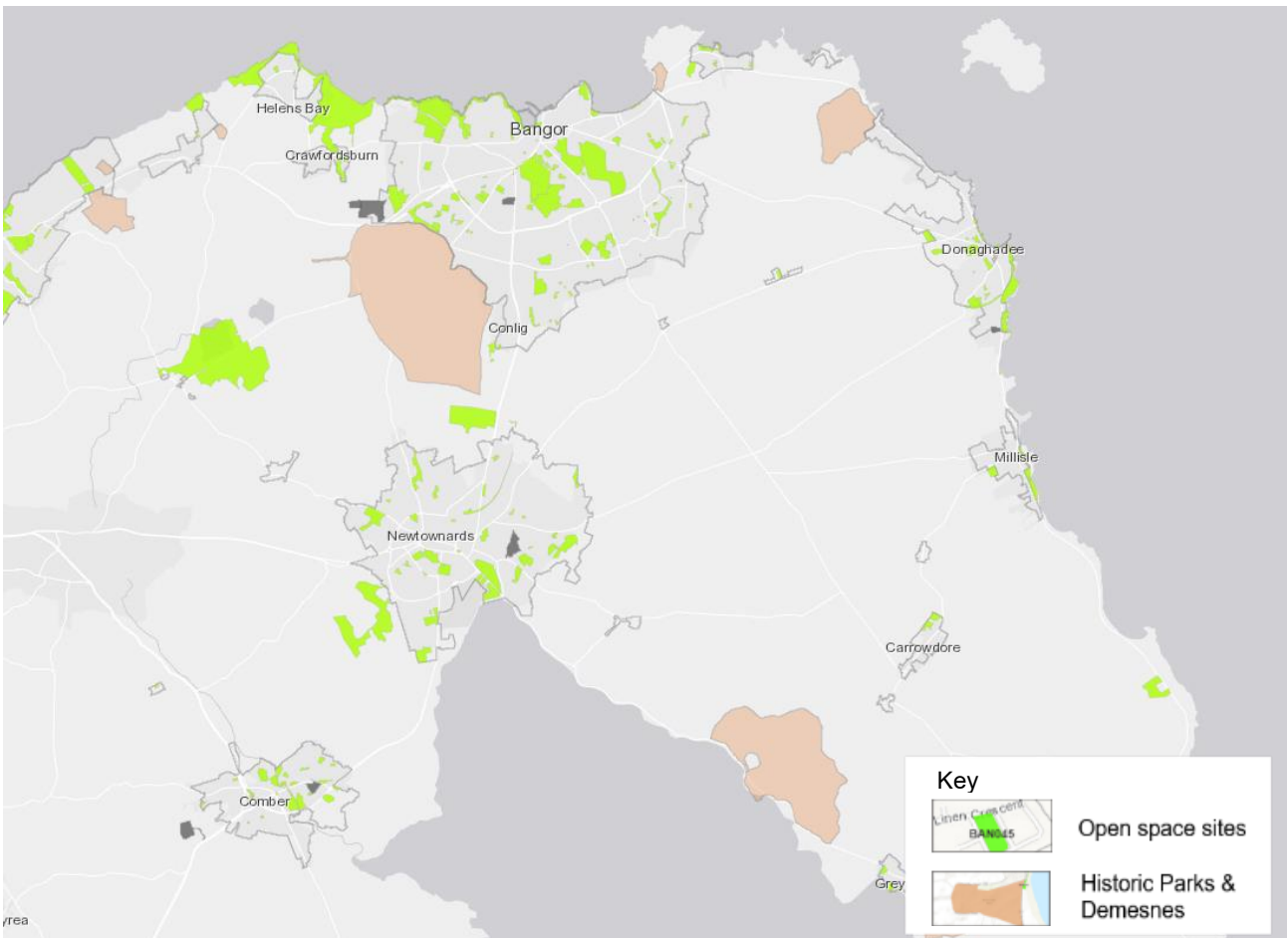


Figure 2: Digital Open Space Map (Extract for illustrative purposes)

Parks and Gardens

The Council area is well served in terms of parks and gardens, which are dispersed throughout the towns and villages. There are also privately owned areas of open space including private playing fields in sports clubs and the education sector and grassland areas, glens, parks, walkways and amenity green space located within areas of housing. There are a variety of parks of varying sizes and facilities including the following:

Country Park / Forest Parks

These are parks which are often of significant size, offering a range of recreational facilities and features, including extensive areas of parkland landscape, woodlands, path networks and visitor attractions. Country Parks are often accessible by public transport, well connected to path networks and contain a number of high quality facilities (e.g. play facility, formal gardens, cafés and historic buildings). Examples include Crawfordsburn Country Park and Forest Parks include Ballysallagh Forest (Cairn Wood), Clandeboye Forest and Mount Stewart Forest.

Town Park / Historic Parks

Large to medium sized public parks, usually located in larger towns containing traditional park features (e.g. historic built or natural features, fountains, formal gardens, walled gardens etc). The parks are designed and managed to provide some or all of the following activities: active and passive recreation (e.g. sports, walking, cycling, children's play, jogging, outdoor exercise), social / community events. Examples include Bangor Castle, Ward Park and Bangor Harbour, The Moat and The Commons in Donaghadee, Seapark Recreational Grounds in Holywood and Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex in Newtownards.



Seaside Parks

Areas of open space located on the seafront, providing a range of play, recreation, gardens which are typical of Neighbourhood Parks. The site often has access to a beach or a harbour and acts as the main seaside recreation space for the community and visitors to the town or village. They are usually well connected by a path network or providing access along a promenade. Examples include South Promenade in Ballywalter, Ballyholme Park in Bangor, The Warren in Cloughey and Groomsport Main Street.



Neighbourhood and Local Parks

These parks are small to medium sized areas of open space usually located in urban areas, that provide a variety of activities and natural features, including sports facilities, children's play for all ages, informal recreation, gardens and seating areas. Examples include Ballycrochan Linear Park in Bangor, Muckers Field in Comber and West Winds in Newtownards.



Outdoor Sports Facilities

Ards and North Down Borough Council owns and maintains a large variety of open space, sport and outdoor recreational areas throughout the council area. This includes a number of playing fields such as those at Bangor Aurora and Londonderry Park, and tennis courts and bowling greens.

Amenity Green Space

These are landscaped areas providing visual amenity or separating different buildings or land uses including informal recreation spaces, communal green spaces in and around housing, and village greens, most commonly, but not exclusively in housing areas.



Equipped / Designated Play Areas

Throughout the Council area there are a number of children's outdoor play areas. The majority of these are located within the towns and villages and includes local playgrounds and equipped playgrounds. The overall provision and distribution of children's equipped play areas by ANDBC is assessed in the Play Strategy.

Green Corridors and Greenways

These open spaces include promenades and paths alongside rivers, disused railways, nature conservation areas, amenity footpaths and other routes. They provide opportunities for informal recreation, walking and cycling whilst also providing a valuable green corridor for wildlife. They include Greenways / active travel corridors (existing and proposed) that enable people to move safely between open spaces, to destinations in the urban areas and out to the countryside.

Natural and Semi-Natural Urban Green Spaces

Areas of undeveloped or previously developed land with residual natural habitats or which have been planted or colonised by vegetation and wildlife, including woodlands (including Community Woodlands), urban forestry, grasslands (e.g. meadows), wetlands, open and running water, rock areas (e.g. cliffs) and coastline main beaches.

Other Open Space

Allotments, community gardens and growing spaces, cemeteries and civic spaces are also included in the typology of open space but have not

been included in the Strategy assessment. ANDBC manages an allotment in Bangor; further community and privately managed allotments and a number of community gardens and orchards are also located in the Borough.

The countryside can provide a wide variety of recreational facilities to meet the increase in demand for outdoor recreation. The many natural resources in the area include: the Holywood Hills, Country Parks and forests provide a wealth of opportunities for outdoor pursuits and recreational activities including walking, cycling, orienteering, horse riding and climbing.

4.2 Main Beaches

The villages and beaches along Belfast Lough and the Irish Sea coastline of the Ards Peninsula are popular with visitors and local communities. There are many accessible sandy beaches, located besides the villages providing scenic places to enjoy a variety of recreational activities.



Ballywalter, Cloughey, Groomsport and Millisle beaches, along with Crawfordsburn beach were awarded the prestigious Seaside Award in 2020. The Seaside Award is the national standard for beaches across the UK. This programme ensures visitors of a clean, safe, attractive and well-managed beach with the facilities provided being appropriate for the location of the beach.



Helen's Bay was awarded a Green Coast Award in 2020 / 2021. The Green Coast Award is aimed particularly at rural beaches which do not qualify for other awards due to the lack of intensive management and development of facilities around the beach area. Bangor Marina was also awarded the internationally renowned Blue Flag for 2020.

Seapark Beach

Seapark beach is located in Holywood beside Seapark Recreation Ground, which is a multi-use seafront facility. It is the main recreational area, with a variety of activities including tennis courts, bowling green, putting green, sports pitches and children's play area. It is the start of the North Down Coastal Path, and there are a network of paths and beach access.

Helen's Bay & Crawfordsburn Beach

Helen's Bay is a popular sandy designated bathing water beach, located close to the village. The sands shelve gently into the sea, making it a good destination for summer bathing but this means it can get quite busy at peak times. The beach is adjacent to the Golf Club, and also to the popular Crawfordsburn County Park.



Ballyholme Beach, Bangor

Ballyholme is a sandy designated bathing water beach in a crescent-shaped bay in an eastern suburb of the town of Bangor. For most of its length, the beach is backed by a sea wall, with a walking promenade above it. There are extensive views of the surrounding hilly coastline and the town of Bangor. The Ballyholme Yacht Club is located at the western end of the beach.

Groomsport Beach

A small sandy designated bathing water beach, with a promenade and a range of facilities including: a children's play area, paddling pool, tennis courts and Cockle Row Cottages a small museum, and recreation activities. There is a car park next to the harbour and public toilets.

This accessible beach has a wheelchair ramp from the adjacent car park and slipways and bookable accessible equipment available at the weekends in July and August. The facilities include a Changing Places accessible toilet.

Donaghadee Beach

The village has developed around the harbour, with its lighthouse and seafront promenade. There is a boat yard, slipway, marina and small areas of rocky beaches. Commons Park extends southwards, with a series of paths, outdoor gym and a play area.

Ballyvester Beach

There is a small car park at Ballyvester, with beach access, located mid-way between Millisle and Donaghadee.

Portavogie Beach

Portavogie is a working fishing harbour, with associated warehouses and uses. There is a small beach to the south and a more extensive beach to the north of the village, which has been recently upgraded with car park, play area, outdoor gym, toilets and access to the beach.

Millisle Beach

To the east of the village is a small sandy designated bathing water beach, forming a seawater lagoon. A second beach is located further south. There is a jetty, slipways, car park and a children's play park.

Ballywalter Beach

There is a 3 km long sandy beach of designated bathing water to the south of the village, with public toilets, a children's play area, ramped access to the beach and a small harbour in the village. Access improvements to provide all abilities access to the beach have been installed.

Ballyhalbert Beach

The 1km long rocky and sandy beach is a good spot for fishing and walking. The village is small in size, with a holiday park at the north end of the bay.

Burr Point

Small Council owned harbour and slipway, at a distance from popular beaches, with a car park.

Cloughey Beach

Cloughey Beach is a long sandy designated bathing water beach with sand dunes. Access point for the East Coast Canoe Trail and popular with wind / kite surfing and water-skiing. Recent upgrades to the car park, toilets, paths along the dunes and waymarking. The Village Plan (2018) identified a lack of provision for water-based activities.

4.3 Recreation Activities

Ards and North Down is popular for a wide variety of outdoor recreation activities and water-based sports. The following section explores the activities that are enjoyed across the Borough in the parks, open spaces, beaches, harbours and countryside.

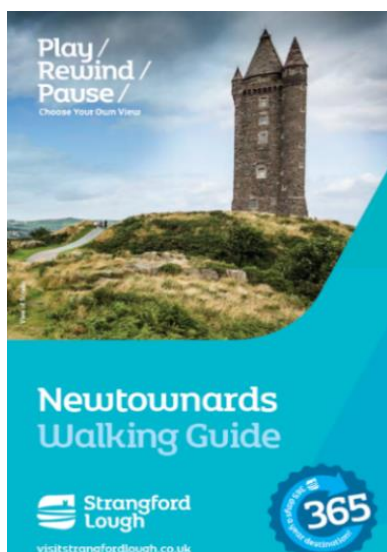
Walking (long distance and shorter local walks)

There are a variety of walking routes throughout the Borough, providing long distance routes along coastal paths and shorter walks for local recreation. Some settlements benefit from a network of paths connecting open spaces. For example, Bangor's parks, beaches and natural spaces are connected by the North Down Coastal Path, which extends from Holywood in the west to Orlock to the east.

The Ulster Way follows the eastern coast along the Ards Peninsula before cutting across to Portaferry on the shores of Strangford Lough. There is a regular ferry service between Portaferry and Strangford. The route mainly follows the busy A2 coast road with intermittent sections on quite rural roads and coastal paths.

The Mourne Coastal Path Feasibility Study identified the potential to develop a long-distance walking route along the Irish Sea Coast. Three quarters of settlements in Ards and North Down are located along its coast. There is opportunity to link places and points of interest, interpreting settlements along the route and developing visitor services, facilities and amenities at key locations. The route currently exists but is not an off-road walking route.

There are a number of walking guides for the larger settlements in the Borough, including Bangor, Comber and Newtownards providing routes and connections to and around the towns and villages.



Cycling (long distance routes and shorter journeys)

The Ards Peninsula is a popular location for road cycling, given its flat terrain and scenic landscapes, providing long distance routes along Greenways and the National Cycle Network (NCN) and shorter walks for local recreation.

NCN 99 route runs between Belfast and Newcastle, via Newtownards. The route takes in the outer Ards Peninsula, crosses on the ferry from Portaferry to Strangford and onward to Newcastle. In addition, the ability to complete a circular trip around the Lough on bike is a popular attraction with the National Cycle Network, providing a waymarked route (combination of route 20 and 99). The Comber Greenway is a long distance cycleway leading from the centre of Belfast to Comber along the line of the former railway.

Swimming (recreational and open water)

There are many wonderful and accessible sandy beaches and varied coastline, enjoyed by many for recreational and open water swimming. They provide special places for both local communities and visitors to enjoy of a variety of activities in spectacular locations. The favoured beaches for open water swimming include: Helen's Bay, Crawfordsburn, Ballyholme, Groomsport, Millisle, Ballywalter, Ballyhalbert, Portavogie and Cloughey.



Water Sports (kayaking, canoeing and paddle boarding (SUP), coastal rowing)

Kayakers and Canoeists have been enjoying the marine waters of Strangford Lough, Lecale and the Outer Ards Coastlines for generations. More recently, stand up paddle boarding (SUP) has become a popular water sport. Northern Ireland was the first country in Europe to develop official canoe trails. In addition to the Strangford Lough Canoe Trail, there is an East Coast Canoe Trail, between Cloughey, Knockinelder and Portaferry. Paddlers

require reasonably convenient access to the water. The Borough offers ample "wild" or informal access whether off beach or rocky shore. Facilities to make parking and access easy are often associated with towns, villages and recreational beaches linked to the sea.

In 2013 the SLLP, developed a vision for coastal rowing that would involve local communities in both the building and rowing of their own boats. There are nine coastal rowing clubs in the area, each with a hand-crafted boat built by members of the community. This initiative brought back to the area a long tradition of racing local rowing boats. Coastal rowing has developed at the following villages: Portaferry, Kircubbin, Ballywalter, Portavogie and Donaghadee. Further survey is required to review boat storage facilities and access points that can be used at all stages of the tide.

Sailing (Dinghy, Cruising & Motorised)

Boats powered by sail occur in many sizes, shapes and configurations of masts, sails and rigging. Both cruising and racing have been popular pastimes with a long history in the area. The activities associated with sailing are largely seasonal when the weather and the sea are more amenable, the Spring until early Autumn. The outer coastal area is important sail-cruising territory and hosts both dinghy and yacht sailing out of harbours, including Bangor, Holywood, Groomsport, Donaghadee, Ballywalter, Burr Point and Portavogie.



Coasteering, Diving & Snorkelling

Coasteering is a rock and water-based activity that involves elements of swimming, rock climbing and scrambling along a shoreline with participants then jumping from the rocks or cliffs into the water. Participants generally wear sturdy footwear, wetsuits, buoyancy aids and helmets. This activity takes place in organised groups.

Strangford Lough is well known as one of Northern Ireland's top diving destinations. The abundance and variety of its coastline and richness of biodiversity, geology, maritime archaeology and beauty prove to be an exciting and mysterious place for diving.



Power Boating

In the Borough there are a few thousand fixed moorings, which facilitate the mooring or tying up of craft to secure positions. These are usually associated with harbours and seaside towns and villages, for example at Bangor and Donaghadee. There are principal harbours which do offer combinations of "drying-out", tying up to harbour walls, pontoons and marinas. The best facilities are linked to the infrastructure of harbour towns and villages and Sailing Clubs which are numerous. Facilities include those for launching boats, parking of boats, wash down, repairs and a clubhouse.

While anecdotal evidence suggests that the number of jet skis within the study area is low, the impact of jet skis on the environment and especially during the bird nesting season has the potential to be high.

Figure 3 identifies the range of outdoor recreation activities that are enjoyed in the settlements along the coast. Activities at Strangford Lough are included in the 2018 Recreation Strategy.

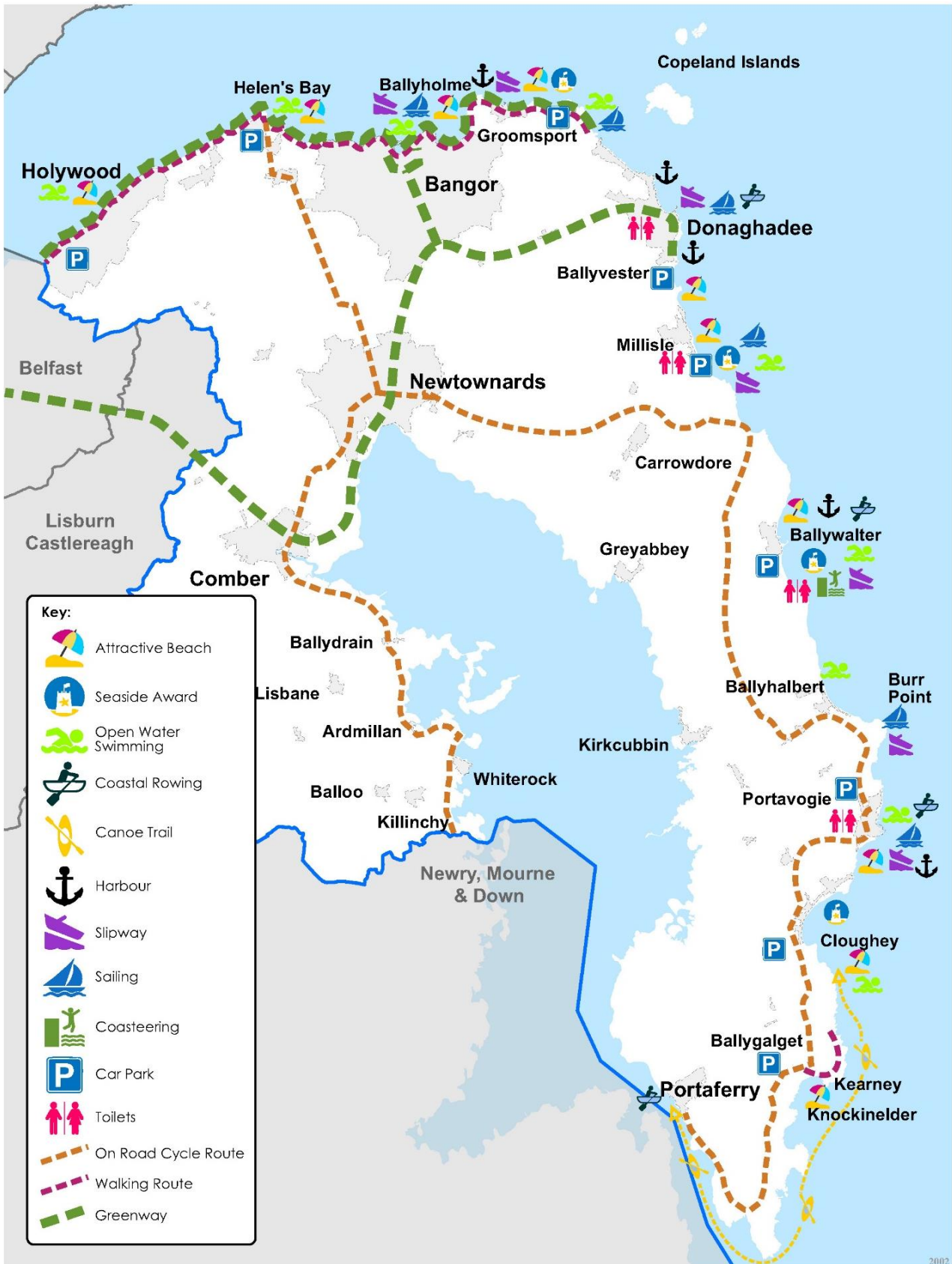


Figure 3: Outdoor Recreation (excluding Strangford Lough)

5.0 OPEN SPACE PROVISION

5.1 Open Space Standards

This section summarises the Borough’s current open space network, analysing the different types of open spaces, quality and distribution. Open space provision is measured against UK best practice standards creating usable outputs and the development of a tool for future open space management.

The results are captured in a database of open spaces, compiled using spatial data from the Open Space Audit, with additional information from ANDBC data for outdoor sports facilities and equipped play areas and teenager play provision.

5.2 Quantity and Type of Open Space

Open space may serve a range of functions and some areas, particularly informal spaces, may not fit neatly into the typology.

An appreciation of the hierarchy of open spaces can help councils to understand the different functions they perform and distinguish between spaces of strategic, local and neighbourhood importance. This should be tailored to fit local circumstances, and is usually most applicable to parks, greenspaces and woodland areas. Criteria linking population catchments to the size of different spaces and sensible distance or time thresholds can be included, helping to ensure that spaces of different types, functions and sizes are easily accessible to the communities they serve.

The classification or typology of open space, based on PPS8, represent the areas wide range of open spaces that are of public value. A typology of spaces can be useful in preparing open space strategies and in setting development plan policies. Each open space audit site has been assigned an identification reference, a name, location, typology and type, as set out in the table below. A GIS shape file has been prepared for the open spaces included in the audit, to which the site survey data will be attached. Each open space audit site has been allocated a typology.

Ards and North Down contains 980.38ha of publicly accessible outdoor recreation space. The following table sets out the amounts of the various types of open space included in the Open Space Audit.

Table 1: Open Space Quantity

Open Space Type	Sub-type	Area (ha)
Parks & Gardens	Country park/ Forest park	383.13
	Town park / Historic park	130.15
	Seaside park	24.17
	Neighbourhood park	36.93
	Local Park	40.93
Amenity Green Space	Amenity Green Space	25.84
Outdoor Sports Facilities	Private playing pitches	38.87
	Public playing pitches	51.76
	School playing pitches	26.10
	Other outdoor sports provision	7.93
	Golf courses	111.22
Equipped / Designated Play Area	Equipped / designated play areas	4.27
	Other children and teenager play provision	0.75
Green corridors	Green corridors and Greenways	13.95
Natural & Semi Natural Greenspace	Community Woodland, grasslands and woodlands	83.17
Allotments	Allotments and Community Gardens	0.61
Civic spaces	Town squares	0.60
Total Open Space		980.38

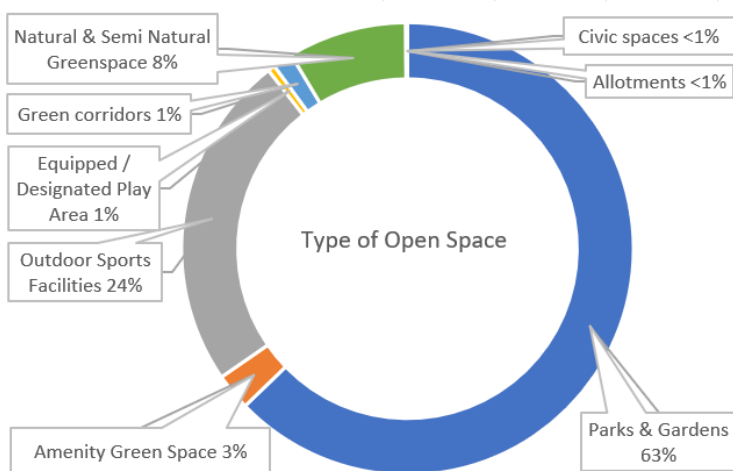


Chart 1: Illustrates the open spaces included in the 2021 Audit (see table 1)

The map below illustrates the provision of the various types of open space and the quality of provision in Comber. Maps for each of the settlements in Ards and North Down have been prepared.

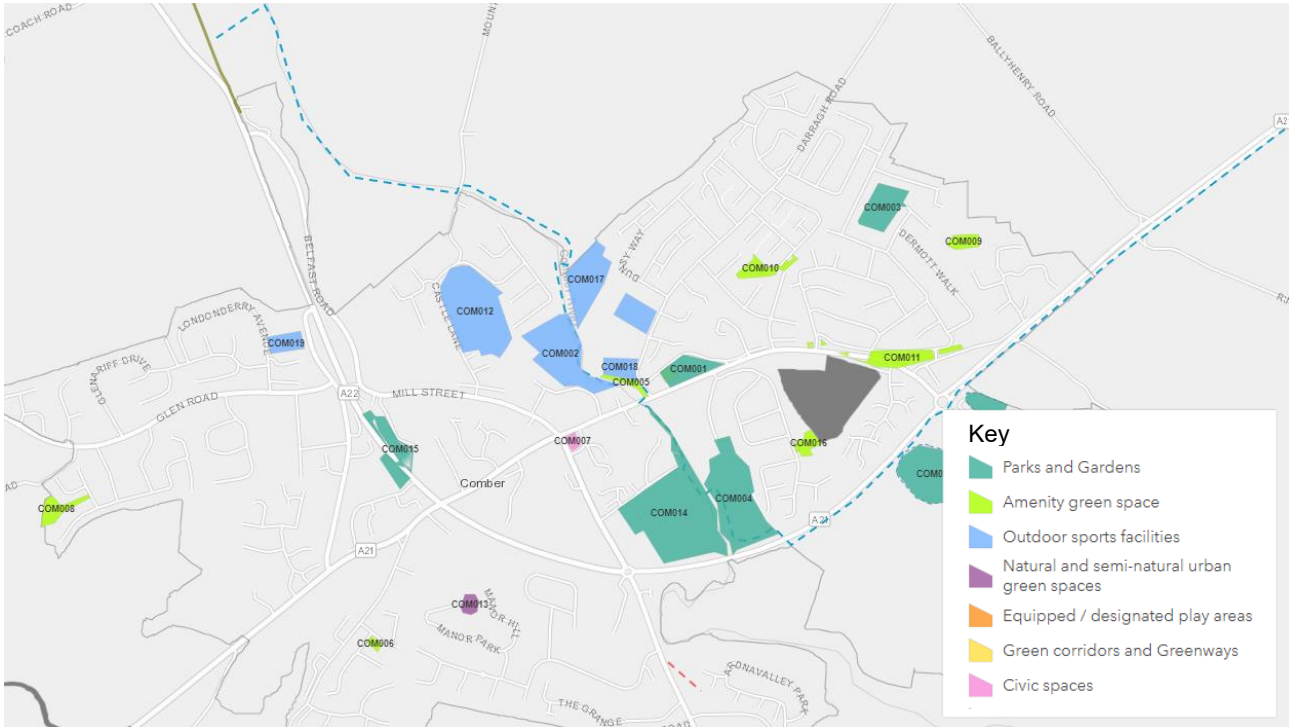


Figure 4: Open Space Types *Example*

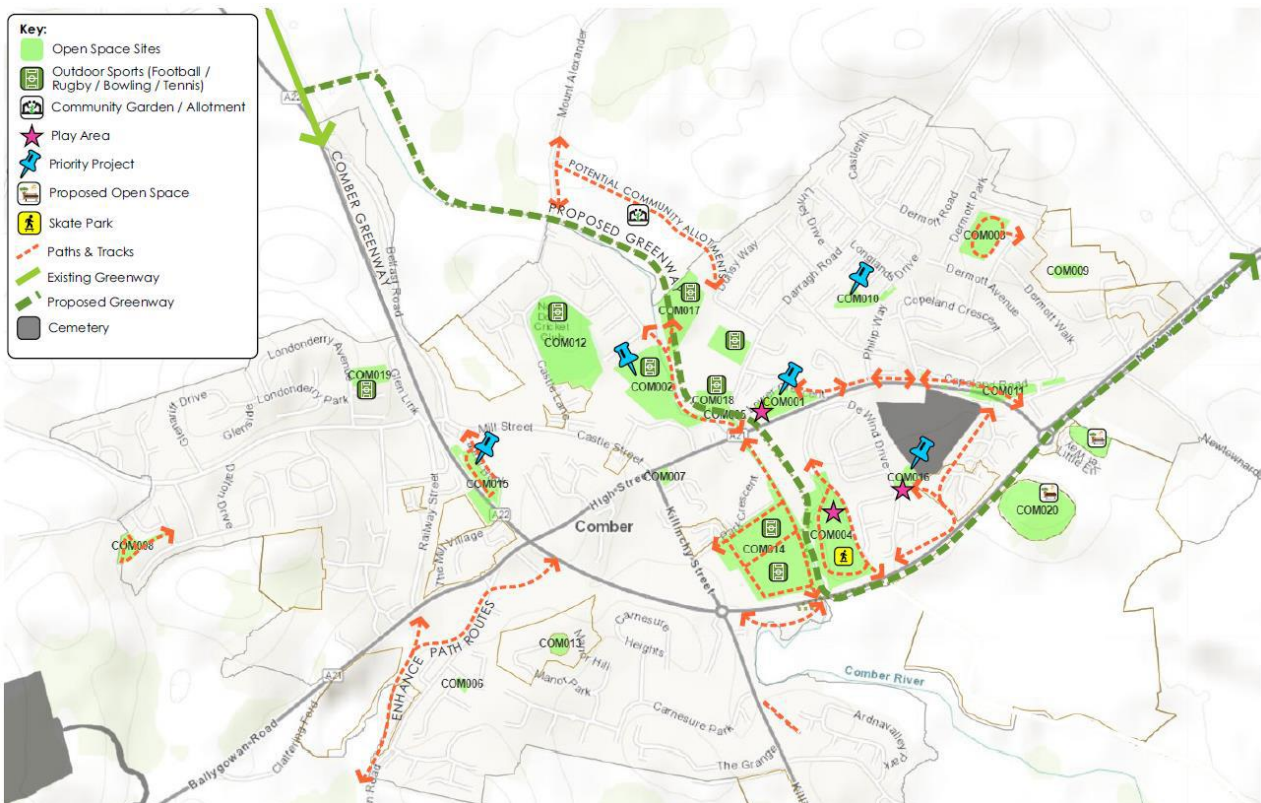


Figure 5: Open Space Concept Map *Example*

Fields in Trust Standards

The SPPS (para 6.209) sets out a policy aspiration to meet the Fields in Trust (formerly National Playing Fields Association) 'six-acre standard'.

In 2015, the Fields in Trust (FiT⁶) replaced the 'six-acre standard' with more comprehensive metrics for open space typologies. The total amount of the various types of open space included in the FiT standard have been quantified. The audit focussed on ANDBC owned and managed open space included in the ANDBC open space database. A calculation of the amount of open space per 1,000 people was calculated, with the results set out in the table below.

Table 2: ANDBC Open Space Provision

FiT Category	FiT Standard per 1000 people (ha)	AND Total (ha)	AND per 1000 people (ha)⁷
Parks and gardens	0.8	615.31	3.89
Amenity green space	0.6	25.84	0.16
All pitches (excluding schools)	1.2	90.63	0.57
Other outdoor sports	0.4	7.93	0.05
Equipped play areas	0.25	4.27	0.03
Other outdoor provision (MUGAs, skateboard parks)	0.3	0.75	0.004
Natural and semi natural greenspace (including Green Corridors)	1.8	97.12	0.61
TOTAL	5.35 ha	841.85 ha	5.32 ha

(Source data ANDBC)

When assessed against the FiT standards, the audit identified that the total open space in the Ards and North Down area almost meets the standards. The ANDBC quantity standards requires there to be 5.35 hectares of open space per 1,000 people and the AND figure is 5.32, a marginal deficit of 0.03 hectares of open space per 1,000 people.

However, this will be offset by a number of privately owned areas of open space (playing fields in sports clubs and the education sector and grassland areas, glens, parks, walkways and amenity green

space located within areas of housing) and the natural resources in the area, such as access to beaches for those communities close to the coast and Strangford Lough.

The Borough has a number of easily accessible beaches including Seapark Holywood, Ballyholme Bangor, Groomsport, Millisle, Ballywalter and Cloughey. There are also beaches at Helen's Bay and Crawfordsburn which fall within Crawfordsburn Country Park. These open spaces have not been captured in the open space audit database but are publicly accessible and provide a wealth of opportunities for active outdoor pursuits such as walking, sailing, angling, cycling swimming, kayaking, and stand up paddle boarding.

Informal recreation facilities also exist in association with the natural resources of the area such as rivers, canals, lakes, heritage sites, and disused railway tracks. Opportunities for cultural recreation are provided at places like Mount Stewart, as well as a number of historic monuments.

When the open space owned and managed by ANDBC is considered, the settlements of Ballywalter, Cloughey, Crawfordsburn, Holywood, Newtownards, Portaferry and Seahill meet the FiT standards. However, the larger settlements including Bangor, Comber, Donaghadee, Groomsport, Helen's Bay and Portavogie do not meet the standard. However, many of the towns and villages are located close to beaches, Country Parks, privately owned open space or areas of accessible countryside and woodland, which have not been included in the quantitative assessment.

(Refer to the Technical Report for more information.)

⁶ <http://www.fieldsintrust.org>

⁷ Population of the Borough approximately 160,900 people (NISRA 2018 Mid Year Population Estimates)

5.3 Quality of Open Space

It is not only important to know how much open space there is in the Borough, but also to understand the quality of that open space. Quality is a key component of open space. Open spaces need to be of a good quality to provide communities a level of service and functional provision to meet informal leisure and recreational needs.

The quality assessment was based on the recommendations included in the “Greenspace Quality: A Guide to Assessment, Planning and Strategic Development”⁸.

The Borough’s towns and villages currently enjoy mostly good provision of open space, ranging from a wide range of well equipped parks and gardens, sports facilities, woodlands and green corridors associated with coastal paths and cycleways. Communities are well connected to the many easily accessible beaches along the coast, play areas and attractive Country Parks.

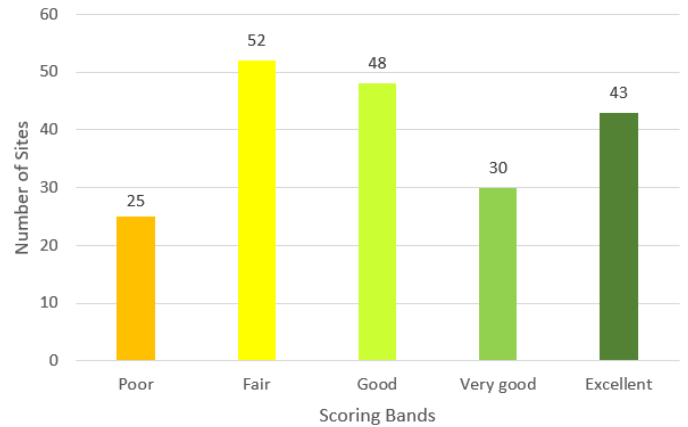


The larger towns of Bangor, Newtownards and Comber provide good quality open spaces. The villages of Ballyhalbert, Cloughey, Crawfordsburn, Helen’s Bay, Killinchy, Kircubbin, Millisle and Seahill, and the small settlement of Craigantlet, have access to very good quality open space. The settlements of Ballywalter, Donaghadee, Groomsport, Holywood, Portaferry and Portavogie

⁸ Greenspace Quality: A Guide to Assessment, Planning and Strategic Development” (2008), Greenspace Scotland

have access to good quality open spaces.

The graph demonstrates that the majority of open spaces included in the open space audit scored 50% and above, with only 25 in a “poor condition”.



There is opportunity to improve the quality of these sites, and to improve the quality of some of the lower quality parks and amenity greenspaces.

Chart 2: Quality Assessment

Chart 2 summarises the number of sites in each of the quality bands. 37% of the sites scored over 70% (73 out of 198 sites). The average quality score was 64%. The quality scores ranged from 36% (Dam Bottom Nature Reserve, Newtownards) to the highest score of 93% (Bangor Castle & Valentine Playing Fields), with the majority of sites scoring in the 50s, 60s and 80s.

Calculating an average quality score for each settlement can give an indication of overall quality of open space in a settlement. Ballystockart, Ballydrain, Lisbane and Carrowdore have the lowest average quality scores. Craigantlet, Crawfordsburn, Millisle and Helen’s Bay have the highest average quality scores.

The settlements with the lower scoring sites have been considered in more detail to identify which sites could be improved. A summary of the analysis of the audit findings is contained in Appendix 1 of the Technical Report.



5.4 Open Space Accessibility

Ards and North Down is fortunate to have within its boundaries a wide variety of parks, open spaces and beaches, which encourage and facilitate healthy lifestyles by promoting opportunities for outdoor leisure, social interaction and recreation.

The provision of easily accessible open spaces close to where we live is vital to encouraging healthier lifestyles and mental wellbeing. Good quality open spaces provide a resource that addresses daily needs, supports access by walking, cycling, horse riding and public transport, supports unsupervised use with safe accessibility and promotes informal recreation and exercise (dog walking, health walking or general passive use).

The impacts of greenspace on health and on wider quality of life has been widely researched and demonstrates that having greenspace within a 5 minute walk of home is a strong indicator for health and quality of life benefits. 0.5 hectares is big enough for a ‘kick about’ pitch or other informal play. A five minute walk is widely considered to equate to a distance of 400 metres ‘door to space’.

The aim of the Council is to ensure easy access to open space for all residents of the Borough, particularly children, older people and people with disabilities.

The open spaces included in the Audit were mapped and the following accessibility standards applied:

Table 3: Open Space Accessibility Standards

Open Space Type	Accessibility Standard
Country Park / Forest Park	1.5km walking catchment* (approx. 18 min walk)
Town Park / Historic Park	1.5km walking catchment* (approx. 18 min walk)
Neighbourhood Park / Seaside Park	1000m walking catchment* (approx. 12min walk)
Local Park	600m walking catchment* (approx. 7.5 min walk)

* Straight line distance

The Country Park/Forest Parks, Town Park/Historic Parks, Neighbourhood Park/Seaside Parks and Local Parks were mapped and the accessibility standards applied, with the catchments drawn to illustrate the accessibility of the communities to the various types of open space. The Technical Report provides a detailed assessment of the open space resource for each of the larger settlements included in the open space audit.

An example of the mapping is included below.

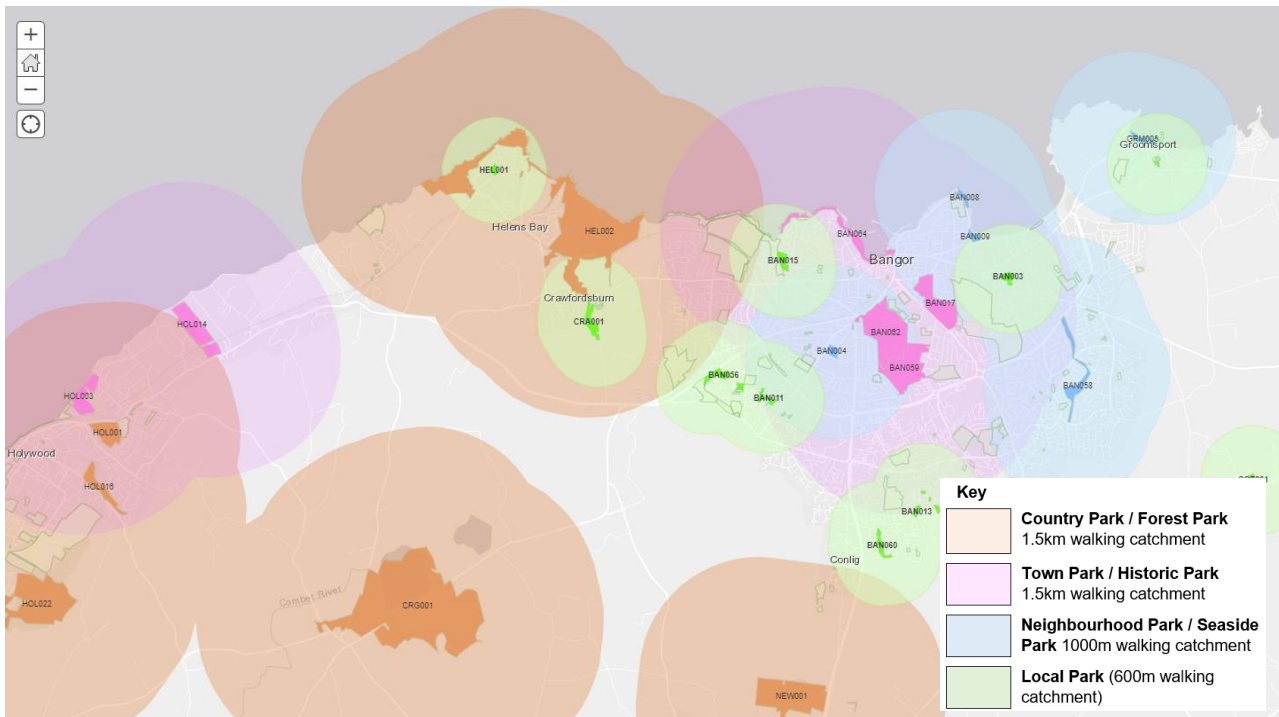


Figure 6: Open Space Accessibility Map Example

The accessibility assessment concluded the following:

Ballygowan - Does not meet the standard

There is only 1 local park in Ballygowan and residential areas in the western fringes of the village are not within 600m of the park.

Ballyhalbert - Does not meet the standard

There are no parks in Ballyhalbert, but there is a play area in the High Street. However, there is good access to the beach, which provides a linear open space along the eastern edge of the village.

Ballywalter - Meets the standard

Ballywalter contains 2 Seaside Parks and a local park, which provide access to the majority of the residential areas and access to Ballywalter beach.



Ballywalter Beach

Bangor - Meets the standard

Bangor is well provided for with regards to access to a range of parks (Town Parks / Historic Parks, Seaside Parks, Neighbourhood Parks, Local Parks and Community Woodlands) and benefits from access to the waterfront, beaches and recreation / play facilities to the north. Much of the residential area enjoys easy access to the facilities at Bangor Castle & Valentine Playing Fields. The residential areas to the west of the town are within easy access of Crawfordsburn Country Park. There is a well distributed hierarchy of smaller parks, play facilities and open spaces throughout the urban area.

Carrowdore - Does not meet the standard

The small village of Carrowdore does not contain a park, but there is an amenity greenspace at Castle Place, a community woodland and a play area.

Cloughey - Meets the standard

Cloughey contains 2 Seaside Parks, which provide access to the majority of the residential areas. Residents also have access to Cloughey Bay beach.

Comber - Meets the standard

There are 3 Neighbourhood Parks in the centre of Comber and 4 local parks located in the surrounding residential areas. The majority of residential areas are within easy access of the park resource, apart from a small area of residential streets on the western periphery of the town. However, the busy A22 road provides a barrier to accessing Laurelbank Park. Access to open space in the residential areas to the west of the A22 should be improved.



Comber Square

Crawfordsburn - Meets the standard

The village of Crawfordsburn contains a well equipped local park and has easy access to Crawfordsburn Country Park, and the beach.

Donaghadee - Meets the standard

Donaghadee is well provided for with regards to park provision, with The Commons Town Park, Moat Historic Park and 3 Neighbourhood Parks, providing a wide range of facilities for local people and visitors. The area also benefits from access to the beach and associated recreation / play facilities.

Greyabbey - Meets the standard

Greyabbey contains 2 Local Parks, which are easily accessed from all parts of the village. There is also access to Strangford Lough.



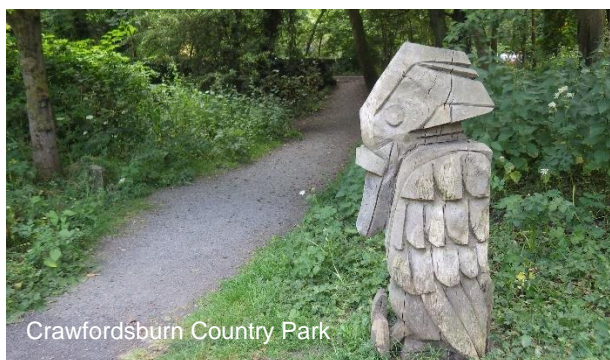
Groomsport - Meets the standard

The village of Groomsport has a Seaside Park and

a Local Park, which provides access to the majority of residential areas. There is an area on the eastern periphery of the village that is more than 1000m from the Seaside Park. However, the village benefits from access to Groomsport beach.

Helen's Bay - Meets the standard

Helen's Bay is located close to Crawfordsburn Country Park, which contains over 100 ha of open space, providing a range of facilities and access to Helen's Bay beach. The North Down coastal path, access to the waterfront and other pockets of semi-natural open space provide a range of recreation opportunities for the residents of Helen's Bay.



Crawfordsburn Country Park

Holywood - Meets the standard

Holywood contains 2 Forest Parks, 2 Town / Historic Parks and Redburn Country Park. Seapark Recreational Grounds, and the associated sports facilities, provide a well used recreational resource, located along the North Down coastal path. Access to the waterfront along the length of the settlement and other pockets of semi-natural open space provide a range of recreation opportunities.

Killinchy - Meets the standard

Killinchy contains a Local Park, which is located within easy access of the village residential areas.

Kircubbin - Meets the standard

Kircubbin contains a Seaside Park, which is located within easy access of the village residential areas.



The Green, Kircubbin

Lisbane - Meets the standard

Lisbane contains a Local Park, which is located within easy access of the village residential areas.

Millisle - Meets the standard

Millisle village has a Seaside Park, which is located with easy access to the residential areas. Its location besides Millisle beach provides a range of recreation opportunities and a draw for visitors to the village.

Newtownards - Meets the standard

Newtownards is well provided for with regards to access to a range of parks (Town Parks, Town Squares, Neighbourhood Parks, Local Parks and Community Woodlands). The residential areas to the north and west of the town are within easy access of Whitespots and Scrabo Country Parks. There is a well distributed range of local parks, play facilities and open spaces throughout the town.

Portaferry - Meets the standard

Portaferry contains 2 local parks and 1 Town Park, which provide a range of recreation opportunities. The town is also located adjacent to an area of woodland walks (Nugents Wood) and enjoys fine views across Strangford Lough from the seafront. There is also access to walks along Rope Walk.

Portavogie - Meets the standard

Portavogie contains a Local Park, a Neighbourhood Park and a Seaside Park, which provide a range of recreational activities. The parks are located within easy access of the village residential areas.

Seahill - Meets the standard

The small residential settlement of Seahill does not contain any parks but contains a small area of amenity open space besides the primary school. However, there is a large area of Coastal Parkland and access to the waterfront and the North Down coastal path. The settlement is within the catchment of Crawfordsburn Country Park, which contains over 100 ha of open space, providing a range of facilities.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Enablers & Barriers to Outdoor Recreation

There are a number of well-known factors that act as enablers or barriers to starting and sustaining participation in outdoor recreation activities. Generally, these are the things that make it easier or more difficult for people to start or continue participation in an activity.

A recent study in Scotland has identified the following barriers to participation in recreation⁹:

- Easy access to good quality facilities and availability of facilities, were perceived as major factors affecting participation
- Physical infrastructure, such as paths, toilets, parking and other facilities
- Activity-specific provision, for example cycling and sports facilities
- Childhood experiences of outdoor recreation and cultural background are important in establishing behaviours
- Social / cultural norms
- Social contact can be a key motivating factor for starting and / or maintaining participation in outdoor activities
- Being able to access information about places to go and about potential activities
- Affordability / access to transport / equipment
- Available leisure time
- Weather and daylight

Overcoming these barriers is key to widening and increasing participation in outdoor recreation activities.



Nugents Wood, Portaferry

6.2 Delivery of Strategic Principles

To ensure that ANDBC open spaces are fit for the future, the following headline actions have been agreed to deliver the Open Space Strategy Vision, and will be reviewed on a regular basis:

1. Protect and enhance open space recognising its role in improving people's mental and physical health and promoting active lifestyles

- Develop leisure infrastructure and services such as greenways, blueways, parks and open spaces, working with Partners to increase community involvement and opportunities for participation in sport and outdoor recreation.
- Develop more Community Greenways and improve links between parks and natural areas to provide networks of connected pedestrian and cycle routes.
- Work to educate our children, and grow capacity within our communities, by encouraging responsible and active participation with the environment.
- Establish an outdoor learning partnership to promote the value of the environment through education initiatives.
- Promote access to a well preserved historic environment, which will encourage tourism and increase the quality of life communities.
- Support community gardens and allotments.

2. Provide high quality, well-managed, clean and safe open spaces close to where people live, that meet the needs of people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds

- Provide high quality, clean and safe public spaces for all ages and abilities, including addressing the specific needs of older people and access for all abilities, where possible.
- Enrich people's enjoyment of the natural and historic environment by increasing access to open spaces, by promoting responsible recreation and facilitating community ownership.
- Ensure that children have safe access to good-quality, well-designed, secure and stimulating play and informal recreation

⁹ Outdoor Recreation: Understanding the Drivers of Participation, Scottish Government 2021

provision.

- Continue to invest in new open space provision and promote public realm, accessible beaches, parks and blue green routes and services across the area, addressing any quantity / quality deficiencies.
- Ensure the development of existing and new open spaces applies good design principles to create safe, well lit spaces, which have good levels of natural surveillance and linkages
- Ensure that, where appropriate, all development masterplans include the creation of high quality new open space / enhancement of existing open space, and access improvements (e.g. LDP zonings, Council masterplans and masterplans submitted with planning applications).

3. Increase opportunities for people to be active by investing in open spaces, outdoor recreation facilities and better connected active travel networks

- Continue to provide a network of diverse, well managed and resourced open spaces that offer a wide range of opportunities for sport and outdoor recreation (water sports, cycling, walking, running, active play etc.)
- Provide infrastructure and facilities at key recreation locations to direct activities to specific sites to manage the varied recreational uses, promoting safe and responsible enjoyment of the ANDBC coastline.
- Explore better linkages between communities and the large areas of open space within the countryside (e.g. country parks, access to the coast and Strangford Lough.)
- Improve the legibility of open spaces which support walking, cycling and wheeling as a means of getting around, through the provision of networks of high quality paths and infrastructure (e.g. path surface, lighting, signage and street furniture).
- Encourage sustainable economic growth of recreation and tourist businesses and promote involvement in recreation management.

4. Protect and enhance the natural environment, helping to improve climate resilience and help create a more sustainable environment

- Improve the biodiversity of parks and green spaces including the promotion of tree planting and wildlife habitat improvement projects, helping meet the objectives of the LBAP and the Tree and Woodland Strategy.
- Work with Partners to understand the impacts of climate change and find solutions for mitigation and adaptation measures.
- Create a connected green infrastructure that protects and enhances biodiversity while also enabling people to benefit from access to well maintained green spaces.
- Promote and support community-based environmental initiatives, for example the management of open spaces by working with community groups (e.g. Friends' groups) and supporting communities to increase their resilience to adapt to climate change and other emergencies.
- Review the management of protected areas of the coastline to ensure that recreational activities avoid adverse impacts on the special landscape qualities of the Borough.
- Support nature recovery, where habitat area, habitat quality and connectivity between places are protected and enhanced.
- Work with Northern Ireland Water's 'Living with Water Programme' (LwWP) to identify opportunities to manage drainage and reduce flood risk, for example through SuDS schemes.

7.0 ACTION PLAN

7.1 Introduction

One of the key barriers to outdoor recreation is the lack of easy access to good quality facilities and availability of facilities, which in turn affects the levels of participation. The Open Space and Outdoor Recreation Strategy has involved a review of the current open space facilities in the Borough.

The following sections sets out the action plan for the consolidation and improvement of existing facilities in each of the urban and coastal settlements.

7.2 The Open Space Action Plan

The settlement summaries contained in the Technical Report contain recommendations that have been identified from the Open Space Audit Mapping and Assessment. Concept Plans have been prepared for each of the major settlements, identifying key priorities and projects.

The following table contains recommendations that have been identified from the Open Space Audit Mapping and Assessment and from the consultation with stakeholders and ANDBC Officers:

Table 4: Priority Open Space Action Plan AND Borough Council (plus partners) led projects

Ref.	Site Name	Location	Action
BALG003	Ballygowan Playground	Ballygowan	Improve landscape quality of the site, community space / gardens, information boards / interpretation.
BALH002	High Street	Ballyhalbert	Opportunity to upgrade as per Play Strategy
Footway	Seafront	Ballyhalbert	Widen footway to provide better access along seafront.
BAL003	Harbour and Seafront Development	Ballywalter	Improve landscape quality of the site and access to the site.
BAN002	Ballykillaire Sports Complex	Bangor	Site investigations and works to resolve ground condition.
BAN003	Brice Park Play Ground	Bangor	Improve landscape quality of the site, seating areas and potential for animation of space to encourage natural and/or informal play.
BAN008	Kingsland Tourist	Bangor	Regeneration of the site to provide attractive civic spaces, landscape planting and a seating area.
BAN009	Ballyholme Park	Bangor	Improvements might include: amenity planting, sculptural elements / informal play structures, interpretation and upgraded path network.
CAR001	Castle Place	Carrowdore	Improve landscape quality of the site and path upgrade.
CLO002	The Warren	Cloughey	Improve access across the dunes. Ecological survey.
CLO003	Main Road Children's Play area	Cloughey	Opportunity to upgrade and consider older children provision as per Play Strategy.
COM001	Lower Crescent	Comber	Improve landscape quality of the site and path upgrade.
COM002	Enler Park / Comber Leisure Centre	Comber	Improved access to and around the site, incorporating the proposed greenway. Landscape improvements.
COM015	Laurel Bank Park	Comber	Consultation with the community to establish if there is a need for a park in this location. Improvements: landscape upgrades, seating, paths, entrances and pond works.
COM016	Cherryvalley Drive	Comber	Improve landscape quality of the site, seating areas and potential for animation of space to encourage natural and/or informal play.
DON002	Crommellin Park	Donaghadee	Potential for animation of space to encourage natural and/or informal play / an education resource for the community.

DON003	Dorman's Isle	Donaghadee	Improve the active travel links to the sea front. Refer to Commons Park Masterplan for the concept proposals.
DON005	Hunt's Park and Railway Embankment	Donaghadee	Landscape improvements, seating and better access along the former railway line, providing seafront access.
DON007	The Commons	Donaghadee	Create a high quality coastal park hub for leisure and recreation. Refer to Commons Park Masterplan for the concept proposals.
GRY001	Islandview	Greyabbey	Improve path connections to the site.
GRM005	Groomsport Main Street	Groomsport	Potential to upgrade as per Play Strategy, signage, interpretation, connections to the coastal paths and a trim trail along the seafront.
HOL001	Ballymenoch Park	Holywood	Additional entrances, walking/cycling trail around the park, benches along the path route and potential for animation of space to encourage natural and/or informal play.
HOL016	Glenlyon Park	Holywood	Additional entrances, walking/cycling trail around the park, benches along the path route and areas of natural play / sculptural seating areas.
KIR003	Kircubbin Promenade	Kircubbin	Potential to upgrade as per Play Strategy and improvements to public realm areas along the sea frontage (paving, picnic areas, wind break planting, landscaping, lighting, entrance features, signage, trim trail and bike parking)
MIL002	Ballywalter Road Recreational Grounds	Millisle	Improved entrances, art works, signage, landscape upgrades and better path connections.
NEW001	Whitespots Country Park	Newtownards	There is aspiration for significant investment and upgrade of the park, involving: landscaping, new trails, new visitor hub, viewing tower, restoration of historic chimney stacks, interpretation of World War 1 and mining heritage, adventure playground and pump track.
NEW006	Glenford Park	Newtownards	Upgrade following development of the Park & Ride site, improved entrances, seating, landscaping and better access paths etc.
NEW017	West Winds	Newtownards	Improve the overall appearance of the site through attractive landscape planting and seating area.
NEW020	Abbot Gardens	Newtownards	Additional entrances, better path connections, benches and potential for animation of space to encourage natural and/or informal play.
POR001	Coach Road Football Field & Open Space	Portaferry	Improve the overall quality of the park, including path routes, improved seating, attractive landscape planting and potential for animation of space to encourage natural and/or informal play.
POR003	Castle Park	Portaferry	A masterplan should be developed, in consultation with the community, to review the potential uses of the site. New playground currently being installed.
POR006	Laurelbank Park	Portaferry	Review the future use of the site, which might include a community garden or seating area.
PTV003	New Harbour Road	Portavogie	Improve landscape quality of the site and path upgrade.
PTV004	Anchor Car Park and Promenade	Portavogie	Provide better accessible paths from the car park to the beach.

7.3 Opportunities for Outdoor Recreation

The many open spaces and beaches located along the Ards and North Down coastline attract high numbers of local people and holiday makers to the area during the summer months. These areas also benefit from a range of facilities including car parks, public toilets, slipways or harbours and easily accessible beaches. Many of the existing facilities are Council owned and managed facilities.

The activities which have the greatest potential for future development are a combination of informal recreation, for example walking, coastal swimming, beach activities and cycling. These activities are typically low cost, don't require specialist equipment, can be enjoyed by people of all ages and abilities, and bring significant health benefits. These activities have the potential to impact on the greatest number of people including local communities, day visitors and tourists.

More formal water-based recreation activities include sailing, kayaking, coasteering, diving & snorkelling, canoeing, coastal rowing and paddle boarding. These activities require a range of facilities that enable access to the water, including: car parks, slipways, harbours or shallow access to the water's edge.

Multi-Functional Coastal Locations

Outdoor recreation provision along the coastline of Ards and North Down could be characterised by multi-functional coastal locations. These locations could have a range of facilities, appropriate to the coastal characteristics and opportunities for outdoor recreation.

The multi-functional coastal locations could:

- Offer a variety of both outdoor activities and support visitor services (café toilets, changing facilities, external showers, parking etc.) in one place.
- Be linked by a network of high quality paths
- Encourage both active (e.g. sport, walking, cycling) and informal recreation (e.g. play)
- Provide opportunities for inclusive (free or low-cost) and participatory activities
- Ensure that the facilities are accessible (e.g. walking / wheel chair ramps to the beach)
- Provide adequate facilities (e.g. toilets, car parking, showers), where appropriate
- Ensure that car parks and on-street parking does not dominate the waterfront

- Be good for tourism and local businesses (e.g. water sport providers, shops and cafes)

Future planning and Investment

More work is needed to assess the outdoor recreational resource to survey the current modes of activity and the levels of use. Management of the recreational resource will help distribute the numbers of visitors to those areas with adequate and appropriate facilities, and away from the protected areas of the coastline. Parking management / signage will also help reduce the pressure on local residential roads in some areas experiencing high levels of day-visitor parking during peak holiday periods. An Active Travel Plan and improvements to the active travel network will encourage and promote access to the most popular beaches and coastal locations on foot or by bicycle.

The improvement of access to beaches and provision of appropriate facilities will help the Council achieve more Seaside Awards. There is potential to seek to win a range of UK nationally recognised awards for the Borough's beaches, including Blue Flag Awards, Seaside Awards or the Green Coast Award. The Green Coast Award is aimed particularly at rural beaches which do not qualify for other awards due to the lack of intensive management and development of facilities around the beach area.

Investment in Blueways infrastructure, such as harbours, pontoons and slipways, should be accompanied by clear identification and promotion of routes for safe leisure use, as well as programmes to ensure inclusive access for all in the Borough. A detailed survey of the coastal open spaces and beaches should be undertaken to determine future needs assessment / costs / feasibility of provision of specialised structures / facilities in these coastal locations.

Development proposals should always seek to conserve, protect and where possible, enhance the natural environment and biodiversity. A precautionary approach must be adopted when considering the potential impacts on internationally or nationally significant landscape or natural heritage resources and protected species.

The undeveloped coast must be protected from inappropriate development that would cause harm to its visual amenity and natural and historic assets. Appropriate sustainable development may be acceptable in locations that are not at risk from coastal change (erosion, landslip and inundation).

Figure 7 and table 5 below illustrates the strategic recommendations for outdoor recreation that have emerged from the Strategy.

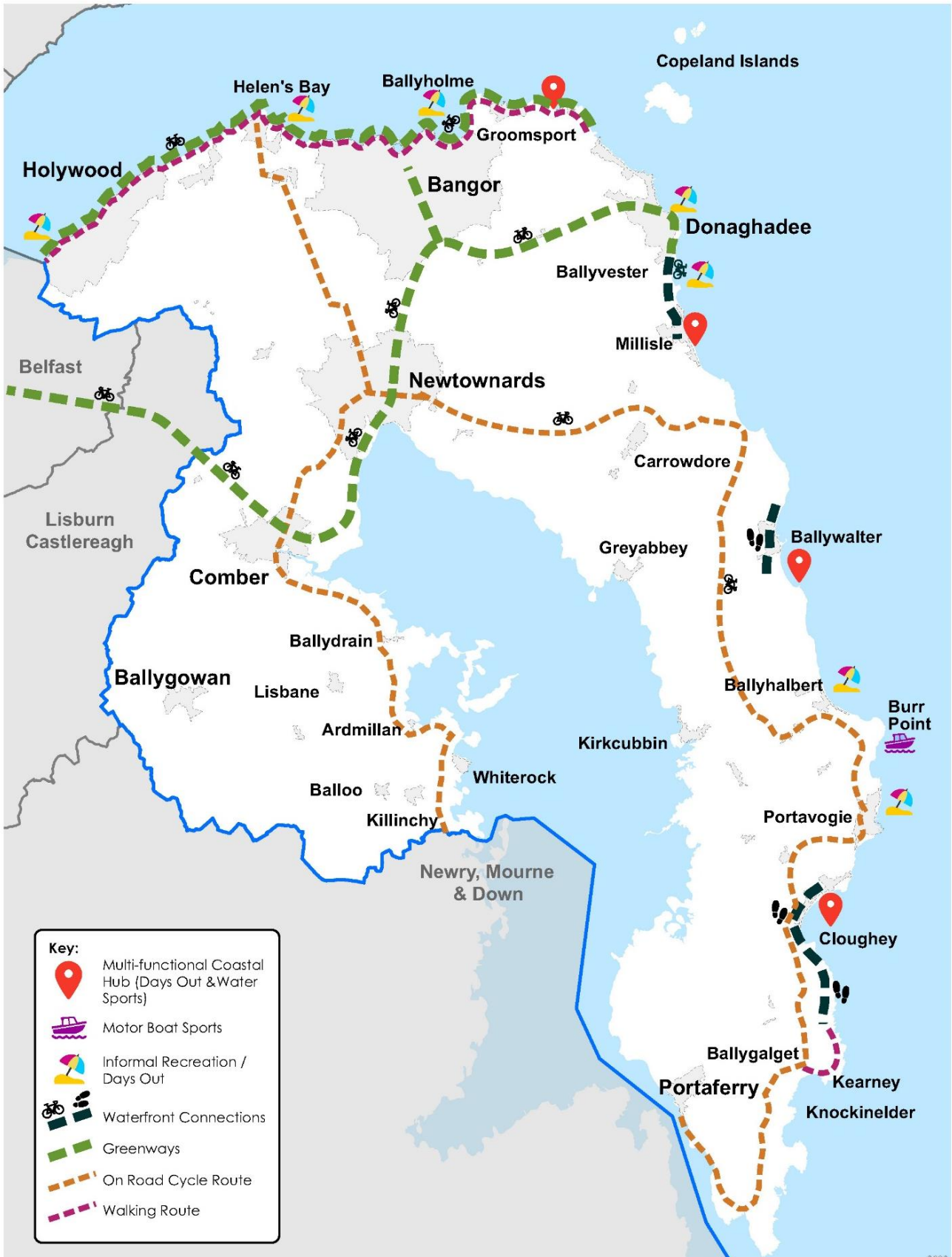


Figure 7: Coastal Recreation Opportunities Map (excluding Strangford Lough)

The following table and Figure 7 above identify the recommendations that have emerged from the Strategy. The harbours / beaches of the following villages are proposed as Groomspoint, Millisle, Ballywalter and Cloughey are proposed as multi-functional coastal locations.

Table 5: Coastal Recreation Opportunities

Location	Action
Hollywood Beach	Provide signage and interpretation and active travel trails to encourage visitors and local people to use the long distance path and the coastal promenade for short local journeys.
Helen's Bay & Crawfordsburn Beach	Provide signage and interpretation and active travel trails to encourage visitors and local people to use the long distance path and the coastal promenade for short local journeys.
Ballyholme Beach, Bangor	Upgrade the path connections in conjunction with the wider Bangor Waterfront redevelopment, which will improve the connections between Ballyholme Bay and Bangor town centre.
Groomspoint Beach	Multi-functional coastal location Upgrade the walking and cycling routes along the sea front, connecting the open spaces and recreation uses along the seafront. Promote as a location for a range of formal water sports and informal beach activity and family day visits from Bangor and the surrounding areas. Provision of outdoor showers and taps. There is opportunity to explore the path routes along the seafront, from the harbour to the holiday park to the west of the village, with links to the adjacent streets. Potential candidate for a Blue Flag award.
Donaghadee Beach	Provide signage from Millisle and Donaghadee to encourage the communities to choose active travel modes to travel between Donaghadee, Ballyvester beach and Millisle. Promote as a location for sailing, cycling and walking and family day visits. Connect the path links from Donaghadee seafront, south across The Commons and onward to Ballyvester beach and Millisle. Explore connections to the proposed Greenway.
Ballyvester Beach	Provide signage from Millisle and Donaghadee to encourage the communities to choose active travel modes to travel between Donaghadee, Ballyvester beach and Millisle. Encourage the use of the roadside pavement as a multi-functional active travel route.
Millisle Beach	Multi-functional coastal location Promote as a location for a range of formal water sports and informal beach activity and family day visits. Upgrade the public realm areas along the seafront, the paths, car park areas and beach access areas with high quality materials, furniture, signage and lighting. Provision of outdoor showers and taps. There is opportunity to explore creation of circular path routes around the village and to Ballycopeland Windmill to the west. Create better connections between the various facilities and open spaces along the sea front through a series of public realm projects. Potential candidate for a Blue Flag award.
Ballywalter Beach	Multi-functional coastal location Promote as a location for a range of formal water sports and informal beach activity and family day visits. Provision of outdoor showers and taps. Explore opportunities to extend the seaside path northwards to Whitechurch and the holiday park (along narrow strip of land to the east of the wall along Whitechurch Rd). Better connect sections of existing path along the seafront and sign post. Potential candidate for a Blue Flag award.
Ballyhalbert Beach	Promote for informal recreation along the seafront. There is opportunity to explore creation of circular path routes around the village, connecting the dispersed residential areas.
Burr Point	Permits to control access to stretches of water with conflicting water based activities are in place. The facility is at a distance from the nearest village and has a car park for boat users.
Portavogie Beach	Promote as a location for informal beach activity and family day visits. There is a recently upgraded path along the seashore. Upgrade the access to south / east beach.
Cloughey Beach	Multi-functional coastal location Promote for paddle sports, surfing, wind / kite surfing and canoe trail. Improvements to bring the beach up to the Blue Flag standard, including outdoor shower / tap at the WC. Promote as a location for informal beach activity and family day visits. Extend the paths along the length of the bay, connecting the holiday parks, open spaces, play areas and providing a longer distance local walking/cycle path. Explore opportunities to extend the coastal path from Cloughey to the south of the village.

8.0 NEXT STEPS

8.1 Delivery of the Action Plan

The urban open space resource, countryside and coastal paths and beaches are a valuable natural resource, located close to communities. The management and enhancement of these spaces requires financial / officer resource to effectively plan, manage and control activities to ensure they are safeguarded for future generations and visitors to the area.

The Open Space Audit has been used to inform the Action Plan recommendations and will inform ongoing area-based working, prioritisation and planning. The Action Plan will be reviewed on a regular basis, identifying the tasks required for implementation of the Strategy, in conjunction with Service Plans and the Community Plan.



8.2 Protection of Special Place Qualities

The outstanding opportunities for recreation and enjoyment that the Borough's coastline and its coastal communities offers will be protected and enhanced, whilst a balanced approach to management will safeguard the protected coastline and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) that attracts visitors to the area.

The development of ancillary facilities to support water sport uses, such as slipways, jetties, boat houses, toilet and changing facilities, parking areas and access, generally requires planning permission. In considering such development proposals, the Council will assess all material considerations including all environmental designations, any relevant plan proposals and planning policy, along with an assessment of the

impact on the visual amenity and character of the area, including the natural and historic environment.

8.3 Partnership Working

The Open Space Strategy will be delivered alongside our partners and stakeholders, with the council playing a key leadership and co-ordination role. The Action Plan will be monitored to review the implementation of the Strategy tasks and targets to inform a future review of the Open Space Strategy.

Joint working between the public and the private sector will be promoted and could be facilitated through the Community Planning and Local Development Plan processes. Identifying and developing partnerships (internal and external) to create links between existing projects and strategies and external partners (e.g. Woodland Trust, National Trust, TCV etc.)

The Technical Report identifies the Action Plan for the publicly accessible open space sites that are managed by other organisations, including:

- Department for Infrastructure (DfI)
- Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)
- Woodland Trust
- Clandeboye Estate
- Education Authority
- Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)

Data sharing amongst public bodies and a partnership approach will allow a better understanding of public open space in the Council areas and enable opportunities and challenges to be identified.