

Local Development Plan (LDP) - Position
Paper

**Landscape Character
Assessment**



**Ards and
North Down**
Borough Council

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Executive Summary

This Position Paper provides the Council with an overview of the baseline evidence in relation to Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) in Ards and North Down Borough Council Area. This should assist in identifying the key future direction for the Local Development Plan (LDP) up to 2030, by allowing members to consider their current status, potential for future review and how it can be used a tool to guide future planning decisions in the Borough.

It is important to stress that in compiling the Position Paper, the best information available has been used, however it may need to be revised in light of the release of any new data.

The paper will provide a foundation of evidence to bring forward proposals in the Preferred Options Paper (POP) and also form a starting point with the views of members generated as part of the engagement event. The POP is the earliest stage of plan preparation and will form the basis for consulting with the public and stakeholders on a range of options for dealing with key issues in the Borough. It shall also allow members to commence consideration of how policy for characterisation of our landscape can be formulated within the context of the Regional Development Strategy (RDS 2035) and the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS.)

Any future decision making will need to be made in the context of a Sustainability Appraisal under the provisions of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Act 2011. This paper is therefore intended to generate ideas on how the landscape character process would best be used as a tool for the planning process.

Introduction

- 1.1 The aim of this paper is to provide baseline evidence to inform members and enable meaningful participation in the LDP topic-based workshops.
- 1.2 The paper begins by acknowledging the importance of landscape to the well-being of people, as emphasised in the [European Landscape Convention](#). It also sets the regional context through the [Regional Development Strategy 2035 \(RDS\)](#) and the [Strategic Planning Policy Statement \(SPPS\)](#). Both these documents provide a framework for Councils to protect landscapes and landscape features. The paper also describes the use of Landscape Character Assessments as a tool for decision makers and highlights some of the landscape designations in the Borough e.g. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and Local Landscape Policy Areas (LLPAs).
- 1.3 The Ards and North Down Borough is characterised by a rich variety of landscape types including the rocky coastline along the southern edge of Belfast Lough, areas of gently rolling farmland at the foot of the Holywood Hills and in the Ards Peninsula and the Outer Ards coastline, characterised by varied coastal rural settlements and rocky coastal features. The central part of the Borough is dominated by Strangford Lough – an enclosed stretch of tranquil marine water, flanked by wooded estates. There are features that have been created by people, such as coastal castles, windmills and burial sites. The landscape has been extensively modified through farming and fishing activities and the gradual expansion of settlements and the infrastructure links between them over time.



Photo 1: Windmill Hill rises above the coastal village of Portaferry and represents a prominent man-made feature in the landscape

Source: Ards and North Down Borough Council

- 1.4 The Borough contains one Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) - Strangford and Lecale. Strangford Lough is an almost landlocked inlet of the sea set within a diverse lowland topography. Within the lough, tips of drowned drumlin hills create a spectacular myriad of islands, while, on shore, the hills form a pleasant rolling landscape. At the northern end of the lough, Scrabo Hill and tower form a prominent landscape feature which can be seen from miles around. The lough is of international importance for wintering wildfowl, while the shores, woodland, meadows, streams and marshes, together with the well-tended farmland provide landscape diversity and great nature conservation interest.



Photo 2: Scrabo Hill at the northern end of Strangford and Lecale AONB

Source: Ards and North Down Borough Council

- 1.5 Landscapes are under pressure from the growth of wind energy and demand for mineral extraction. There are additional pressures from solar farms, housing and businesses. Landscape Character Assessments are a planning tool which can be used to respond to landscape threats and opportunities.

European Context for Landscape Character Assessment

- 2.1 The European Landscape Convention (ELC) promotes the protection, management and planning of European landscapes and organises European co-operation on landscape issues. The Convention was adopted on 20 October 2000 in Florence, Italy and came into force on 1 March 2004. It is the first international treaty to be exclusively concerned with all aspects of European landscape.

- 2.2 The overarching principle of the ELC is that landscape is a reflection of European identity and living heritage, be it ordinary or outstanding, urban or rural, on land or in water. The Convention perceives landscape as a combination of many factors including biodiversity, ecology, heritage, values and memories and the experience we have of a place.
- 2.3 Articles 5 and 6 of the ELC state the general and specific obligations of the parties, which include: establishing and implementing landscape policies aimed at landscape protection, management and planning, integrating landscape into regional, town planning, cultural and environmental policies, increasing awareness of the value of landscapes and identifying and assessing the landscapes in their territories. As a signatory to the Convention, Northern Ireland undertook to carry out Landscape Character Assessment for the region.

Regional Context for Landscape Character Assessment

- 3.1 The Regional Policy Context is provided by the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) and the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS.)

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

- 3.2 Within the RDS, landscape issues are acknowledged in the following guidance:
- Spatial Framework Guidance 5 seeks to ‘protect and enhance the quality of the setting of the Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area (BMUA) and its environmental assets – protecting areas of high scenic value, undeveloped coastline, Belfast Lough and the hills around the BMUA from development and protecting and enhancing the network of open spaces in the BMUA.’

- Regional Guidance 11 seeks to ‘conserve and protect and where possible enhance our natural environment, maintain the integrity of historic landscapes and recognise and promote the conservation of local identity and distinctive landscape character.’ By understanding how places differ, we can also ensure that future development is well situated, sensitive to its location and contributes to environmental, social and economic objectives.
- RG11 further recognises that the NI Landscape Character Assessment 2000 provides valuable guidance on local landscape character and scenic quality.

[The Strategic Planning Policy Statement \(SPPS\)](#)

- 3.3 The SPPS must be taken into account in the preparation of Local Development Plans, and is a material consideration in all decisions on individual planning applications and appeals. The SPPS places an emphasis upon the protection of special landscapes from inappropriate development and the need for Councils to take Landscape Character Assessments into account.
- 3.4 The SPPS advises that ‘the LDP process will play an important role for councils in identifying key features and assets of the countryside and balancing the needs of rural areas and communities with the protection of the environment. This should include an environmental assets appraisal and landscape assessment which will provide the evidence base for the purposes of bringing forward an appropriate policy approach to development of the countryside. This should take into account Landscape Character Assessments.’

What is Landscape Character Assessment (LCA)?

- 4.1 Landscape Character Assessments emerged as a technique in the 1980s. It is the process of identifying and describing variations in character of the landscape. LCA documents identify and explain the unique combination of elements and features that make landscapes distinctive by mapping and describing character types and areas. They also show how the landscape is perceived, experienced and valued by people.
- 4.2 LCAs can inform a range of activities including:
- Planning policies and decisions
 - Sensitivity and capacity studies
 - Land management plans
 - Landscape and visual impact assessments
 - Local council studies
 - Minerals planning
 - Place making
 - Green infrastructure
 - Forest and woodland strategies
 - Waterways strategies
 - Renewable energy
 - AONB and National Park management plans
- 4.3 LCAs are useful for monitoring change across the landscape and for capturing the characteristics of the landscape including topographic features, flora and fauna, land use, sights, sounds, touch and smells, cultural associations, history and memories.
- 4.4 The classification of the landscape can be used for making decisions about the landscape and identify how character can be maintained.
- 4.5 Landscape character goes beyond an appreciation of an area's visual attractiveness. It involves an understanding of how the landscape functions to

support communities, cultural heritage and development, local and macro economies as well as the wildlife and natural resources of the area.

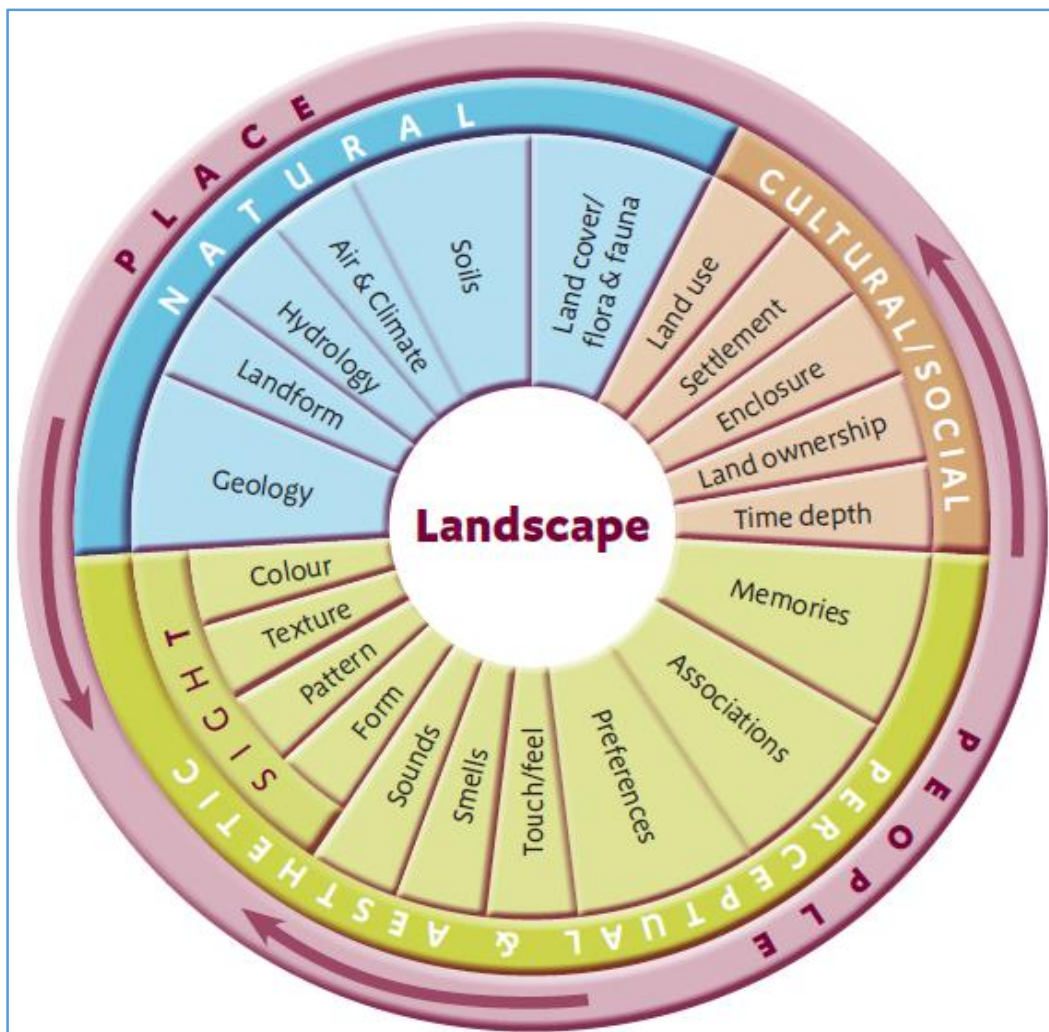
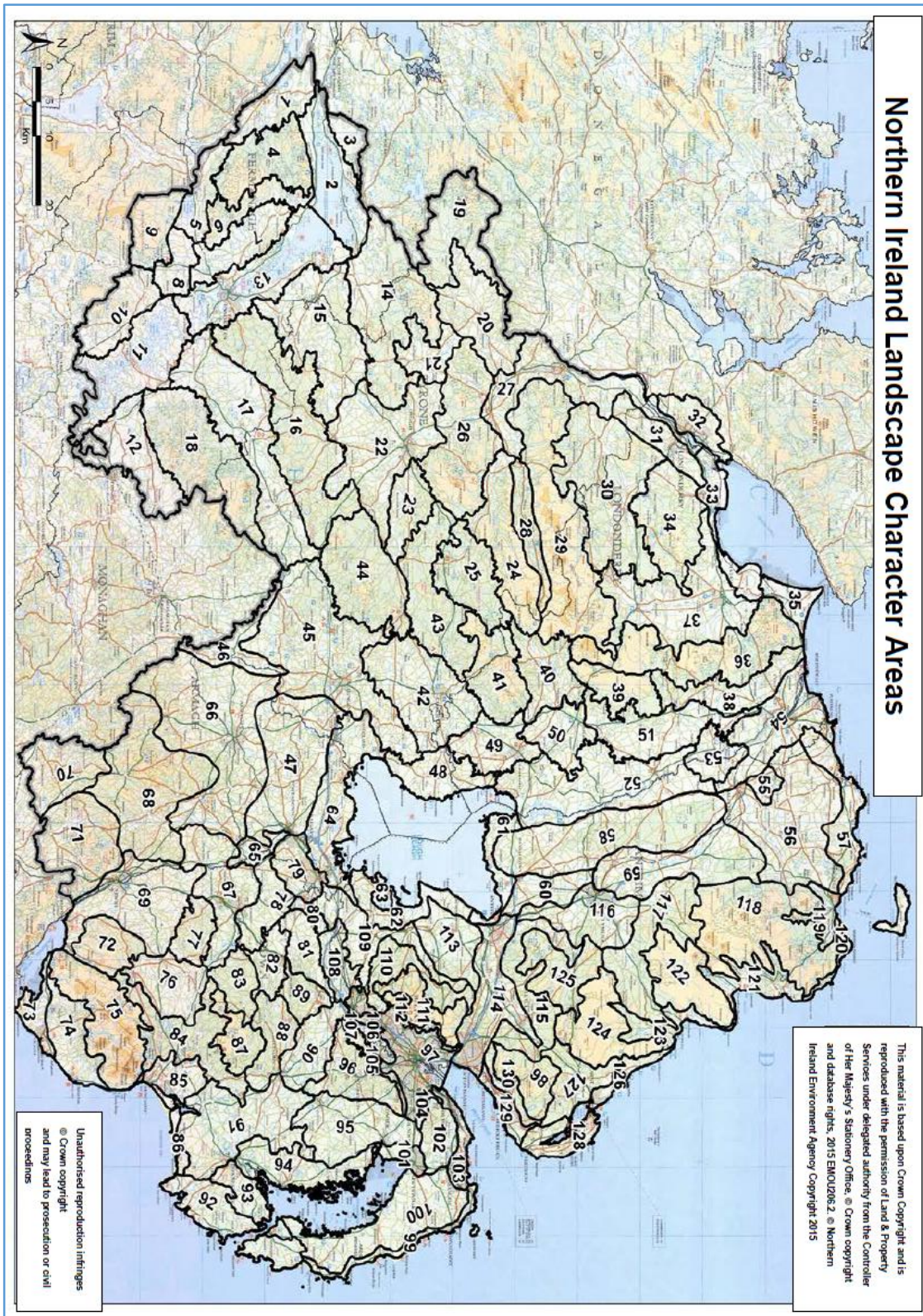


Fig 1: The 'Landscape Wheel' illustrates the many components that interact to produce landscapes

Source: Natural England

The existing NI Landscape Character Assessment (NILCA) 2000

- 5.1 The [NILCA](#) was carried out in 1999 and subdivided the region into 130 Landscape Character Areas (LCAs), each based upon local patterns of geology, landform, land use, cultural and ecological features.



Map 1: Overview of NI Landscape Character Areas

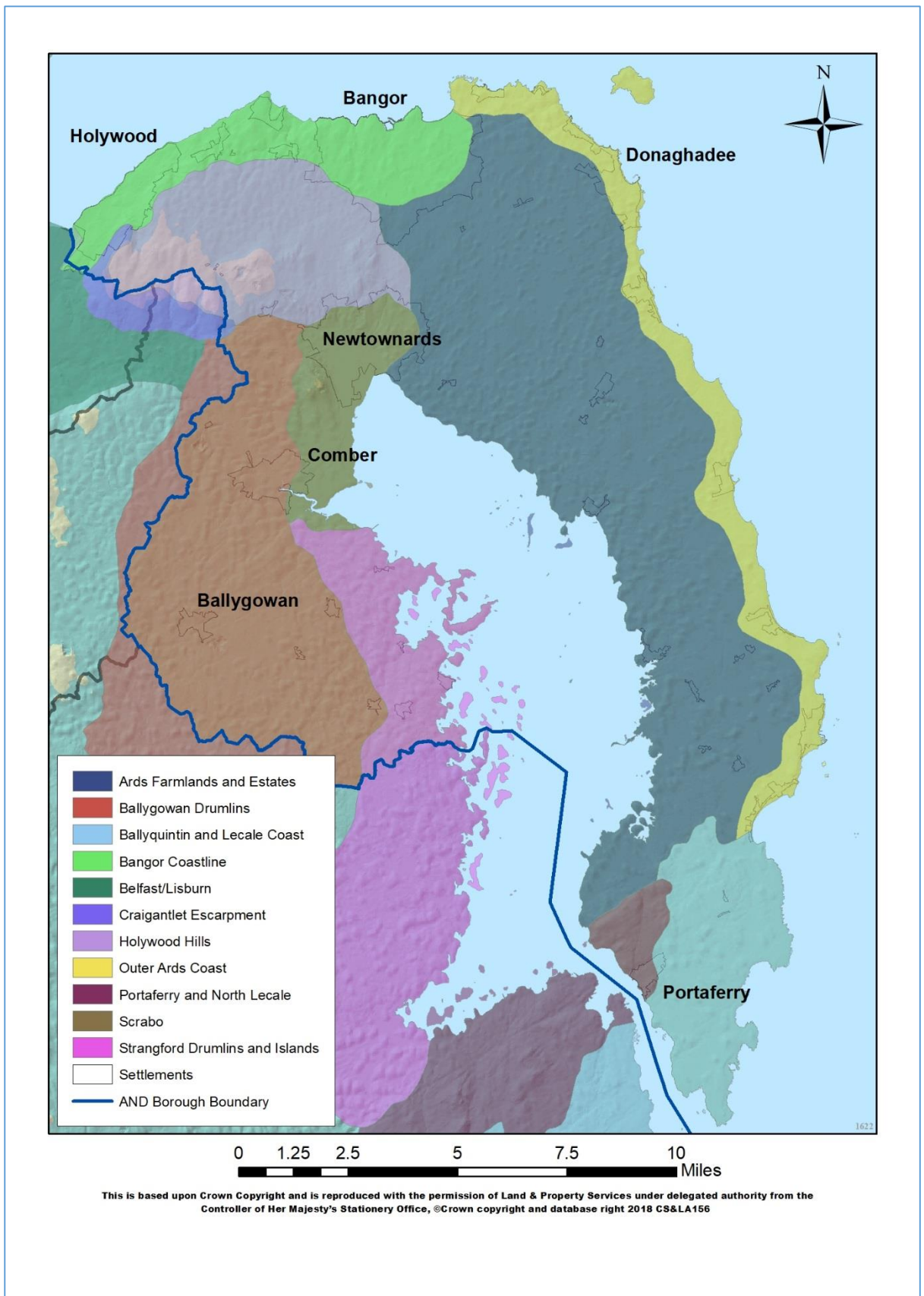
Source: Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)

- 5.2 The LCA report for each area contains a detailed description of the landscape assets and where they are located. It further identifies the principal forces for change and the key issues influencing landscape sensitivity. The report accepts that when new features are added to a landscape, for example through planning approvals, they now form part of the evolving character of the area. The LCA reports also suggest specific landscape guidelines for each area based either around landscape management or establishing principles for accommodating development.
- 5.3 Within the Ards and North Down Council area, 10 LCAs are identified. These areas follow complex landforms and therefore do not readily accord with council or other administrative boundaries. This means that some fall wholly within our Borough and others are shared with the neighbouring council areas of Newry, Mourne and Down District, Belfast City Council and Lisburn Castlereagh City Council. A list of the LCAs can be found in Appendix 1, along with examples of assessment of 2 LCAs in our Borough in Appendix 2.

Wind Energy in Northern Ireland's Landscape (Supplementary Guidance to Planning Policy Statement 18)

- 6.1 The supplementary planning guidance 'Wind Energy Development in Northern Ireland's Landscapes' provides a broad and strategic guidance in relation to the visual and landscape impacts of wind energy development in each of the 130 LCAs in Northern Ireland. Whilst it is specifically aimed at wind energy developments, it also provides more general information on which LCAs are most altered by development pressures and which are most sensitive to future change.

Map 2: Landscape Character Areas in Ards and North Down, reflective of those indicated in the NILCA 2000



6.2 For each LCA, a description of sensitivity against a number of criteria was prepared. Each LCA was then given an overall sensitivity level using a five point scale as shown in Fig. 2 below.

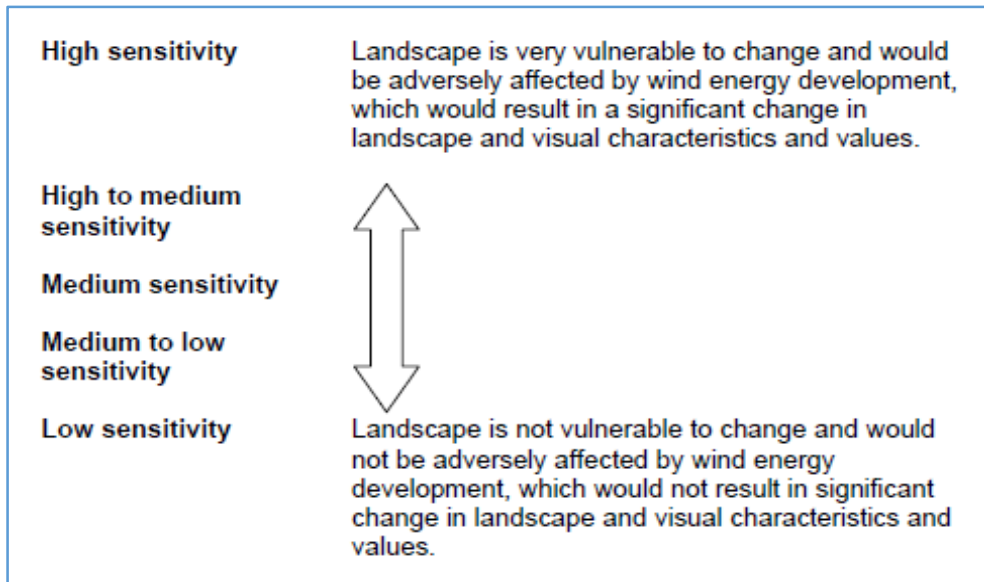


Fig 2: Categorisation of sensitivity to Wind Energy for LCAs

Source: DAERA, 2010

6.3 Based upon the above scale, all 10 of the LCAs that fall wholly or partially within the boundaries of Ards and North Down Borough Council area exhibit high sensitivity to change with the exception of LCA 95 (Ballygowan Drumlins) which is classified as having High to Medium sensitivity.

Northern Ireland's Landscape Charter (January 2014)

7.1 Northern Ireland's Landscape Charter was launched by the Department of the Environment (DOE) in 2014. The Charter acknowledges that change in the landscape can be gradual or rapid, accelerated by new technologies and that understanding the landscape assets and the forces of change is key to making informed decisions.



Photo 3: Two wind turbines on the hills to the rear of Whitespots Country Park Newtownards, located within LCA 102: Hollywood Hills.

Source Ards and North Down Borough Council

7.2 The Charter has six guiding principles:

- All landscapes matter and each of us has the right to derive the benefits of these places;
- Each of us respects this in all places even when they are not our own; because our landscapes are a shared asset for which we have to exercise care and responsibility;
- Each distinctive sense of place collectively adds more value to the variety and uniqueness of Northern Ireland's landscapes;
- Change is continuous however we can manage it by using evidence to inform policy and decisions that respect and enhance the character and

value of our landscapes;

- Transparency and communication about how the diversity, distinctiveness, history and character of our landscapes are considered fosters awareness and confidence and
- Each of us is responsible and empowered to shape the future of our landscapes in the actions and decisions taken now by us and others on policy and development.

7.3 The Charter advises that the quality of decisions made by Councils needs to be carefully considered in relation to their immediate impact upon the landscape and the impact for future generations.

NI Regional Character Assessment (NIRLCA) (Consultation draft Report, April 2015)

8.1 The NIRCLA does not replace, but aims to complement the existing NILCA 2000. It is more strategic in nature and provides a regional framework upon which more detailed local studies can be based in the future. The NIRLCA subdivides the countryside into 26 Regional Character Areas (RCAs) based upon information on people and place and the combinations of nature, culture and perception which contribute to regional uniqueness.

8.2 The methodologies used in NIRLCA bring it in line with similar studies carried out elsewhere in the UK, thereby providing a comparable baseline. Also, in contrast to the NILCA 2000, it is in a contemporary digital format linked to Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and is therefore updateable and reactive to new pressures on the landscape.

8.3 The purpose of the NIRLCA, set out by DAERA, is to provide an up to date evidence base which can be used equally by planners, developers and the public. It will help inform a range of decisions including policy development,

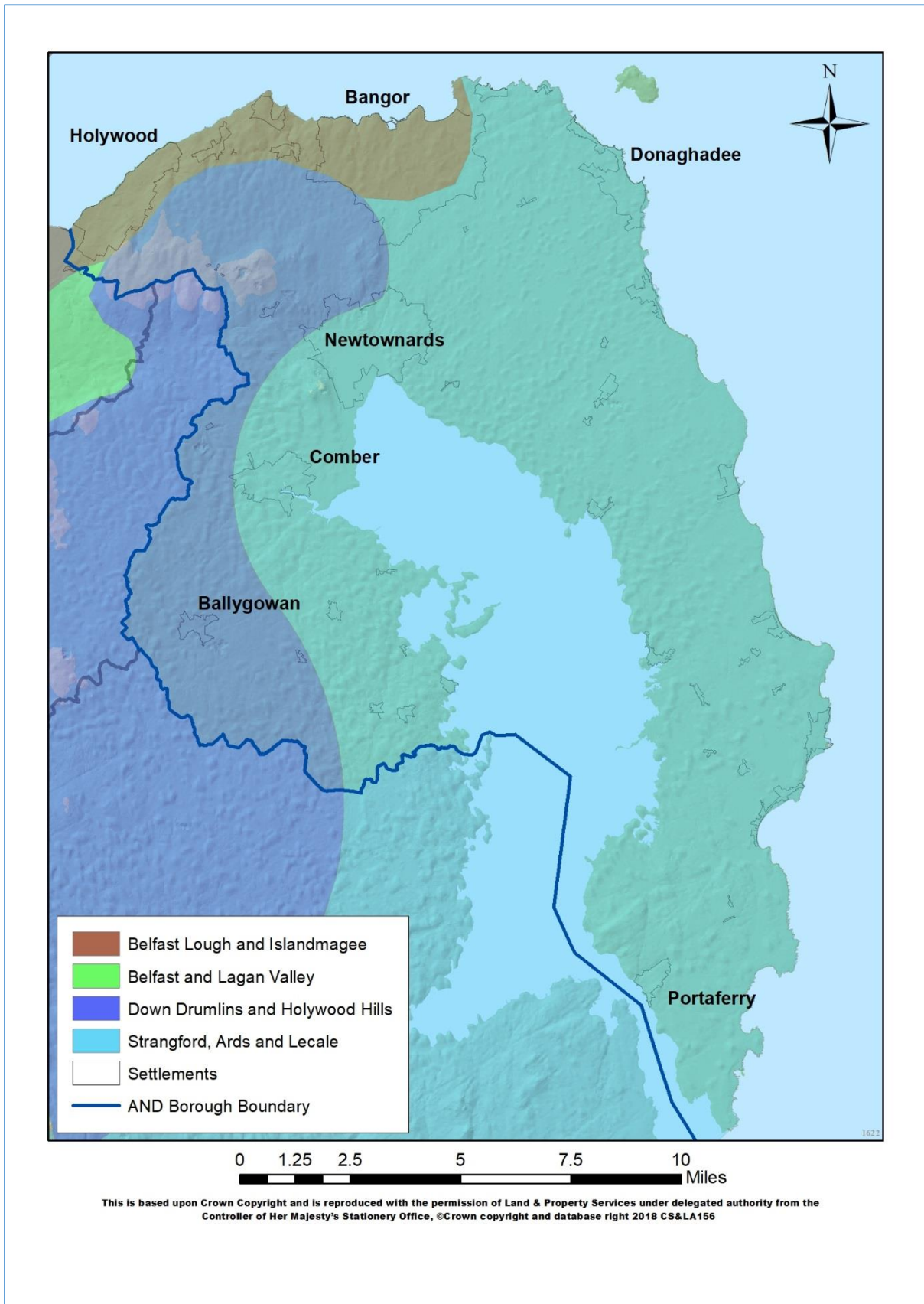
land use planning, development management decisions, policy development and designations, opportunities for local action and monitoring of landscape changes over time.

- 8.4 The NIRLCA identifies four RCAs which fall wholly or partly within the Ards and North Down Borough, as shown on the following map and listed in Appendix 3. It is important to note that planning decisions taken by neighbouring councils may have impacts upon the character of our LCAs and vice versa

Ecosystem Services

- 9.1 The 2016 NRLCA recognises that ecosystem services are being given an increasingly high profile in land use planning. The Northern Ireland National Ecosystem Assessment presented the first analysis of the benefits provided by Northern Ireland's natural environment in 2011, and formed part of a UK wide project to assess the state of ecosystems, the goods and services they deliver and the value they provide to human well-being and the economy.
- 9.2 Ecosystem services are generally grouped into four main categories:
- **Provisioning:** the products obtained from ecosystems such as food, fibre and fresh water
 - **Regulating:** the benefits obtained from ecosystem processes such as pollination and control of climate and water
 - **Cultural:** the non-material benefits obtained from ecosystems for example through spiritual enrichment, recreation and tourism or other aesthetic experience
 - **Supporting:** ecosystem functions that are necessary for the production of other ecosystem services including soil formation and cycling of nutrients and water

Map 3: Regional Landscape Character Areas in Ards and North Down



- 9.3 The NIRLCA includes ecosystem benefits for each LCA and the SPPS recognises the importance of ecosystem services: ‘where appropriate, identifying the condition of ecosystems, the provision of services and their relationship to human wellbeing should be integrated into the plan making and decision taking processes.
- 9.4 For example, the following ecosystem services have been identified in LCA 26 (Strangford, Ards and Lecale): marine fisheries, aquaculture, arable production, agriculture and food processing, nitrogen cycling, waste disposal, public access, archaeological heritage, tourism and angling.

NI Regional Seascape Character Assessment (NIRSCA)

- 10.1 Seascape is defined as ‘an area of sea, coastline and land, as perceived by people, whose character results from the actions and interactions of the land with the sea, by natural and/or human factors.’
- 10.2 With its 115 miles of coastline, Ards and North Down has always had a close connection with the sea. The seascape has become an important part of local identity, given that the majority of the key settlements in the Borough are situated in coastal areas.
- 10.3 The seascapes of the Borough are subject to change as a result of both natural and man-made influences including natural processes, climate change, recreational activity, commercial marine activity, offshore energy. Although some traditional marine based activities are in decline, their cultural associations leave a lasting legacy that continues to shape the character and identity of the seascape.



Photo 4: The picturesque Donaghadee seafront includes a fully operational harbour and lighthouse

Source: Ards and North Down Borough Council

- 10.4 The Northern Ireland Regional Seascape Character Assessment (NIRSCA) follows the same well-established and widely used principles and stages set out in LCA, with emphasis given upon to the particular issues that need to be considered when assessing coastal and marine environments. There are five seascape character areas (SCAs) that fall wholly or partly within the Borough. These are shown on the following map:

Existing Scenic Landscape Designation – Strangford and Lecale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

- 11.1 AONBs are designated for their high landscape quality, wildlife importance

and rich cultural and architectural heritage under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (NI) Order 1985. The purpose of the AONB designation is to ensure that policies are created and action taken to:

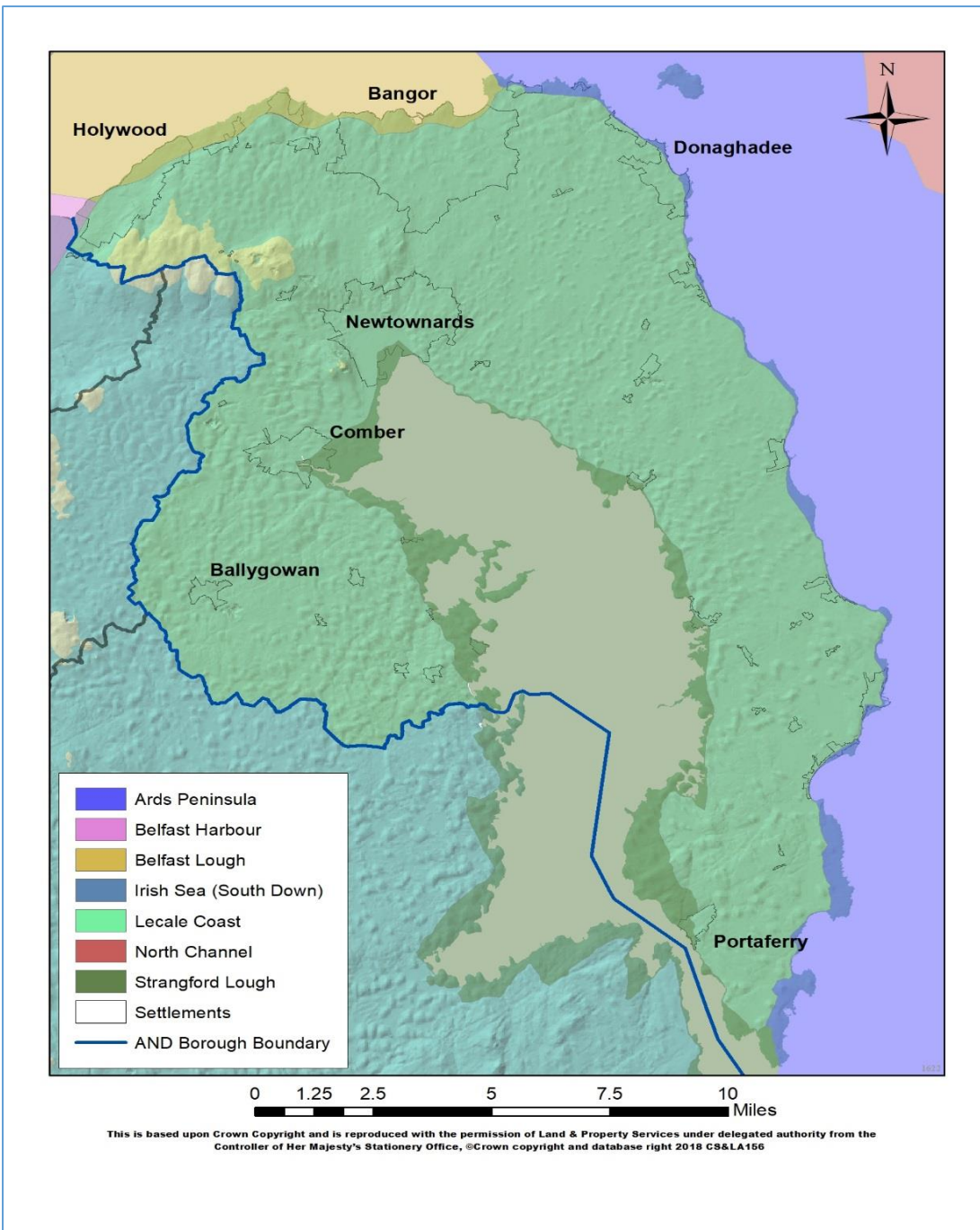
- Conserve and enhance the natural beauty or amenities of the area;
- Conserve, wildlife, historic objects or natural phenomena within it;
- Promote its enjoyment by the public; and
- Provide and maintain public access to it

11.2 Strangford and Lecale AONB was designated in 2010. This coastal area follows the shores of a nearly landlocked inland sea and extends inland up the Quoile River, dominated by the historic town of Downpatrick, and south along the outward-facing shore of the Irish Sea. The lowland landforms tell the story of Northern Ireland's glacial past; drumlin hilltops poking from sea to form the hundreds of islets of Strangford Lough.

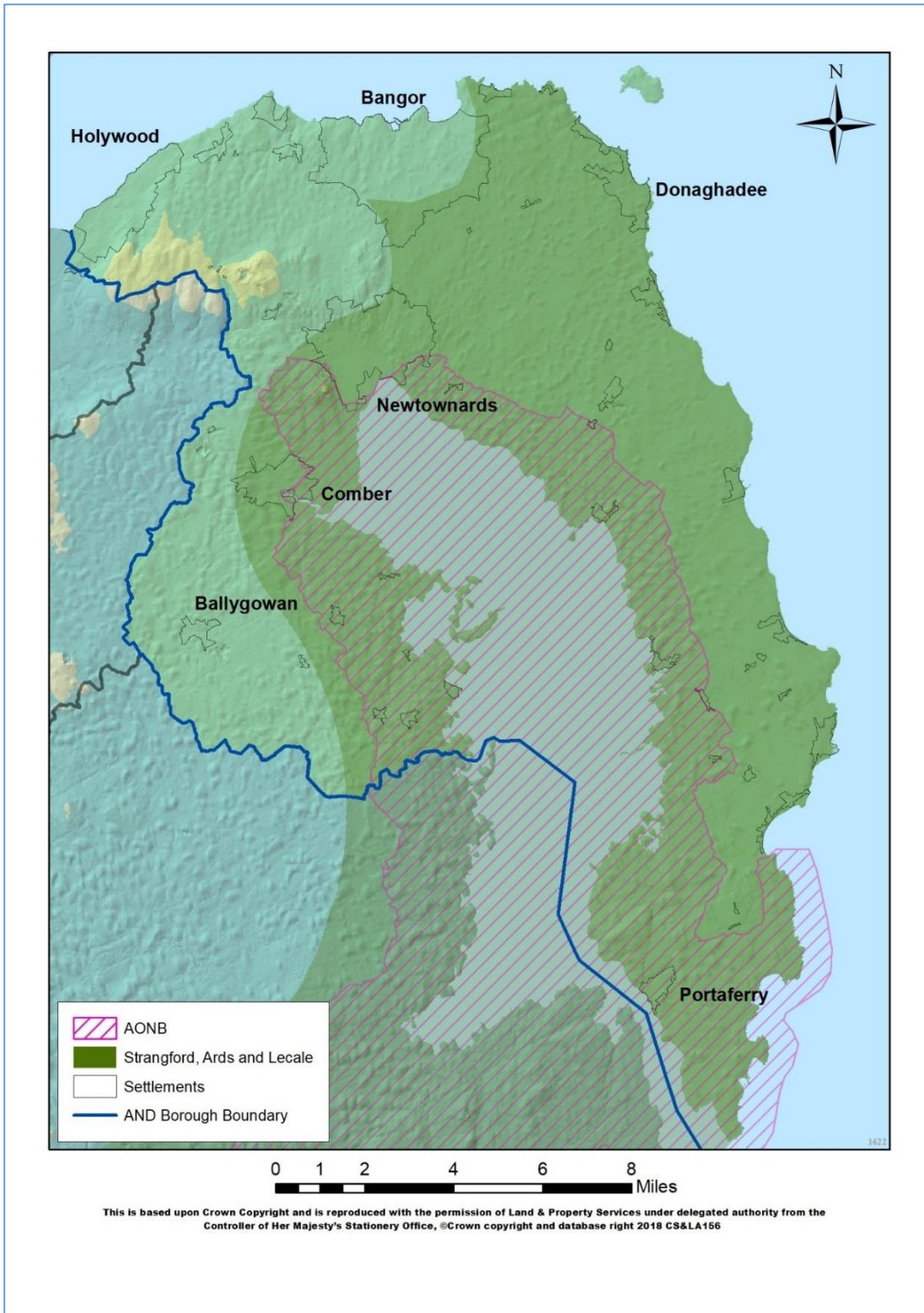
11.3 At the northern end of Strangford Lough, Scrabo Hill capped by its tower forms a prominent landmark. Below the waters, the hidden riches of this habitat have led to the lough being designated as a marine nature reserve. As one travels south, you reach the windswept Lecale area, remote in character and with a distinctive local identity strongly influenced by the areas numerous ancient sites and attractive coastal settlements.

11.4 Although much of this area has been designated as an AONB since the late 1960's, re-designation in 2010 allows for the first time voluntary management plans to be drawn up for this exceptional landscape.

Map 4: NI Regional Seascape Character Areas (note: two additional offshore areas are also shown on the map)



Map 5: Strangford and Lecale AONB

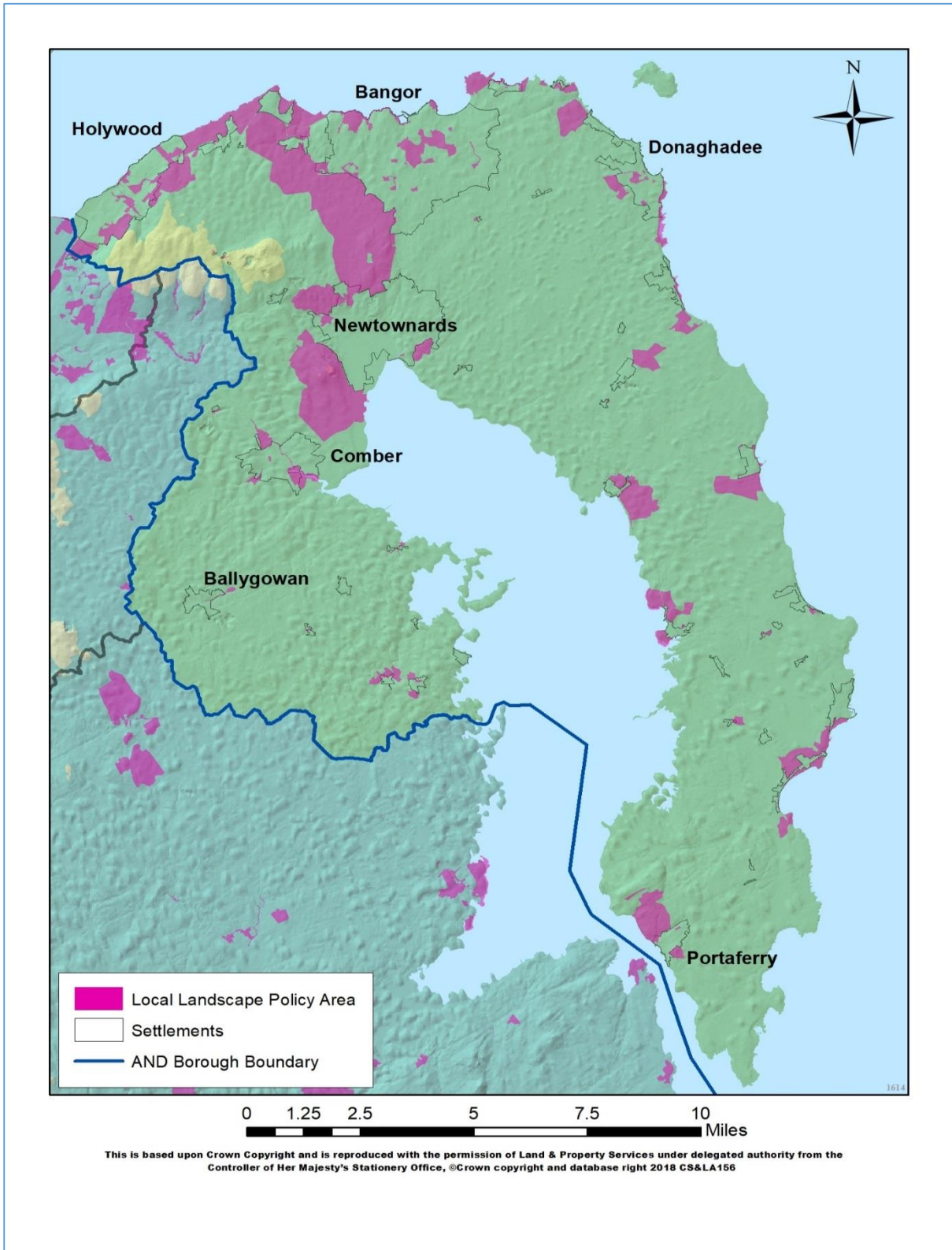


- 11.5 The Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership is a voluntary organisation that aims to bring together all those who have an interest in the AONB and bring about effective and sustainable management of the landscape. The Partnership has produced the Strangford Lough and Lecale Action Plan 2013-2018 in recognition that the landscape, built heritage and natural environment of Strangford and Lecale AONB are fundamental to the well-being and vibrancy of local communities. For these reasons, as well as for their intrinsic value, there is a need for people to work together to protect and enhance our heritage whilst fostering appropriate human activities and developments. The action plan sets out a sixteen objectives to achieve these aims. The document can be viewed at:
- http://www.strangfordlough.org/images/publications/6283Action_Plan_low_res_2.pdf

Settlement Landscape Settings: Local Landscape Policy Areas (LLPAs)

- 12.1 Local Landscape Policy Areas (LLPAs) are designated by development plans in accordance with PPS 6 – Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage. LLPAs consist of landscape features within or adjoining settlements that are considered to be of the greatest amenity value, landscape quality or local significance and which are worthy of protection from damaging or undesirable development. They can include archaeological sites and monuments and their surroundings, listed and other locally important buildings, river banks, shorelines, attractive vistas, localised hills and other areas of local amenity importance.
- 12.2 There are a total of 101 LLPAs in the Ards and North Down Borough and these are indicated on map 6 on the following page. The aim of the designation is to help to ensure that development does not dominate the distinctive landscape and townscape characteristics of settlements. They

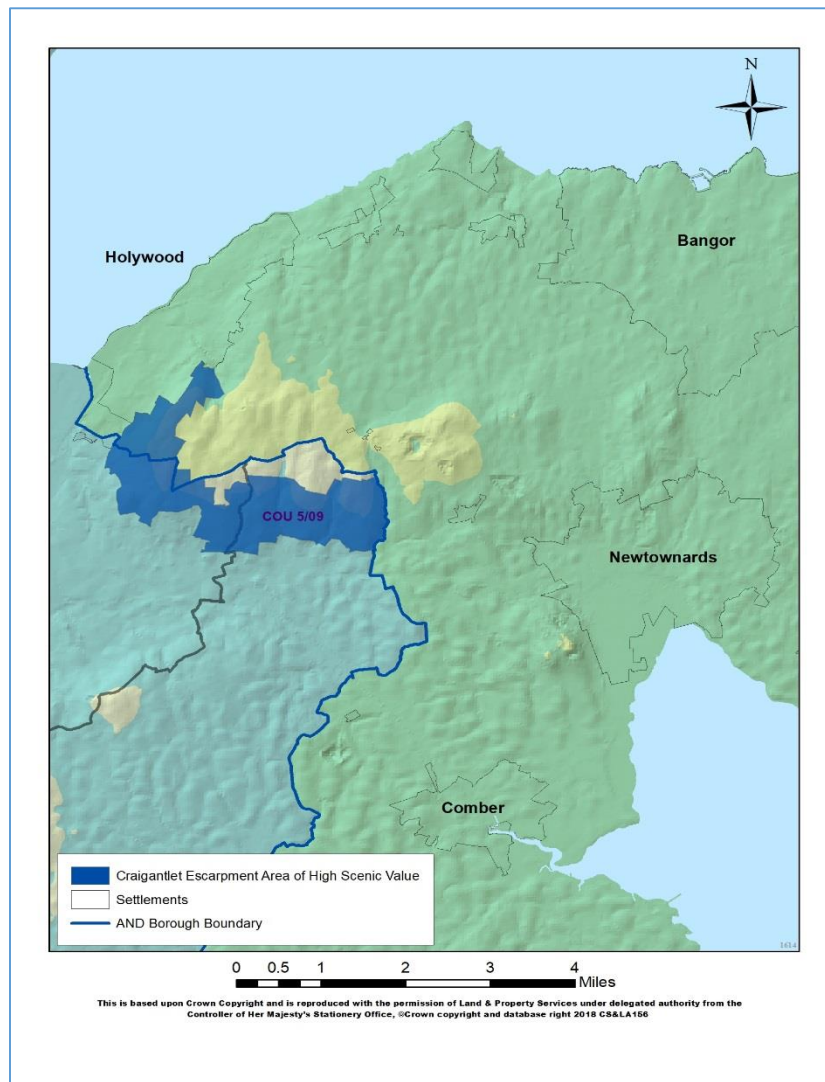
may also function as buffer zones between different uses and help to reduce the likelihood of over-intensive development.



Map 6: Ards and North Down LLPA

A Scenic Landscape Designation: Craigantlet Escarpment Area of High Scenic Value (AOHSV)

- 13.1 Areas of High Scenic Value (AOHSV) are designated to protect the setting of Urban Areas and other areas of particular landscape merit. The unique landform of Craigantlet Escarpment was identified in the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment as an area of scenic quality and is designated in this Plan as an Area of High Scenic Value. The landform of is a prominent ridge stretching from East Belfast to Holywood. The Craigantlet Escarpment Area of High Scenic Value also extends across council boundaries into Belfast City Council and Lisburn Castlereagh City Council Districts.



Map 7: Craigantlet Escarpment Area of High Scenic Value

Key Findings

- 14.1 The Ards and North Down Borough contains a rich variety of natural and urban landscapes, each with their own unique characteristics. The wider value of these landscapes is derived not just from their visual amenity and role in the setting of settlements but also indirectly through their promotion as a tourist asset, recreational resource and habitat for flora and fauna. Landscape Character Assessment is an effective way to classify, map and describe variations in landscape character.
- 14.2 The SPPS requires councils to take Landscape Character Assessments into account when preparing their LDPs. The existing NILCA 2000 is 17 years old and while much of it is still relevant, the context of the built form has changed with approvals such additional housing and industrial uses coming forward, along with newer forms of development such as wind turbines and solar farms.
- 14.3 Landscape Character Assessment provides a basis for landscape designations such as LLPAs, Landscape Wedges and Areas of High Scenic Value. There is potential for these designations to be reviewed, modified, deleted or supplemented (and the policy that deals with them to be tailored to the Borough) during the LDP process.

Appendix 1: List of Landscape Character Areas in Ards and North Down

LCA No:	Name
92	Ballyquintin and Lecale Coast
93	Portaferry and North Lecale
94	Strangford Drumlins and Islands
95	Ballygowan Drumlins
99	Outer Ards Coast
100	Ards Farmlands and Estates
101	Scrabo
102	Hollywood Hills
103	Bangor Coastline
104	Craigantlet Escarpment

Appendix 2: Examples of LCAs in Ards and North Down

Source – Department of Agricultural, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/landscape-character-northern-ireland>

LCA 100 ARDS FARMLANDS AND ESTATES

Key Characteristics

- Smooth, undulating drumlins, with both pasture and arable farmland.
- Good hedgerow network but relatively few hedgerow trees.
- Waterlogged hollows between drumlins.
- Straight roads cross the peninsula, linking to the sinuous coastal road.
- Estates provide wooded backdrop to the Lough in some areas.
- Stands of trees, often seen in silhouette.
- Scattered houses of varying sizes and styles; traditional dwellings are small scale and clustered in form.
- Historic and archaeological features are often prominent local features.

Landscape Description

The *Ards Farmlands and Estates* extends across much of the Ards peninsula. The area has a gently undulating landform, with shallow drumlins and there is a scattering of farms on the higher, drier land. The relatively large scale of many landholdings contributes to a consistent landscape pattern with a broad, even grain. The farmland extends to the edge of Strangford Lough, where large, wooded estates, such as Mount Stewart and Rosemount at Greyabbey, have an important influence on landscape character and pattern. They provide

a woodland backdrop along parts of the Lough edge and may often be visible from one side of the peninsula to the other. The A20 passes close to the water's edge, allowing attractive views to a rural loughside landscape studded with estates.

Inland, an evenly distributed network of small roads and lanes connects the scattered farmsteads and houses. These are of a variety of styles, although small vernacular buildings may still be seen in their original form or, more usually, as part of a more extensive complex of farm buildings. There are scattered areas of heathland along the central spine of the peninsula, with clumps of gorse and prominent stands of Scots pine.

Landscape Condition and Sensitivity to Change

The landscape is generally in a good condition, although some field boundaries have been lost through neglect. Recent built development sometimes detracts from the rural character of the landscape, particularly in the more open parts of the farmland and where it is out of scale with the small clustered settlements which are typical of the area. However, the many estates and large farm holdings contribute to a relatively high quality landscape in areas where they have an influence.

The topography of this landscape allows the accommodation of some development but its rural character limits the type and scale of development which may be appropriate. The relative lack of trees in some farmland areas makes them more sensitive to change, although these areas are generally less sensitive than the coastal edge. The *Ards Farmland and Estates* landscape has a variety of archaeological and historic sites, including castles, churches, mottes, abbeys and raths. The area is also known for its windmills, which are unique in Northern Ireland.

Strangford Lough is one of the largest sea loughs in Northern Ireland and its inter-tidal mudflats are recognised for their nature conservation and earth science value by their designation as an ASSI; the waters are a Marine Nature Reserve. The Lough and shoreline areas are also designated as an AONB.

Principles for Landscape Management

- Hedgerows should be maintained and hedgerow trees replanted to prevent loss of field structure and to create the impression of a well maintained landscape.

- Replanting of trees will replace existing trees as they mature and ensure that silhouetted stands of trees are conserved as features of the landscape.
- ASSIs and Nature Reserves along areas close to the shores of Strangford Lough should be managed in accordance with the guidelines set out in the relevant DoE publications.

Principles for Accommodating New Development

- Unity of architectural style and use of materials are important in designing new housing to avoid detracting from the rural character of the landscape; simple styles with a relatively small scale and local materials are most appropriate. The planting of native trees within gardens and the avoidance of prominent 'suburban' garden fences, rockeries and walls will also help to integrate buildings within this farmland landscape.
- The roofs of farm outbuildings may integrate more easily with the landscape if they are painted in traditional colours, typically red or green.
- Traditional dwellings should be renovated or converted in preference to new houses; this will avoid the dereliction of properties and loss of vernacular styles. It will also help to maintain the characteristic small-scale, clustered pattern of houses and barns in a rural setting.

LCA 103 BANGOR COASTLINE

Key Characteristics

- Undulating shoreline topography.
- Well wooded and densely settled coastal edge to the south of Belfast Lough.
- Wild, rocky shoreline with gorse scrub, stands of Scots pine and steep, narrow glens.
- Estates with mixed woodlands overlooking the sea.
- Large houses and hotels set in ornamental grounds.
- Good infrastructure linking settlements with many recreational facilities.
- Views restricted by extent of woodland.

Landscape Description

The *Bangor Coastline* forms a linear shoreline strip extending from the edge of Belfast, at the head of Belfast Lough, to Groomsport at its mouth. It is a strip of land with a gently undulating topography which supports a patchwork of pasture, mature deciduous woodland and dense urban development, including several large houses and hotels.

The presence of many estates has created a local landscape of large fields, stone walls and woodland, with a sequence of landmarks glimpsed in views along the coastal roads. A series of narrow, wooded glens wind down the steeper slopes towards the Lough shore; a notable example is Crawfordsburn Glen, which lies within a Country Park. Views are generally short due to the well wooded character of the coast, but the exposed coast line has an open rocky edge and patches of low growing gorse and scrub; it provides opportunities for long panoramas across the Lough.

The urban centres of Holywood, Helen's Bay and Bangor are linked by a good communication network comprising the main A2 dual carriageway and the Belfast to Bangor railway line as well as many minor roads and the North Down Coastal Path. The provision of footpaths, parking places and picnic sites provides recreational opportunities along the coast.

Landscape Condition and Sensitivity to Change

The landscape of the *Bangor Coastline* is generally in good condition in both urban and rural contexts. The presence of country parks ensures that visitor pressure and potential erosion is controlled and that countryside management plays an important role. The many large houses, hotels and estates (including the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum) have well-maintained grounds, parkland and estate woodlands.

The landscape is extensively settled and has almost fulfilled its development potential. Further change may lead to loss of important rural areas and valuable recreational resources. However, the well wooded character and robust landscape pattern of the area allows development to be well integrated into the fabric. Views from the northern shore of Belfast Lough restrict changes to the Lough edge.

Principles for Landscape Management

- The provision and upkeep of visitor facilities will help to reduce erosion and pressure on the more sensitive parts of the landscape, such as the scenic glens, woodlands and open shores.
- Potential viewing opportunities at the Lough shore may be maximised by the provision of parking spaces and viewpoints.
- Woodlands, parks and stone walls may be retained through continued management and conservation of these important elements.

Principles for Accommodating New Development

- Further built development should not spread into areas of rural character between settlements, which form an invaluable recreational resource and important green break between individual settlements.
- Coalescence of developments along the coast is a significant pressure, encouraged by the strong linear communication pattern; there is a need to recognise *buffer zones*, which separate settlements and help to conserve their individual landscape setting.

Appendix 3: List of Regional Landscape Character Areas in Ards and North Down

RCA No.	RCA Name
20	<p>Belfast Lough and Islandmagee</p> <p>The developed coast of Belfast Lough and extending out to Bangor in the south and Islandmagee and Larne to the north. This area contains Northern Ireland's most settled landscapes and is the focus of the main road corridors. It is a developed urban landscape with an absence of tranquility. Movement, noise and artificial lighting has a strong influence on the area.</p>
21	<p>Belfast and Lagan Valley</p> <p>The urban area of the city and associated inland settlements, including the scarps of the Belfast Hills and Castlereagh Hills which provide the city setting. The area extends south-west along the Lagan Valley, taking in less densely settled, though still largely developed landscapes as far as Moira.</p>
22	<p>North Down Drumlins and Hills</p> <p>The eastern section of the wide drumlin belt, defined along its northern edge by igneous geology in contrast to the sedimentary rock of the Lagan Valley.</p>
26	<p>Strangford, Ards and Lecale</p> <p>The coastal lowlands of County Down around Strangford Lough, including the Ards Peninsula. It includes the drumlin-strewn lowlands around Strangford and rocky coastline with distinctive headlands and bays</p>