

Plean Forbartha Áitiúla 2035 **Dréacht-Straitéis an Phlean** **Local Development Plan 2035** **draft Plan Strategy**

Forlónadh Teicniúla 13 – Oidhreacht Nádurtha
Meitheamh 2025

Technical Supplement 13 – Natural Heritage
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Comhairle Ceantair
an Iúir, Mhúrn agus an Dúin
Newry, Mourne and Down
District Council

Ag freastal ar an Dún agus Ard Mhacha Theas
Serving Down and South Armagh

Contents

1.0	Introduction	1
2.0	Policy Context	2
3.0	Preferred Options Paper	16
4.0	District Profile	17
	International Designations	17
	National Designations	19
	Local Designations	23
5.0	Consultee and Councillor Engagement	26
6.0	Draft Plan Strategy Approach	27
7.0	Soundness	28
8.0	Evolution of Policies	30

Appendices

	Appendix A: UNESCO Geopark	36
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1.0 Introduction

Purpose of this document

- 1.1 The purpose of this technical supplement is to bring together the evidence base that has been used to inform the preparation of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Local Development Plan (LDP) draft Plan Strategy. It forms one of the subject based technical supplements that should be read alongside the draft Plan Strategy, to provide justification for the policies proposed therein.
- 1.2 This builds upon the Local Development Plan Preparatory Study Paper 6 'Environmental Assets', which established a baseline position for the district at that time (January 2017) and informed various key issues identified within the Preferred Options Paper (POP).
- 1.3 This technical supplement provides an overview of the regional and local policy context (and legislative background) in relation to natural heritage and the district profile of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council in respect of natural heritage.
- 1.4 The information contained within this technical supplement provided the evidence base for and informed the natural heritage policies within the draft Plan Strategy.

Planning and Natural Heritage

- 1.5 Natural heritage is widely considered to be defined as 'the diversity of our habitats, species, landscapes and earth science features'¹. It has long been recognised that a diverse natural environment contributes to society and improves wellbeing.
- 1.6 Local councils, which operate in the public interest, must be aware of their role in enhancing and conserving our natural heritage, recognising it as an asset to society and in promoting sustainable development and wellbeing.
- 1.7 The LDP, taking account of regional policy detailed within the Regional Development Strategy and the Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland, seeks to protect, conserve and enhance the district's natural heritage.

¹ Definition from Planning Policy Statement 2: Natural Heritage

2.0 Policy Context

Regional Policy Programme for Government 2024-2027 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most'

- 2.1 This document outlines three missions set by the Northern Ireland Executive for both now and the future. These are: people, planet and prosperity. It also outlines nine cross-cutting priorities which will help deliver its missions. One of these is 'Protecting Lough Neagh and the Environment'.
- 2.2 It states that a new environment strategy will be published which will be adopted as Northern Ireland's first Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP). This EIP will include a range of commitments to improve the natural environment and, in conjunction with other strategies, will provide a determined and coherent response by the Executive to the global challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change.

Regional Development Strategy 2035

- 2.3 The Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035 provides an overarching strategic planning framework to facilitate and guide the public and private sectors. It acknowledges that the environment, both in terms of natural and built heritage, is one of Northern Ireland's most important assets.
- 2.4 The RDS outlines two types of strategic guidance: regional guidance (RG) and spatial framework guidance (SFG). Regional guidance applies to everywhere in the region and is presented under the three sustainable development themes: economy, society and environment. Spatial framework guidance is additional to the regionwide guidance and is tailored to each of the five elements of the spatial framework.
- 2.5 RG4 seeks to 'promote a sustainable approach to the provision of tourism infrastructure'. It recognises that investment in tourism provides the opportunity to get maximum benefit from our wealth of environmental and heritage assets; our waterways, landscapes, coastline and built heritage. One intention of this regional guidance is to 'encourage environmentally sustainable tourism development', whereby the development of tourism infrastructure needs to be appropriate to the location to ensure that the natural assets are protected and enhanced.
- 2.6 RG11 seeks to 'conserve, protect and, where possible, enhance our built heritage and our natural environment' and outlines the following intentions with regard to the natural environment:
- Sustain and enhance biodiversity;
 - Identify, establish, protect and manage ecological networks;
 - Protect and encourage green and blue infrastructure within urban areas;

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

Strategic Planning Policy Statement

- 2.7 The Strategic Planning Policy Statement 2015 (SPPS) states that planning authorities should deliver on all three pillars of sustainable development in formulating policies and plans and in determining planning applications and appeals. These three pillars include: the needs and aspirations of our society; the economy; and the environment.
- 2.8 The SPPS also outlines five core planning principles which underpin the delivery of the two-tier planning system with the aim of furthering sustainable development. These are: improving health and well-being; creating and enhancing shared space; supporting sustainable economic growth; supporting good design and positive place making; and preserving and improving the built and natural environment.

The SPPS outlines that the regional strategic objectives for natural heritage are to:

- Protect, conserve, enhance and restore the abundance, quality, diversity and distinctiveness of the region's natural heritage;
 - Further sustainable development by ensuring that natural heritage and associated diversity is conserved and enhanced as an integral part of social, economic and environmental development;
 - Assist in meeting international (including European), national and local responsibilities and obligations in the protection and enhancement of the natural heritage;
 - Contribute to rural renewal and urban regeneration by ensuring developments take account of the role and value of natural heritage in supporting economic diversification and contributing to a high-quality environment; and
 - Take actions to reduce our carbon footprint and facilitate adaptation to climate change.
- 2.9 The SPPS recognises that the quality of our local environment is world renowned, however it highlights that the importance of the environment goes far beyond the immediate benefits it can provide, and states it is critical that

this vital asset is preserved and improved for the enjoyment and benefit of future generations.

- 2.10 The SPPS states that planning authorities should apply the precautionary principle when considering the impacts of a proposed development on national or international significant landscape or natural heritage resources.

Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland

- 2.11 Many of the policies within A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland 1993 (PSRNI) have been superseded by numerous planning policy statements/policy documents.

Planning Policy Statement 2: Natural Heritage

- 2.12 Planning Policy Statement 2: Natural Heritage (PPS2) was produced by the Department of the Environment (DoE) and was published in July 2013. For the purposes of PPS 2, natural heritage is defined as 'the diversity of our habitats, species, landscapes and earth science features'.
- 2.13 The objectives of PPS 2 are:
- To seek to further the conservation, enhancement and restoration of the abundance, quality, diversity and distinctiveness of the region's natural heritage;
 - To further sustainable development by ensuring that biological and geological diversity are conserved and enhanced as an integral part of social, economic and environmental development;
 - To assist in meeting international (including European), national and local responsibilities and obligations in the protection and enhancement of the natural heritage;
 - To contribute to rural renewal and urban regeneration by ensuring developments take account of the role and value of biodiversity in supporting economic diversification and contributing to a high quality environment;
 - To protect and enhance biodiversity, geodiversity and the environment; and
 - To take actions to reduce our carbon footprint and facilitate adaptation to climate change.

Planning Policy Statement 21 Sustainable Development in the Countryside

- 2.14 Planning Policy Statement 21 (PPS21) aims to manage development in the countryside in a manner consistent with achieving the strategic objectives of the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland; and in a manner which strikes a balance between the need to protect the countryside from unnecessary or inappropriate development, while supporting rural communities.

- 2.15 The objectives of this policy are:
- To manage growth in the countryside to achieve appropriate and sustainable patterns of development that meet the essential needs of a vibrant rural community;
 - To conserve the landscape and natural resources of the rural area and to protect it from excessive, inappropriate or obtrusive development and from the actual or potential effects of pollution;
 - To facilitate development necessary to achieve a sustainable rural economy; including appropriate farm diversification and other economic activity; and
 - To promote high standards in the design, siting and landscaping of development in the countryside.

Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy

- 2.16 The Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy identifies six priority areas for action, each outlining a framework of the actions necessary for achieving sustainable development. The priority area most relevant to natural heritage is number four - 'striking an appropriate balance between the responsible use and protection of natural resources in support of a better quality of life and a better-quality environment'. The strategic objectives of this priority area are to:
- Ensure an appropriate policy and legislative framework is in place supported by a regulatory regime which will deliver statutory environmental standards in respect of air, water and other environmental pollution;
 - Promote sustainable land management;
 - Promote sustainable marine management;
 - Ensure our built heritage is used in a sustainable way;
 - Improve the quality of life of our people by planning and managing development in ways which are sustainable and which contribute to creating a better environment;
 - Take action to halt biodiversity loss; and
 - Reduce the total quantity of waste going to landfill.

UK Marine Policy Statement

- 2.17 The UK Marine Policy Statement (UK MPS) has been prepared and adopted for the purposes of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. It is the framework for preparing Marine Plans and taking decisions affecting the marine environment and will contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom marine area.

Marine Plan for Northern Ireland (Draft 2018)

- 2.18 As per the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 and the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, the Department for Agriculture, Enterprise and Rural Affairs (DAERA), as the marine plan authority, is required to prepare marine plans for the better management of the Northern Ireland marine area.
- 2.19 The draft Marine Plan has been developed in accordance with the UK Marine Policy Statement (UK MPS) and will come into effect when it is published in final form and adopted.

The European Water Framework Directive (2000)

- 2.20 The European Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) has been transposed into Northern Ireland regulations through The Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017.
- 2.21 These regulations place a responsibility on Northern Ireland to try and ensure that all inland and coastal waters achieve or surpass 'good status' and require the publication and implementation of river basin management plans (RBMP).

Biodiversity

The Wildlife and Natural Environment (NI) Act 2011

- 2.22 The Wildlife and Natural Environment (NI) Act 2011 (the WANE Act) places a statutory duty on public bodies to conserve biodiversity when carrying out their functions.

Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy – A Biodiversity Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020

- 2.23 The Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy sets out how Northern Ireland plans to meet its international obligations and local targets to protect biodiversity and ensure that the environment can continue to support our people and economy. It adopts the modern and internationally agreed approach that emphasises the management of biological systems to deliver the materials and services upon which people depend – the ecosystem services approach. The mission of the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy is "to make progress towards halting overall biodiversity loss, establish an ecosystem approach and help business and society in general have a greater understanding of the benefits that nature can bring to everyday life in Northern Ireland."

UK National Ecosystem Assessment Northern Ireland Summary

- 2.24 This document was published in October 2011 and is the first analysis of Northern Ireland's natural environment in terms of the benefits it provides to society and to economic prosperity.
- 2.25 It provides an assessment of the extent and condition of Northern Ireland's natural and human-modified habitats. It looks at the ecosystem services they provide and, where possible, attempts to place a value on those services in economic, social and environmental terms.
- 2.26 The key recommendations from this assessment include:
- The Northern Ireland NEA should inform policy and decision-making;
 - A fully integrated cross-departmental and intersectoral approach is needed;
 - Greater understanding is required at public and political levels of ecosystem services;
 - Further research, especially around establishing financial values for service delivery, is required;
 - Effective delivery of ecosystem services requires informed and integrated management across a range of habitats that supports high levels of biodiversity and ensures long-term resilience to changing circumstances;
 - The role of ecosystem services in mitigating the effects of human impacts, including climate change and biodiversity loss, should be considered in all decisions about the use of land and sea;
 - Carbon management needs to be seen as an important part of management for multiple service delivery;
 - The full value of sequestration in existing habitats must be factored into carbon and greenhouse gas budgets and targets and given weight when making decisions on land management regimes;
 - Planning and management policies need to be aligned with natural processes to maintain the capacity for multiple service delivery;
 - A network of ecologically coherent sites should form a core for integrated management within the wider environment, delivering ecosystem services and minimising environmental degradation; and
 - The island of Ireland should be considered as a whole for ecosystem management.

Landscape

The European Landscape Convention and Northern Ireland's Landscape Charter

- 2.27 In Florence in October 2000, the European Landscape Convention was signed. It was ratified by the United Kingdom in November 2006 and came into force in March 2007.
- 2.28 In January 2014 the Department of the Environment published Northern Ireland's Landscape Charter which states that the European Landscape

Convention defines 'landscape' as 'an area as perceived by people whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors' and 'it concerns landscapes that might be considered outstanding as well as everyday or degraded landscapes'.

- 2.29 It outlines ten affirmations for Northern Ireland's landscapes, these are:
- Our landscapes are an essential aspect of our sense of place and belonging.
 - Our landscapes contribute to our health, well-being and quality of life.
 - Our landscapes are for all of us as part of our national and community identity.
 - Our landscapes reflect the multiplicity of our history and culture.
 - Our landscapes shall continue to inspire expression in words, sound and images.
 - Our landscapes shall continue to express who we are and have been as people.
 - Our landscapes shall continue to attract others to visit and generate wealth.
 - Our landscapes shall continue to attract individuals and businesses to locate here.
 - Our landscapes shall assist in marketing the export of our goods and services.
 - Our landscape and its management shall become an example to other nations.

Landscape Character Assessments

- 2.30 In 1999 the "Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment 2000" (NILCA) was published by DAERA. The NILCA subdivided the countryside into 130 Landscape Character Areas (LCAs), each based upon local patterns of geology, landform, land use, cultural and ecological features.
- 2.31 The NILCA also identifies Areas of Scenic Quality (ASQ) - within Area Plans these were generally recognised as Areas of High Scenic Value (AoHSVs). The district currently shares a small part of the Magheraknock Loughs AoHSV which is located to the north of Ballynahinch; most of this designation is within the neighbouring Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council area.

Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment

- 2.32 The Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment (NIRLCA), published in February 2016, provides a strategic overview of the landscape in Northern Ireland and subdivides the countryside into twenty-six Regional Landscape Character Areas based upon information on people and place and the combinations of nature, culture and perception which make each part of Northern Ireland unique.

Northern Ireland Regional Seascape Character Assessment

- 2.33 A Seascape Character Area is defined as a unique geographic area of land, intertidal and marine area with a recognisable sense of place and identity. NIEA commissioned a Regional Seascape Character Assessment of Northern Ireland. This was published in January 2014. The aim of this was to provide a strategic understanding of different areas of regional seascape character along the entire Northern Ireland coast. This contributed to the aims of the European Landscape Convention through promoting the protection, management and planning of the seascape, and supported European co-operation on landscape issues.

Local Policy Context Existing Development Plans

- 2.34 The current operational area plans which apply to Newry, Mourne and Down District Council are:
- Banbridge/Newry and Mourne Area Plan 2015
 - Ards and Down Area Plan 2015

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Corporate Plan 2024-2027

- 2.35 The mission of the Council's corporate plan is to deliver sustainable services and empower our communities through transparent governance and collaboration. The plan outlines eight strategic objectives, those most relevant to natural heritage are: to protect and enhance our environment to secure a sustainable future; and to support regenerative tourism opportunities which promote our culture, heritage and environment.

Newry, Mourne and Down Community Plan to 2030 'Living Well Together'

- 2.36 The Community Plan is the overarching strategic plan for integrated planning and delivery of services in Newry, Mourne and Down. The Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 introduced a statutory link between the Community Plan and the LDP, in that the preparation of the LDP must take account of the Community Plan.
- 2.37 Within the Community Plan it is recognised that while social and economic development are key to supporting the wellbeing of our communities, we must also ensure our unique natural environment and built heritage is enhanced and sustainably managed. The Community Plan identifies 'a clean quality and sustainable environment' as one of its five key priority areas, and it outlines that one of the indicators to measure the success of achieving this is a 'rich, diverse, natural environment' which can be measured by the quality of habitats.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Biodiversity Strategy 2024-2030

- 2.38 Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Biodiversity Strategy 2024-2030 and associated internal Action Plan will guide the protection and enhancement of biodiversity across Newry, Mourne and Down until 2030. The aims of the Biodiversity Strategy are to:
- Conserve and enhance the rich biodiversity of the district for both current and future generations;
 - Educate and raise awareness of the importance and variety of biodiversity found within the Newry, Mourne and Down district area; and
 - Encourage local ownership of Newry, Mourne and Down district's biodiversity.

Mourne Gullion Strangford Aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark Ten Year Masterplan 2020-2030

- 2.39 This document contained an integrated ten-year development plan that examined the potential for the future sustainable development of the Mourne, Gullion, Strangford aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark (aUGGp), to support its pending UNESCO Global Geopark status and fulfil its responsibilities for sustainable tourism, conservation and education. The vision statement of this Masterplan is 'Mourne Gullion Strangford UNESCO Global Geopark-born of fire and shaped by ice, cared by its people and shared with others'.
- 2.40 The Masterplan outlines, under four core themes, a summary of strategic high-level actions which provide a framework for the Mourne Gullion Strangford UNESCO Global Geopark Management Group (GMG), and NMDDC as the lead partner, and other bodies who share the desire to utilise the status for further sustainable development within the aUGGp. These four core themes are: A Cared for and Cherished Place, A Learning and Caring Environment, Sustainable Tourism and Economy; and A Healthy Place and Space. It also outlines three cross cutting themes, these are: Governance, Leadership and Networks, Community Engagement; and Marketing and Communication.

Landscape Character Review for Newry, Mourne and Down, Ironside Farrar 2020

- 2.41 The landscape of Newry, Mourne and Down has been subject to significant change since the publication of the original Landscape Character Assessments (1999), therefore, in 2019, the Council commissioned Ironside Farrar to undertake a review and update of the character assessment. This included an update of the biodiversity and geodiversity profiles which accompany each character assessment, and a review of local landscape designations.

- 2.42 This document describes the findings of the review and provides an updated landscape character assessment for the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Area.

This review is located within Technical Supplement 7 – Countryside Assessment, Appendix A.

Supplementary Guidance

Building on Tradition: A Sustainable Design Guide for the Northern Ireland Countryside

- 2.43 This document was published in May 2012 on behalf of the Department for the Environment and aims to raise awareness of the importance of looking after the Northern Ireland Countryside and how to achieve a higher quality of sustainable development that will provide a strong basis to protect and enhance our rural assets.
- 2.44 This document is supplementary planning guidance to Planning Policy Statement 21 Sustainable Development in the Countryside.

Wind Energy Development in Northern Ireland's Landscapes

- 2.45 This supplementary planning guidance on wind energy development in Northern Ireland's landscapes was published in August 2010 and accompanies the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Statement 18: Renewable Energy (PPS 18).
- 2.46 This guidance is based on the sensitivity of Northern Ireland's landscapes to wind energy development and contains an assessment of each of the 130 Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) in Northern Ireland by referencing the characteristics and values associated with each LCA. An overall sensitivity level was also given to each LCA using a five-point scale ranging from high sensitivity to low sensitivity.

Cross Boundary Policy Context

- 2.47 In considering the local policy context, it is important to take account of the three neighbouring councils in Northern Ireland and the two in the Republic of Ireland.
- 2.48 The table below offers a short summary of each Council's position in relation to natural heritage.

Table 1: Cross Boundary Policy Context

Neighbouring Council	Position
<p>Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council</p>	<p>Published its Preferred Options Paper in March 2018.</p> <p><u>Key Issue ENV 2: Protecting international, national and local nature conservation designations (that are designated outside the LDP process)</u></p> <p><u>Preferred Option ENV 2A - <i>An approach in line with existing policy with regards to protecting and enhancing international, national and local nature conservation sites that are not LDP designations.</i></u></p> <p>The preferred option aims to carry forward policy in line with the provisions of existing Policies NH1, NH3 and NH4 from Planning Policy Statement 2 (Natural Heritage) and the SPPS to ensure that all International, National and Local sites of Nature Conservation Importance designated outside the LDP process are afforded adequate protection against development proposals.</p> <p><u>Key Issue ENV 3: Identifying and protecting local nature conservation designations</u></p> <p><u>Preferred Option ENV 3A - <i>An approach in line with the existing policy with regards to protecting and enhancing local nature conservation designations; and review existing and identify new LDP designations as appropriate.</i></u></p> <p>This option allows for the review of existing Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance (SLNCIs), and the designation of new SLNCIs in the LDP, which are worthy of protection due to their local nature conservation or earth science value. The current SLNCIs designated in the existing Area Plans will be reviewed and amended as necessary. This would address any inconsistencies in approach across the existing Area Plans, in terms of the level of protection afforded to these areas.</p>
<p>Ards and North Down Borough Council</p>	<p>Published its Preferred Options Paper in March 2019.</p> <p>Key Issue 23: Protecting International and National Nature Conservation Interests</p>

	<p><u>Option 23 - Adopt an approach in line with existing regional policy with regards to protecting and enhancing international and national conservation sites that are not LDP designations.</u></p> <p>The retention of this only preferred approach will enable continued safeguarding of the Borough's natural heritage assets and will ensure that the habitats, species and features protected by law are not harmed or adversely impacted by development proposals.</p> <p>Key Issue 24: Protecting and enhancing local nature conservation sites and scenic landscapes</p> <p><u>Preferred Option 24a - Review local nature conservation sites and scenic landscapes and formulate appropriate accompanying policy for their protection and enhancement.</u></p> <p>This preferred option allows for the review of existing LDP designations and also for new designations as appropriate. The existing designations could then be updated and amended as necessary. This option would also address any inconsistencies in approach across the existing Development Plans in terms of the level of protection afforded to these areas.</p> <p>Key Issue 25: Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)</p> <p><u>Preferred Option 25a - Bring forward bespoke policies to guide future development and protection of Strangford and Lecale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.</u></p> <p>The preferred option would permit the Council to recognise the unique characteristics of the AONB that falls within our district and tailor bespoke policies to address the unique challenges it faces. It also provides the opportunity for cross-council co-operation as part of the AONB falls within Newry, Mourne and Down District council area.</p>
Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council	<p>Published its Local Development Plan's Plan Strategy in September 2023.</p> <p><u>Strategic Policy 19: Protecting and Enhancing Natural Heritage:</u></p> <p>The Plan will support development proposals that:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Protect, conserve and, where possible, enhance and restore our natural heritage; b) Maintain and, where possible, enhance landscape quality and the distinctiveness and attractiveness of the area; c) Promote the highest quality of design for any new development affecting our natural heritage assets; d) Safeguard the Lagan Valley Regional Park allowing appropriate opportunities for enhanced access at identified locations thereby protecting their integrity and value. <p>Council's operational policies which support the strategic policy are outlined below:</p> <p><i>NH1 European and Ramsar Sites – International</i></p> <p><i>NH2 Species Protected by Law</i></p> <p><i>NH3 Sites of Nature Conservation Importance – National</i></p> <p><i>NH4 Sites of Nature Conservation Importance – Local</i></p> <p><i>NH5 Habitats, Species or Features of Natural Heritage Importance</i></p> <p><i>NH6 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty</i></p>
Monaghan County Council	<p>Monaghan County Development Plan 2025-2031 was adopted 26 May 2025 and shall have effect from 7 July 2025.</p> <p>The overarching aim of the Development Plan is to protect our natural and built heritage in an appropriate sustainable manner for the benefit of future generations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage Conservation and Landscape Objectives HCLO1-4 • Heritage Conservation and Landscape Policy HCLP 1 • Landscape Character Assessment Objective LCO1 • Heritage, Conservation and Landscape Objective HCLO 5 • Heritage, Conservation and Landscape Objectives HCLO6-9 • Heritage Conservation and Landscape Policies HCLP2-3 • Heritage, Conservation and Landscape Objectives HCLO10-18

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage, Conservation and Landscape Policies HCLP4-10 • Areas of Primary Amenity Value Policy PAP1-2 • Areas of Secondary Amenity Value Policies SAP1-2 • Scenic Routes Policies SRP1-3 • Wetlands Policies WLP1-3 • Trees and Woodlands Policies TWP1-2 • Invasive Species Objective ISO1 • Invasive Species Policy ISP1
Louth County Council	<p>Local Development Plan – Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027 was adopted by council members in September 2021. The Plan aims to conserve and enhance the county's green infrastructure and ecosystem services, support the sustainable management of natural assets and the biodiversity of the country's protected habitats and species, to provide a wide range of environmental, social and economic benefits to communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage Plan Objective – NBG1 • International, EU and Irish Policy on Biodiversity Objective - NBG2 • European Sites Objectives – NBG3 – NBG7 • Protected Plan and Animal Species Objective - NBG8 • Protecting Biodiversity Value in Non-designated Sites Objectives - NBG9 - NBG 11 • Invasive Species Objectives – NBG 12 – NBG13 • Natural Heritage Areas Objectives – NBG 14 – NBG 15 • Sites of Geological Interest Objectives – NBG16- NBG 18 • Wetlands Objectives – NBG19- NBG 22 • Landscape Conservation Area Objectives – NBG 23 – NBG 28. • Trees Objectives – NBG 29- NBG 35 • Environment and Amenities Objectives – NBG 36- NBG 39 • Scenic Routes Objective – NBG 40

- 2.49 The Council has engaged and responded to neighbouring Councils POP's and draft or final Plan Strategies (where published). The Council is represented on a number of working groups to discuss cross-boundary issues, including the Development Plan Working Group.
- 2.50 The draft Plan Strategy was presented to neighbouring councils in a workshop on 9 April 2025, where representatives from the three neighbouring councils in the north were represented. A similar presentation was held online with the two neighbouring councils in Louth and Monaghan County Councils on 8 April 2025. This involved discussion on the proposed Plan objectives, strategic policies and new operational policies, along with the consideration of shared cross-boundary issues.
- 2.51 In consideration of neighbouring Council's development plan documents and discussions held with their officials, it is the opinion of this Council that no conflict is apparent with our draft Plan Strategy, insofar as it related to natural heritage.

3.0 Preferred Options Paper

- 3.1 Publication of the Preferred Options Paper (POP) in June 2018 represented the Council's formal commencement of work on the preparation of a new local development plan (LDP) for the district. The purpose of the POP was to stimulate debate and encourage feedback to inform the development of the LDP. The POP set out the proposed vision and strategic objectives for the LDP along with 24 key strategic issues. For each key strategic issue, a range of options were set out and the Council's preferred option identified.
- 3.2 As part of the process of preparing the POP, a Preliminary Review of Operational Planning Policy was carried out by the Council. This drew upon operational experience and changes in regional planning policy to identify issues to be addressed through the LDP.
- 3.3 The POP did not include any key strategic issues relating directly to natural heritage. It outlined four LDP themes along with their associated objectives:
- Spatial growth strategy
 - Social
 - Economic
 - Environment
- 3.4 Chapter 4 of the POP focused on our environment and listed 'protecting and enhancing the natural and built environment to achieve biodiversity, quality design, enhanced leisure and economic opportunity and promote health and wellbeing' as its first objective.
- 3.5 Alongside the publication of the POP, several key documents were published, including a Sustainability Appraisal Interim Report, Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report (SA) incorporating a Strategic Environmental assessment

(SEA), an Equality Impact Assessment Progress Report (EQIA) and a Preliminary Review of Operational Policy.

- 3.6 Following the launch of this document, the Council carried out a public consultation exercise for 12 weeks between 1st June 2018 – 24th August 2018. During this consultation period 14 public engagement events were held across the district and advertisements were published in the local press.
- 3.7 There were 222 representations received during the POP consultation exercise (6 responses were received outside the consultation period). Of these, 14 were received from statutory bodies.

4.0 District Profile

- 4.1 Newry, Mourne and Down's natural heritage, with its unique combination of mountains and sea, is central to our tourism industry, generating employment in the recreation and nature-based activity sectors. There are a number of international, national and local natural heritage designations across the district².
- 4.2 Within Newry, Mourne and Down District Council there are:
- 3 Special Protection Areas (SPAs)
 - 11 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
 - 4 RAMSAR Sites
 - 1 Global Geopark (24 Geosites and 3 Geopark Trails)
 - 62 Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs)
 - 2 Areas of Scientific Interest (ASIs)
 - 7 National Nature Reserves/Nature Reserves
 - 2 Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs)
 - 3 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
 - 25 Landscape Character Areas
 - 5 Regional Landscape Character Areas
 - 7 Regional Seascape Character Areas
 - 187 Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance (SLNCIs)
 - 3 Special Countryside Areas (SCA)
- 4.3 Further details on each of these designations is listed below.

International designations **Special Protection Areas**

- 4.4 Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are designated under the European Commission Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds (79/409/EEC), also known as The Birds Directive. All European Community Member States are required to identify internationally important areas for breeding, overwintering

² Natural heritage designations can be viewed on the LDP Map Viewer.

and migrating birds and designate them as Special Protection Areas (SPAs). In Northern Ireland SPAs are designated under The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended).

4.5 There are **3** SPAs within Newry, Mourne and Down:

- Killough Bay SPA
- Strangford Lough SPA
- Carlingford Lough SPA

Special Areas of Conservation

4.6 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are those which have been given greater protection under the European legislation of The Habitat's Directive. They have been designated because of a possible threat to the special habitats or species which they contain and to provide increased protection to a variety of animals, plants and habitats of importance to biodiversity both on a national and international scale. In Northern Ireland SACs are designated under The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations 1995 (Northern Ireland) (as amended).

4.7 There are **11** SACs within Newry, Mourne and Down:

- Aghnadarragh Lough SAC
- Turmennan SAC
- Lecale Fens SAC
- Hollymount SAC
- Ballykilbeg SAC
- Murlough SAC
- Eastern Mourne SAC
- Strangford Lough SAC
- Derryleckagh SAC
- Rostrevor Wood SAC
- Slieve Gullion SAC

Ramsar Sites

4.8 Ramsar Sites are those areas covered by the Convention on Wetlands, called the Ramsar Convention, which seeks the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. This recognises wetlands as ecosystems that are extremely important for biodiversity conservation in general and for the wellbeing of society. The management of our wetlands is important and are sensitive to trans-boundary water and air pollutants.

4.9 There are **4** RAMSAR sites within Newry, Mourne and Down:

- Turmennan Ramsar Site
- Killough Bay Ramsar Site
- Strangford Lough Ramsar Site
- Carlingford Lough Ramsar Site

4.10 There is one proposed RAMSAR site within the district at Derryleckagh.

Global Geopark

4.11 Global Geoparks are designated by UNESCO as 'single, unified geographical areas where sites and landscapes of international geological significance are managed with a holistic concept of protection, education and sustainable development. A UNESCO Global Geopark uses its geological heritage, in connection with all other aspects of the area's natural and cultural heritage, to enhance awareness and understanding of key issues facing society, such as using our earth's resources sustainably, mitigating the effects of climate change and reducing natural hazard-related risks'.

4.12 The entirety of Newry, Mourne and Down is a designated Global Geopark, known as the Mourne Gullion Strangford Global Geopark (see Appendix A). The area was awarded UNESCO Global Geopark status in May 2023, it has over 400 million years of geological history and has a total area measuring 1,932 km² including 294.12 km² of marine areas³.

4.13 There are 24 Geosites identified within Mourne Gullion Strangford Global Geopark:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Annalong Geosite | 14. Lighthouse Road Geosite |
| 2. Ardglass Geosite | 15. Newry Canal Geosite |
| 3. Ballyhornan Geosite | 16. Murlough Lough Nature Reserve Geosite |
| 4. Bernish Viewing Point Geosite | 17. Quoile Estuary Geosite |
| 5. Bloody Bridge Geosite | 18. Slieve Croob Geosite |
| 6. Camlough Lake Geosite | 19. Slieve Donard (Donard Car Park) Geosite |
| 7. Camlough Quarry Geosite | 20. Slieve Gullion Geosite |
| 8. Cloughmore Glacial Erratic Geosite | 21. Slieve Gullion Ring Dyke Geosite |
| 9. Cranfield Beach Geosite | 22. Spelga Dam Geosite |
| 10. Dundrum Inner Bay Geosite | 23. Tollymore Forest Park/Shimna River Geosite |
| 11. Flagstaff Geosite | 24. Windy Gap Geosite |
| 12. Granite Trail Geosite | |
| 13. Killard Point Geosite | |

4.14 There are 3 Geopark trails identified within Mourne Gullion Strangford Global Geopark Trails:

1. Gullion Geological Trail
2. Mournes Geological Trail – Bloody Bridge
3. Strangford Geological Trail

³ [Interactive map - Mourne Gullion Strangford UNESCO Global Geopark \(mournegullionstrangfordgeopark.com\)](https://www.mournegullionstrangfordgeopark.com)

National Designations

Areas of Special Scientific Interest

4.15 Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) are protected sites which are of special interest by reason of their flora, fauna, geological and/or physiological features designated under the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 (as amended). Sites are designated to conserve biodiversity and geodiversity.

4.16 There are **62** Areas of Special Scientific Interest within Newry, Mourne and Down:

Ardglass ASSI	Carlingford Lough ASSI
Aughnadarragh Lough ASSI	Carrickastickan ASSI
Ballybannan ASSI	Carrivemaclone ASSI
Ballycam ASSI	Cashel Loughs ASSI
Ballykilbeg ASSI	Castle Enigan ASSI
Ballynagross Lower ASSI	Clermont and Anglesey Mountain ASSI
Black Lough ASSI	Cloghinny ASSI
Carrowcarlin ASSI	Derryleckagh ASSI
Castlewellan Lake ASSI	Drumlougher Lough ASSI
Corbally ASSI	Eastern Mourne ASSI
Gransha ASSI	Fathom Upper ASSI
Heron and Carrigullian Loughs ASSI	Glendesha ASSI
Hollymount ASSI	Goraghtwood Quarry ASSI
Killard ASSI	Greenan ASSI
Killough Bay and Strand Lough ASSI	Greenan Lough ASSI
Loughkeelan ASSI	Gruggandoo ASSI
Loughmoney ASSI	Kilbroney River ASSI
Murlough ASSI	Kilkeel Steps ASSI
Quoile ASSI	Levallymore ASSI
Sheepland Coast ASSI	Lislea ASSI
Shimna River ASSI	Loughaveely ASSI
St John's Point ASSI	Lurgan Lough ASSI
Strangford Lough Part 2 ASSI	Mourne Coast ASSI
Strangford Lough Part 3 ASSI	Mullaghbane ASSI
Tullyratty ASSI	Rostrevor Wood ASSI
Turmennan ASSI	Samuel's Port ASSI
Tyrella and Minerstown ASSI	Slieve Gullion ASSI
Woodgrange ASSI	Tullyard ASSI
Aughnagon Quarry ASSI	Western Mourne and Kilfeaghan Upper ASSI
Cam Lough ASSI	White Water River ASSI
Camlough Quarry ASSI	Slieve Croob ASSI

Areas of Scientific Interest

- 4.17 Areas of Scientific Interest (ASI) are designated under the Amenity Lands Act (Northern Ireland) 1965 due to the importance of their flora, fauna, geological or physiographical features.
- 4.18 There are 2 Areas of Scientific Interest (ASIs) in Newry, Mourne and Down:
- Mourne Coast
 - South Mourne Coast

National Nature Reserves

- 4.19 National Nature Reserves (NNR) are designated and managed by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 as amended 1989, 2002 and 2013 (NCALO). They aim to conserve their features now and for future generations through the development of experience and techniques in managing land for conservation.
- 4.20 There are **2** National Nature Reserves within Newry, Mourne and Down District Council:
- Hollymount Forest
 - Killard

Nature Reserves

- 4.21 Nature Reserves (NR) are also designated and managed by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 as amended 1989, 2002 and 2013 (NCALO). They aim to manage and protect these areas, conserve biodiversity and provide opportunities for public access, study, and research.
- 4.22 There are **5** Nature Reserves within Newry, Mourne and Down District Council:
- Murlough
 - Cloughy Rocks
 - Quoile Pondage Basin
 - Bohill Forest
 - Rostrevor Forest

Marine Conservation Zones

- 4.23 Marine Conservation Zones⁴ (MCZs) are designated under the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 to protect, conserve and manage its priority marine features (habitats, species, natural features).
- 4.24 There are **2** Marine Conservation Zones designated within the district:
- Strangford Lough
 - Carlingford Lough

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

- 4.25 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are designated under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, primarily for their high landscape quality, wildlife importance and rich cultural and architectural heritage.
- 4.26 There are **3** Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in Newry, Mourne and Down:
- Mourne
 - Ring of Gullion
 - Strangford and Lecale

Landscape Character Areas

- 4.27 There are **25** Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) in the Newry, Mourne and Down - some of these areas are shared with neighbouring councils:
- | | |
|--|--|
| LCA 66 Armagh Drumlins | LCA 73 Kilkeel Coast |
| LCA 84 Mourne Foothills | LCA 92 Ballyquintin and Lecale Coast |
| LCA 67 Armagh/Banbridge Hills | LCA 74 The Kingdom of Mourne |
| LCA 85 Newcastle Valleys | LCA 93 Portaferry and North Lecale |
| LCA 68 Carrigatuke Hills | LCA 75 Mourne Mountains |
| LCA 86 Tyrella Coastal Dunes | LCA 94 Strangford Drumlins and Islands |
| LCA 69 Newry Basin | LCA 76 Ballyronney Basin |
| LCA 87 Slieve Croob Summits | LCA 95 Ballygowan Drumlins |
| LCA 70 Crossmaglen Drumlins and Loughs | LCA 77 Iveagh Slopes |
| LCA 88 Craggy Dromara Uplands | LCA 96 Castlereagh Plateau |
| LCA 71 Ring of Gullion | LCA 83 Lower Slieve Croob Foothills |
| LCA 90 Ravarnet Valley | |
| LCA 72 Slieve Roosley | |
| LCA 91 Quoile Valley Lowlands | |

⁴ Marine Conservation Zones replaced Marine Nature Reserves following the introduction of the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013

Regional Landscape Character Areas

- 4.28 There are **5** Regional Landscape Character Areas in Newry, Mourne and Down Council, some of which are shared with neighbouring council areas:
- 22 - Down Drumlins and Holywood Hills
 - 23 - Newry Valley and Upper Bann
 - 24 - Slieve Gullion and South Armagh Hills
 - 25 - Mourne and Slieve Croob
 - 26 - Strangford, Ards and Lecale

Regional Seascape Character Areas

- 4.29 There are **7** Regional Seascape Character Areas within Newry, Mourne and Down Council, these are:
- Strangford Lough
 - Lecale Coast
 - Dundrum Bay
 - Mourne Coast
 - Carlingford Lough
 - Newry Estuary
 - Irish Sea (South Down)

Local Designations

Special Countryside Areas

- 4.30 Special Countryside Areas (SCAs) are areas of the countryside with exceptional landscapes, stretches of the coast or lough shore, and certain views or vistas, wherein the quality of the landscape and unique amenity value is such that that development should only be permitted in exceptional circumstances. SCAs are identified through the LDP process with local policies to protect their unique qualities. Further detail of the SCAs are included in Technical Supplement 7 – Countryside Assessment.
- 4.31 There are **3** areas designated as Special Countryside Areas (SCA) within Newry, Mourne and Down:
- The High Mournes
 - Ring of Gullion
 - Slieve Croob

Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance

- 4.32 Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance (SLNCIs) are designated for their habitats, species and/or earth science. SLNCIs are identified through the LDP process with policies provided in the plan for their protection and/or enhancement.

4.33 There are **187** SLNCIs in Newry, Moure and Down:

Drumantine Grassland	Aghadavoyle Ponds
Dromantine College	Foughilletra East and
Canal Wood	Foughellitra Mountain
Gransha	Longfield Grassland
Goragh Wood and Goraghwood	Jonesborough Fen and
Quarry	Grasslands
Drummilt Railway, Lough Gilly	Mullaghbane Mountain
and Dane's Lough	Silverbridge
Ballintate Woodland	Greenkill Grassland
Black Hill	Carran Fen
Bessbrook	Carnally Fen North
Eshwary Fen	Crosslieve Pond Fen
Drumilly	Crosslieve
Camlough Mountain	Creggan Bane Fen
Duburren Pastures	Drumintee
Ballymacdermot Mountain	Lough Ross
Cullywater	Crossmaglen North Fen
Dorsy	Carnally Fen South
Garvagh Lough	Carnally Grassland
Aghmakane Fen	Lurgan Lough
Bernish Rock	Glassdrumman Fen
Aghmakane Fen West	Tullydonnell Grassland
Aghanduff Lower Mountain	Tievecrom
Aghmakane Fen South	Carrickastickan Grassland
Dorsy Hearty Fen	Glassdrumman Lough
Tamnaghbane	Lisamry Lough
Slievenacappel	Crossmaglen Fen
Longfield Road	Carrickbroad
Clarkill	Cornahove Lough
Levallymore Grassland	Cappagh Lough Fen and
Aghanduff Upper Mountain	Cappagh Grassland
Cashel	Drummackavale Lough
Hawthorn Hill Upper	Annaghgad Grassland
Lisleitrim Lough	Clonalig Lough
Aughadanove	Drumboy Lough
Cullyhanna Lough	Cullion Fen
Foughilletra Fen	Tamary
Hawthorn Hill	Croreagh, Newry
Kiltybane Lough	Sheeptown Fen
Lough Patrick	Damolly
Sheetrim Lough	Creeve
Ummeracam	Derryleckagh Lake
Slievegullion Grassland	Western Mourne Habitat and
Lough Alina	Geology incorporating Rocky
Teer	Mountain
Carrigans Grassland	Aughnagon Quarry
Annaghmare Lough	Ghann River

Granite View
 Betty's Hill Fen
 Milltown Lough
 Dublin Road Bridge
 Commons Hall Road
 Fathom Lower Woods and
 Grasslands
 Cloghoge
 Maginnis Villas
 Greenan Wood
 Carrickmacstay
 Upper Burren Lake and Fen
 Burren Lowlands incorporating
 Donaghaguy Reservoir
 Narrow Water Forest
 Bunarilla
 Killeen Fen North
 Cassy Water
 Flagstaff
 Clontygora
 Carrickbawn Wood
 Carrickbawn
 Anglesey Mountain
 Rostrevor River
 Kilbroney Park
 Spelga Dam incorporating
 Spelga Dam Stream
 Annalong River
 Mullartown Moraine
 Ballymartin Moraine
 incorporating Ballyveagh Beg
 Glassdrumman
 Mourne Park incorporating
 White Water River and Cranfield
 Moraine
 Attical Moraine Complex
 St. Pious Hill
 South Down Coast
 Carrogs – Carnbane Wood and
 Daisy Hill Wood (both within
 Newry City)
 Altnadua Lough
 Annesley Demesne
 Ardglass Bay
 Ardglass – Cloghan Head
 Ardglass – Ringfad Point
 Ardmeen Fen
 Ballybeg Fen

Ballydugan Lake
 Ballydyan
 Ballygallum Ponds
 Ballylough Grasslands
 Ballymenagh Fen Site
 Ballynoe Fen Site
 Ballyvaston
 Bohill
 Bow Lough
 Brookvale Bog and Lough
 Burren, Shimna and Trassey
 Rivers
 Carrickmannon Lough
 Castlemahon Fen
 Claragh Lough
 Clea Lakes
 Creevy Lough and Rocks
 Cuttyshane Bog
 Downpatrick Marshes
 Drumgooland Lake
 Dundrum Wood
 Dunnanelly
 Glassdrumman Fen and Lake
 Glebe House, Rathmullan
 Great Dam
 Knocksticken
 Lecale Coast
 Leesans Cottage
 Lough Money
 Loughinisland
 Magheracranmoney Wood
 Magheralone
 McAuley's Lake
 Mill Pond
 Moneycarragh River
 Pollramer Lake
 Portulla Wood
 Rathmullan Point
 Rathmullan West
 Ringawaddy Reedbed
 Sandy Port
 Seaconnell
 Seaforde Lakes
 Shague Hill
 Slieve Croob
 Slievenagriddle
 St John's Point
 Tannaghmore Reservoir

Tullynacree
Tullyratty
Tullyree
Tyrella/Minerstown
Yates Corner
Drin Wood
Loughran's Lane

Slieve Croob
Slievenaboley Road
Ardglass
Gargarry Fen
Ballymagreehan Quarry
Altnadua Lough

Tree Preservation Orders

- 4.34 Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) are imposed to protect selected trees or woodland if their removal is likely to have a significant impact on the local environment and its enjoyment by the public. Priority will be given to the protection of those trees deemed to be at immediate risk from active felling or damage from development on site.
- 4.35 The Council has a duty to protect trees under Section 122 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.
- 4.36 Spatial mapping of current TPOs within the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council is available on our website - www.newrymouredown.org/protected-trees-in-the-council-area .

Ancient and Long-established Woodlands

- 4.37 Ancient woodland are areas that have been continuously wooded since at least 1600. Very little woodland remains in Northern Ireland that can definitively be proven ancient.
- 4.38 Long-established woodland is woodland that has been continuously present since the first accurate, comprehensive mapping of the province by the Ordnance Survey in the 1830s.
- 4.39 The Woodland Trust created an inventory of ancient and long-established woodland in Northern Ireland entitled 'Back on the Map'⁵. This was the first such recording for Northern Ireland.
- 4.40 More information on ancient and long-established woodlands can be found at ati.woodlandtrust.org.uk.

5.0 Consultee and Councillor Engagement

- 5.1 In order to meet the requirements set out in the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 relating to the need for the Plan Strategy to take account of the RDS, other policy and guidance issued by the Department and other relevant government strategies and plans, the Council has engaged with key

⁵ [Back on the Map - Ancient Tree Inventory](#)

consultees representing relevant central government departments and agencies. This engagement was undertaken in three parts over the period June 2022-June 2023. Stakeholders were provided with LDP strategies and policies and afforded the opportunity to review and provide written comment.

- 5.2 Elected members have been engaged in the LDP Plan Strategy from the POP stage. An initial preparatory studies paper on the Council's Environmental Assets was presented to Council in January 2016. The purpose of the paper was to provide members with an overview of the existing environmental assets in Newry, Mourne and Down, and to outline how these are protected and utilised across the district.
- 5.3 The draft Plan Strategy Natural Heritage policies were presented to the planning committee on 5th May 2021 where there were no concerns raised by members. The draft policies were presented to the project management team in June 2022 and followed up with a series of engagement meetings. The comments received helped to shape the strategic policies and proposals.
- 5.4 Finalised draft policies and designations were brought back to Members at a Special Committee on the 31 March 2025. These were approved and the decision ratified by full Council on the 6 May 2025.

6.0 Draft Plan Strategy Approach

- 6.1 The principal approach of the draft Plan Strategy is to facilitate the aims and objectives of the RDS and SPPS by providing a strategic policy framework that conserves, protects and where possible enhances the natural heritage within Newry, Mourne and Down.
- 6.2 In bringing forward the natural heritage policies for the district, the Council has been mindful to ensure that any changes to operational policies, as set out in Planning Policy Statement 2: Natural Heritage (PPS2), are aligned with regional policy requirements for Natural Heritage currently contained within the SPPS. Special Countryside Areas (SCAs) are dealt with in Technical Supplement 7 – Countryside Assessment.
- 6.3 The LDP recognises the important contribution that the district's rich and diverse natural heritage brings to people across the district. Many nature conservation sites within our district have been designated sites of international, national and local importance in order to protect their significant and endangered habitats, species and biodiversity. This approach is considered to be in line with the SPPS's regional strategic objectives, outlined in para 6.172.
- 6.4 This approach will be delivered primarily through the strategic policy ENVS2 (Protecting, Conserving and Enhancing Natural Heritage and our Valued Landscapes), as set out within Chapter 5 of the draft Plan Strategy. Policies NH1-NH7 and Policy LA2 are developed on the policy context, primarily PPS2.

- 6.5 The natural heritage policies have in large been retained from Planning Policy Statement 2: Natural Heritage, with minor modifications to take account of policy wording within the SPPS. They have been developed in conjunction with the POP paper and the relevant responses to it.

7.0 Soundness

- 7.1 The draft Plan Strategy has been prepared to take due regard to meeting the tests of soundness, as set out in the DfI Development Plan Practice Note: Soundness (Version 2, May 2017).
- 7.2 The Draft Plan Strategy, in relation to the natural heritage subject policies is regarded as sound because it meets the various tests of soundness, as summarised below:

Table 7.0 Soundness

Procedural tests	
P2	The natural heritage policies have evolved from the Preferred Options Paper (POP) and POP Consultation Report.
P3	The natural heritage policies have been subject to a Sustainability Appraisal. Further details are included in the Sustainability Appraisal Report.
Consistency tests	
C1	The natural heritage policies have taken account of the Regional Development Strategy (RDS), with particular focus on RG11 as it is linked with the natural environment.
C2	The natural heritage policies have taken account of Newry, Mourne and Down's Community Plan, particularly in relation to the Environment and Spatial Development Thematic Group within this plan.
C3	The natural heritage policies have taken account of policy and guidance issued by the Department particularly the SPPS, PPS2: Natural Heritage, PPS21: Sustainable Development in the Countryside and A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland.
C4	The natural heritage policies have taken into account the existing development plan policies related to Newry, Mourne and Down.
Coherence and effectiveness tests	
CE1	The natural heritage policies have taken account of the emerging LDPs of neighbouring Councils, and they are not considered to be in conflict with them.
CE2	The natural heritage policies are founded on a robust evidence base, which includes the baseline information assembled in LDP Paper 6: Environmental Assets, the Preferred Options paper and responses to it, and subsequent consultation with consultees, including DfI.

CE3	<p>The Monitoring Framework within Chapter 7 of the draft Plan Strategy outlines the following LDP objectives in relation to natural heritage:</p> <p>4. To protect, conserve, enhance and restore the district's natural heritage to support biodiversity in its habitats, species, landscapes and earth science features, and promote health and wellbeing.</p> <p>5. To protect our sensitive landscapes from inappropriate development.</p>
CE4	<p>The natural heritage policies can be reviewed at Plan Review Stage.</p> <p>There will be flexibility at the Local Policies stage to review and introduce new local designations, provided they are underpinned by a sound evidence base.</p>

8.0 Evolution of policies

Existing Policy PPS2: Natural Heritage	Regional Planning Policy	POP Preferred Option	Comments received to POP	Draft Plan Strategy Policy
<p>Policy NH1: European and Ramsar Sites – International</p> <p>Planning permission will only be granted for a development proposal that is not likely to have a significant effect on a European or Ramsar site. Mitigation measures in the form of planning conditions may be imposed. Where a development proposal could adversely affect the integrity of these sites, development may only be permitted in exceptional circumstances.</p>	<p>SPPS</p> <p>The SPPS (paras 6.176, 6.177 and 6.178) accords with Policy NH1 in regard to assessing proposals that may impact on European or Ramsar sites.</p> <p>The SPPS does not set out exceptions but refer to these in the relevant statutory provisions.</p>	<p>Not raised as key issue in POP.</p> <p>The Preliminary Review of Operational Planning Policy that was published alongside the POP recommended that the existing policy approach as set out in PPS2 be carried forward with minor changes to reflect the wording of the SPPS.</p>	<p>Public responses to the POP generally welcomed the Plan Vision and Strategic Objectives, however, some felt there was a need to expand on the reference to sustainable development and the role of the natural environment. The Woodland Trust stated the POP did not reflect the role of the natural environment in providing ecosystems services, such as improving air quality, water management, flood alleviation, urban heat island mitigation etc.</p>	<p>Policy NH 1 – European and Ramsar Sites – International</p> <p>The policy outlines that permission will only be granted for a development proposal that is not likely to have a significant effect on a European Site or a listed or proposed Ramsar Site. Mitigation measures in the form of planning conditions may be imposed. Only in exceptional circumstances will a development proposal which could affect the integrity of a European or Ramsar site by permitted: where there are no alternative solutions; the proposed development is required for imperative reasons of overriding public interest; and compensatory measures are agreed and fully secured.</p>

<p>Policy NH2: Species Protected by Law</p> <p>Planning permission will only be granted for a development proposal that is not likely to harm a European protected species (listed under Annex IV of the Habitats Directive). In exceptional circumstances, a development proposal that is likely to harm these species may only be permitted if it meets the 4 specified criteria. Under Policy NH2, planning permission will only be granted for a development proposal that is not likely to harm any other statutorily protected species (including national) and which can be adequately</p>	<p>The SPPS (paras 6.180, 6.181 and 6.182) is largely consistent with the thrust of NH2. Unlike PPS2, the SPPS does not specify a section on national protected species, rather it includes all text under the Protected Species heading. Para 6.179 of the SPPS outlines the steps that must be taken to establish whether a legally protected species is present on site or to determine if it may be affected by a proposed development.</p>	<p>Not raised as key issue in POP.</p> <p>The Preliminary Review of Operational Planning Policy that was published alongside the POP recommended that the existing policy approach as set out in PPS2 be carried forward with minor changes to reflect the wording of the SPPS.</p>	<p>The RSBP stated in their response to the POP that Policy NH2 of PPS2 remains critically important.</p>	<p>Policy NH2 – Species Protected by Law</p> <p>The policy outlines that permission will only be granted for a proposal which is not likely to harm a European or national protected species. The policy outlines that in exceptional circumstances, a development proposal that is likely to harm these species may only be permitted where the specified criteria are met.</p>
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mitigated or compensated against.				
<p>Policy NH3: Sites for Nature Conservation Importance – National</p> <p>Under Policy NH3, planning permission will only be granted for a development proposal that is not likely to have an adverse effect on the integrity, including the value of the site to the habitat network, or special interest of a site of national nature conservation importance. Development proposals which could adversely affect a site of national nature conservation importance may only be permitted where the benefits of the proposed development clearly outweigh the</p>	<p>The SPPS is largely consistent with Policy NH3 (paras 6.183 and 6.184).</p> <p>The SPPS states that 'There is a legal duty to take reasonable steps to further the conservation and enhancement of the features by which the ASSI is of special scientific interest'.</p> <p>In the SPPS, Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) replace Marine Nature Reserves (MNRs) in the list of National Sites of Nature Conservation Importance, in accordance with the Marine Act (NI) 2013.</p>	<p>Not raised as key issue in POP.</p> <p>The Preliminary Review of Operational Planning Policy that was published alongside the POP recommended that the existing policy wording as set out in PPS2 be carried forward with minor changes to reflect the wording of the SPPS.</p>	<p>The RSBP in their response stated that the POP does not explicitly protect national nature conservation designations.</p>	<p>Policy NH3 – Sites of Nature Conservation Importance – National</p> <p>Policy outlines that permission will only be granted for a development proposal that is not likely to have an adverse effect on the integrity, including the value of the site to the habitat network, or special interest of an ASSI, a Nature Reserve, a National Nature Reserve or Marine Conservation Zone. Development proposals which could adversely affect a site of national nature conservation importance may only be permitted where the benefits of the proposed development clearly outweigh the value of the site.</p>

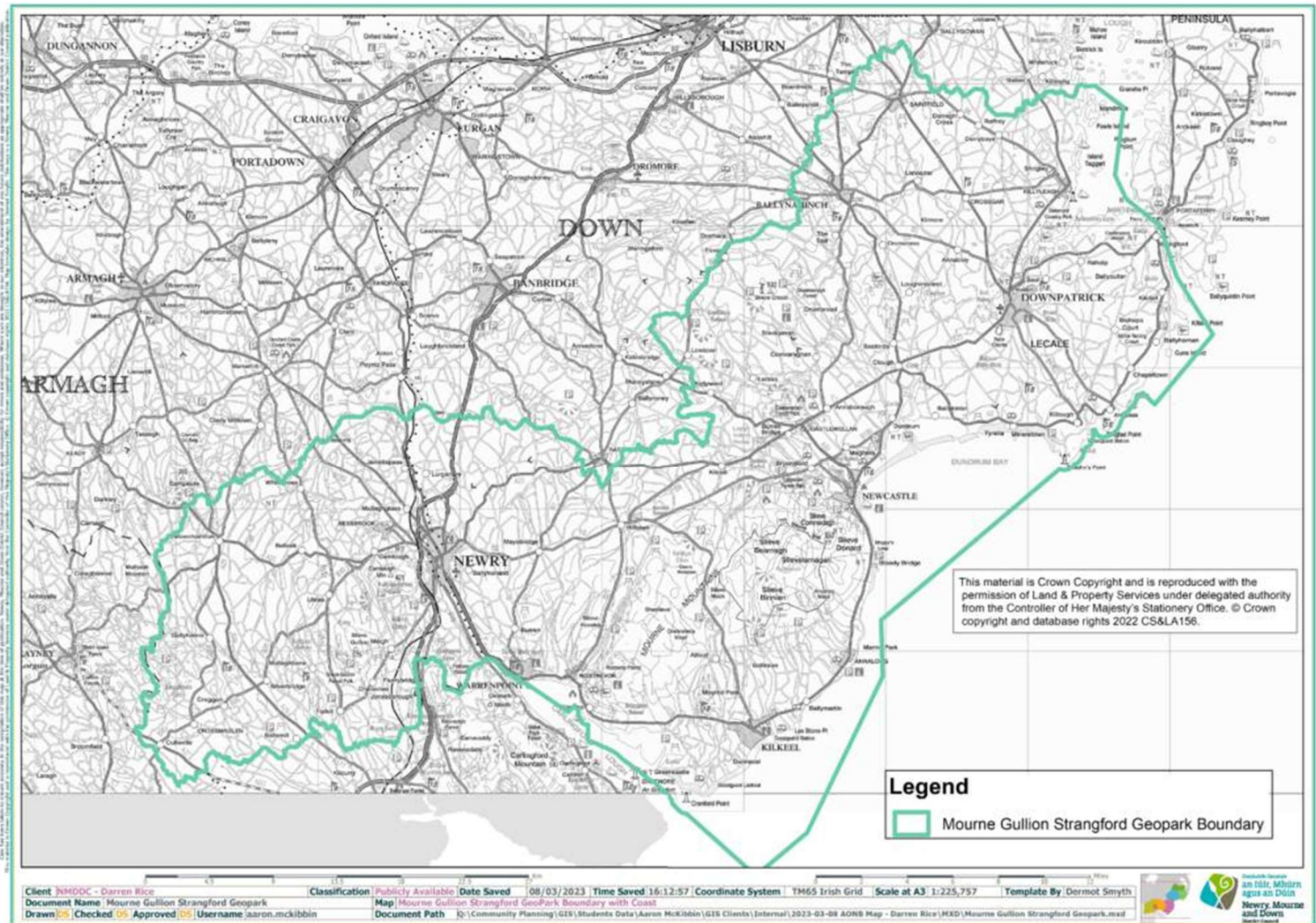
value of the site.				
<p>Policy NH4: Sites for Nature Conservation Importance – Local</p> <p>Under Policy NH4, planning permission will only be granted for a development proposal that is not likely to have a significant adverse impact on a site of local nature conservation importance. Development proposals which could have a significant adverse impact on a site of local importance may only be permitted where the benefits of the proposed development outweigh the value of the site.</p>	<p>The SPPS is largely consistent with Policy NH4.</p> <p>There are some minor changes to the text wording included in para 6.190 of the SPPS regarding local designations. It states that 'a development proposal which could have a significant adverse impact on a site of local importance should only be permitted where the benefits of the proposed development outweigh the value of the site. In such cases, appropriate mitigation and/or compensatory measures shall be required'.</p>	<p>Not raised as key issue in POP. The Preliminary Review of Operational Planning Policy that was published alongside the POP recommended that the existing policy approach as set out in PPS2 be carried forward with minor changes to reflect the wording of the SPPS.</p>	<p>The RSPB stated that the POP provides nothing on protecting local nature conservation designations and that there is no mention of local designations such as Sites of Local Nature Conservation (SLNCIs). They are of the view that a number of special places should be protected from development, managed appropriately and enhanced, these include Strangford and Carlingford Lough, The Mourne, coastal areas, areas of deciduous and other woodland, East County Down and a</p>	<p>Policy NH4 Sites of Nature Conservation Importance – Local</p> <p>Policy outlines planning permission will only be granted for a development proposal that is not likely to have a significant adverse impact on a site of local nature conservation importance. Development proposals which could have a significant adverse impact on a site of local importance should only be permitted where the benefits of the proposed development outweigh the value of the site.</p>

			Red Kite core area.	
<p>Policy NH5: Habitats, Species or Features of Natural Heritage Importance</p> <p>Under Policy NH5, planning permission will only be granted for a development proposal which is not likely to result in the unacceptable adverse impact on, or damage to, known habitats, species or features of natural heritage importance listed under this policy. Development proposals which are likely to result in an unacceptable adverse impact may only be permitted where the benefits of the proposed development outweigh the value of the</p>	<p>The SPPS (paras 6.192 and 6.193) accords with Policy NH5.</p> <p>The SPPS (para 6.192) explicitly states that other natural heritage features worthy of protection include 'trees and woodland'.</p> <p>In comparison with the SPPS, PPS2 provides greater detail on the complexity of priority habitats and species and the legislation relating to them.</p>	<p>Not raised as key issue in POP.</p> <p>The Preliminary Review of Operational Planning Policy that was published alongside the POP recommended that the existing policy approach as set out in PPS2 be carried forward with minor changes to reflect the wording of the SPPS.</p>	<p>The RSBP response to the POP stated that Policy NH5 from PPS2 remains critically important.</p> <p>The Woodland Trust stated that ancient and long-established woodlands need to be protected from damage and/or destruction and added that the additional consideration of a 50 metres buffer zone around ancient and long-established woodlands would ensure sufficient protection for these important habitats.</p>	<p>Policy NH5 Habitats, Species or Features of Natural Heritage Importance</p> <p>Policy outlines planning permission will only be granted for a development proposal which is not likely to result in the unacceptable adverse impact on, or damage to known habitats, species or features of natural heritage importance listed under this policy. A development proposal which is likely to result in an unacceptable adverse impact on, or damage to, habitats, species or features listed above will only be permitted where the benefits of the proposed development outweigh the value of the habitat, species or feature.</p>

habitat, species or feature.				
<p>Policy NH6: Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty</p> <p>Under Policy NH6, planning permission for new development within an AONB will only be granted where it is of an appropriate design, size and scale for the locality and where additional tests are met in regard to respecting the special character of the AONB and the conservation of its heritage assets.</p>	See Technical Supplement 7 Countryside Assessment for full details.	See Technical Supplement 7 Countryside Assessment for full details.	See Technical Supplement 7 Countryside Assessment for full details.	<p>Policy LA2 – Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty</p> <p>See Technical Supplement 7 Countryside Assessment for full details.</p>

9.0 Appendices

Appendix A: UNESCO Geopark



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