www.newrymournedown.org

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

Forlíonadh Teicniúla 8 –
Spás oscailte, Spórt agus Fóillíocht lasmuigh
Technical Supplement 8 –
Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation
June 2025

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 3

2.0 Policy Context 5

3.0 Preferred Options Paper 15

4.0 District Profile 16

5.0 Consultee and Councillor Engagement 20

6.0 Draft Plan Strategy Policy Approach 20

7.0 Soundness 22

8.0 Evolution of Policies 24

9.0 Appendices
Appendix 8A: Open Space Audit Technical Report 47
Appendix 8B: Open Space Audit
Appendix 8C: Draft Open Space Strategy

Tables

Table 1: Cross Boundary Policy Context 11

Table 2: Fields in Trust recommended benchmark guidelines- formal outdoor space 18

Table 3: Soundness 22

Table 4: Evolution of Policies 24

Figures

Figure 1: Associated factors and benefits of Open Space in the district 4

1.0 Introduction

Purpose of this document

1.1 This purpose of this technical supplement is to bring together the evidence base that has been used to inform the preparation of the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Local Development Plan (LDP) 2035 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 technical supplement builds upon LDP Preparatory Studies Paper 10: Open Space, Recreation and Leisure which provides baseline information for open space, sport and outdoor recreation and formed part of the evidence base for the Preferred Options Paper (POP).

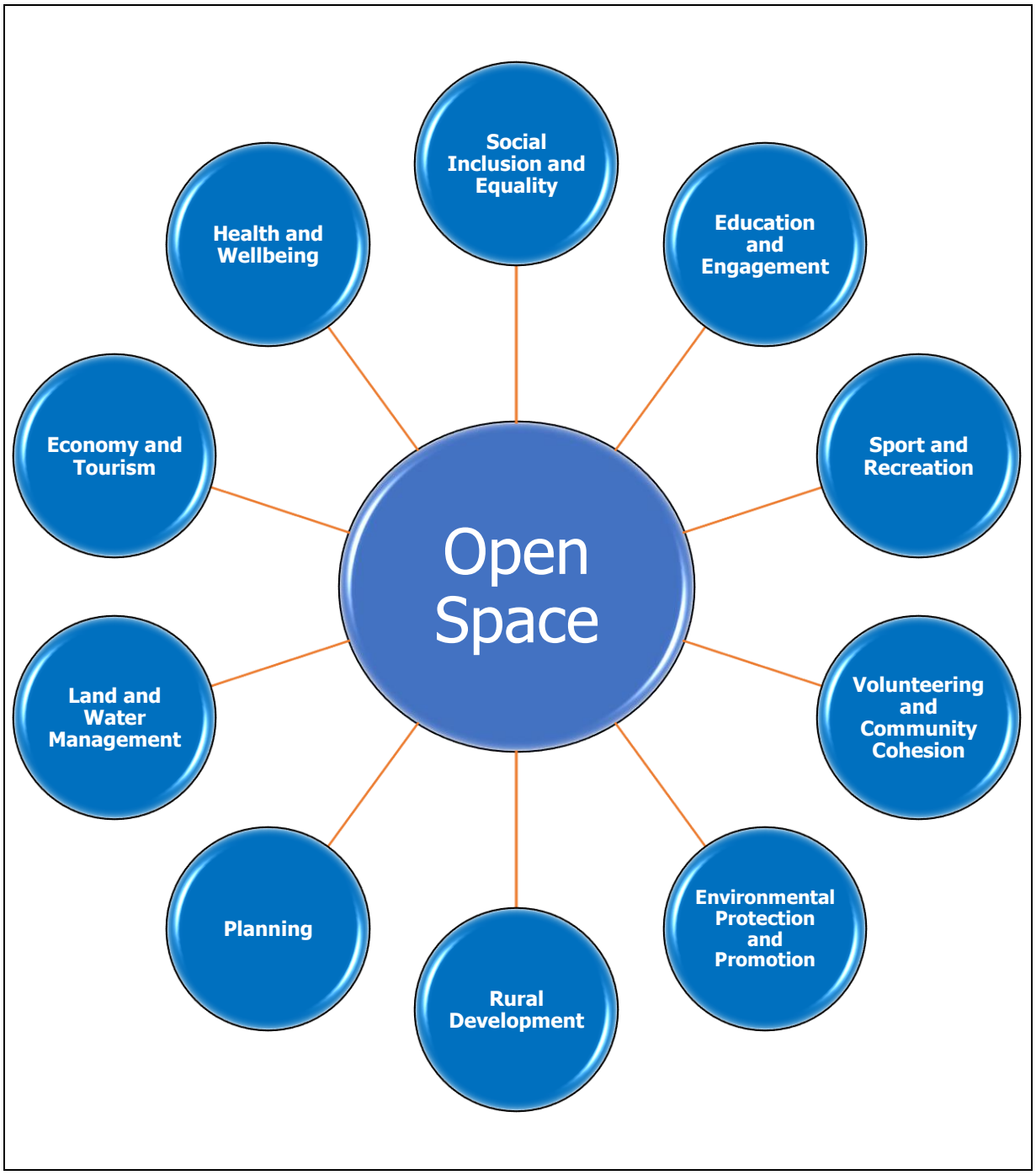
1.3 This technical supplement provides an overview of the regional and local policy context to open space and the district profile of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council in respect of open space, sport and outdoor recreation.

Planning and Open Space

1.4 Open Space and green infrastructure are considered as all open space of public value, such as parks, woodlands, outdoor sport facilities, green corridors, cemeteries, including not just land, but also inland bodies of water such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs which offer important opportunities for sport and outdoor recreation and can also act as a visual amenity.

1.5 Open space, sport and outdoor recreation are important components of life. They provide many cultural, social, economic and environmental benefits and contribute positively to physical and mental health and a better quality of life. Open space can enhance the character of residential areas, civic buildings, conservation areas, listed buildings and archaeological sites. It can also help to attract business and tourism and thereby contribute to the process of urban regeneration. The use being made of the countryside for a range of sporting and outdoor recreational activities, particularly where these are associated with farm diversification, can contribute to the process of rural regeneration and help promote natural resource tourism.

Figure 1: Associated factors and benefits of Open Space in the district



1.6 The planning system ensures there is an adequate provision of open space within the Newry, Mourne and Down area for current and future users by protecting existing areas of open space and by encouraging the delivery of new open space. Open space is a key component in the role of promoting healthy living, supporting deprived areas through providing areas for sporting activities, social well-being and passive activity.

1.7 Sport is defined as "all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships, or obtaining results in competitions at all levels" (Council of Europe 1992). This Technical Supplement focuses mainly on outdoor recreation, but it also briefly considers provision of both current and future forms of indoor recreation in the Newry, Mourne and Down area.

2.0 Policy Context

Regional Policy Context

Programme for Government 2024- 2027 'Doing What Matters Most'

2.1 The Programme for Government (PfG) sets out key priorities of the Northern Ireland Executive and includes improving health and well-being.

2.2 It recognises that sport can be life-changing and has the potential to build strong relationships across communities. It states that sports and physical activity will be prioritised to tackle obesity and that investment in new outdoor recreation and sporting facilities will help ensure provision of quality and modern focal points for communities and help people to enjoy active social lives.

Regional Development Strategy 2035

2.3 The Regional Development Strategy (RDS) provides a spatial strategy by providing overarching strategic planning framework to facilitate and guide sustainable development.

2.4 The RDS places importance in promoting recreational space within our towns and cities and it acknowledges that it is our responsibility to protect the environment as a sustainable asset for future generations.

2.5 Regional Guidance 7 of the RDS supports urban and rural renaissance by promoting a joined-up approach to support sensitive and sustainable development. It recognises the importance of providing greater significance to the design and maintenance of the public realm while also outlining the crucial role recreational spaces within our cities, towns, neighbourhoods and new developments play in providing an adequate green and blue infrastructure.

2.6 Regional Guidance 11 of the RDS refers to the conservation, protection and, where possible, enhancement our built heritage and our natural environment. It recognises the synergies between the environment, health and wellbeing and economic development. It notes the value of green and blue infrastructure, and that the establishment of ecological networks can also be of amenity and recreational value.

Strategic Planning Policy Statement

2.7 The Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) contains the following objectives in respect of open space, sport and outdoor recreation:

- Safeguard existing open space and sites identified for future such provision.
- Ensure that areas of open space are provided as an integral part of new residential development and that appropriate arrangements are made for their management and maintenance in perpetuity.
- Facilitate appropriate outdoor recreational activities in the countryside that do not negatively impact on the amenity of existing residents.
- Ensure that new open space areas and sporting facilities are convenient and accessible for all sections of society, particularly children, older people and those with disabilities.
- Achieve high standards of siting, design and landscaping for all new open space areas and sporting facilities; and
- Ensure that the provision of new open space areas and sporting facilities is in keeping with the principles of environmental conservation and helps sustain and enhance biodiversity.

2.8 The SPPS also states that the following considerations must be taken into account in the preparation of the LDPs:

- Bring forward on Open Space Strategy that must reflect the aim, objectives and policy approach to the SPPS, tailored to the specific circumstances of the plan area;
- The LDP should be informed by a survey/assessment of existing open space provision and future needs;
- Policy presumption against the loss of open space to competing land uses irrespective of its physical condition and appearance;
- Bring forward policy to require new residential developments of an appropriate scale to provide adequate and well-designed open space;
- Policy for intensive sports facilities; and
- Policy for the consideration of development proposals for outdoor recreation in the countryside

Planning Policy Statement 2: Natural Heritage

2.9 Planning Policy Statement 2 (PPS 2) sets out the planning policies for the conservation, protection and enhancement of our natural heritage.

Planning Policy Statement 7: Quality Residential Environments

2.10 Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS 7) aims to encourage good design and quality housing developments. It emphasises that a quality residential

environment depends not only on built form, but also the supporting infrastructure, including appropriate provision of open space within the development and linkages to the surrounding green network.

Planning Policy Statement 8: Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation

2.11 Planning Policy Statement 8 (PPS 8) sets out regional planning policy for the protection of open space, the provision of new areas of open space in association with residential development and the use of land for sport and outdoor recreation. It highlights the commitment to sustainable development, to the promotion of a more active and healthier lifestyle and to the conservation of biodiversity.

Planning Policy Statement 21: Sustainable Development in the Countryside

2.12 Planning Policy Statement 21 (PPS 21) sets out the planning policies for development in the countryside. It states that planning permission will be granted for outdoor sport and recreational uses in accordance with PPS 8.

Local Policy Context

Existing Area Plans

2.13 The existing development or area plans that apply to Newry, Mourne and Down District are:

- Banbridge, Newry and Mourne Area Plan 2015 (BNMAP)
- Ards and Down Area Plan 2015 (ADAP)

Banbridge, Newry and Mourne Area Plan (BNMAP)

2.14 The Plan area covers a largely rural area which includes much of the Mournes Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (including Slieve Croob), the Ring of Gullion Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the shores of Carlingford Lough.

2.15 It aligns with the aims of the RDS through promotion of development which improves the health and well-being of communities by recognising that a healthy community is better able to take advantage of the economic, social environmental opportunities which are available to it.

2.16 The Plan identifies major areas of existing open space, sport and outdoor recreation but did not bring forward new/additional lands for open space. Existing areas of open space, whether identified by the Plan or not, were to be safeguarded under policy OS1 in PPS 8 as the Plan did not introduce separate policies.

2.17 It also promotes the creation of recreational space within cities, towns and neighbourhoods and that new developments should make provision for adequate green and blue infrastructure.

Ards and Down Area Plan (ADAP)

2.18 The Ards and Down Area Plan refers to the RDS aims and objectives by highlighting the importance of protecting and enhancing open space and playing facilities for the long-term benefit of the whole community while recognising the value to health and well-being.

2.19 It identifies the various resources and types of open space that are located within the district. It notes that natural resources, such as Strangford Lough and the Mourne Mountains, provide a wealth of opportunities for active outdoor pursuits. It also notes the area contains a variety of informal recreational open space, particularly parkland with Castlewellan and Tollymore Forest Parks being notable examples.

2.20 In addition the Plan states that informal recreation facilities are associated with natural resources such as rivers, canals, lakes, heritage sites and disused railway tracks with Tyrella Beach and Murlough Nature Reserve being popular examples. Opportunities for cultural recreation are provided at places like Castleward and other National Trust properties and historic monuments.

2.21 The Ards and Down Area Plan identifies existing recreational open spaces and amenity land within the major settlements and relevant villages throughout the Plan area. It also identified lands within some urban areas for proposed open space, to meet future demand, where there was a commitment to provide open space by an enabling authority. Areas of open space, whether identified or not by the plan, were to be safeguarded by Policy OS1 in PPS8 as no additional policies were included in the Plan.

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

2.22 The Council's mission as detailed in the Corporate Plan 2024-2027 is to lead and serve a district that is prosperous, healthy and sustainable.

2.23 The Council has identified eight strategic objectives that it aims to have achieved by 2027. One of these is that it will have 'Improve the health and well-being of everyone in the district' by participating in improving quality of life and reducing health inequalities, primarily through programmes, services and access to open spaces.

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

2.24 The Community Plan is the overarching strategic plan for integrated planning and delivering of services in Newry Mourne and Down District Council. It provides a framework for the strategies and plans the Council will put in place to contribute towards the outcomes in the community plan and it is based on a detailed analysis of future risks and opportunities for the district.

2.25 The vision of our Community Plan is "Newry, Mourne and Down is a place with strong, safe and vibrant communities where everyone has a good quality of life and access to opportunities, choices and high-quality services which are sustainable, accessible and meet people's needs".

2.26 Open space provision is particularly relevant to 3 of the 5 key priorities/outcomes outlined within the Community Plan namely, enjoyment of resident's good health and well-being, benefiting from a clean, quality and sustainable environment and that all residents live in respectful, safe and vibrant communities. In working towards these outcomes, it is evident that a range of diverse issues need to be addressed, a number of which relate specifically to the provision of open space, sport and outdoor recreation. The relevant indicators include assessment of the level of connectivity enjoyed by residents, the level of quality living environment and the level of social connectivity.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Sports Facility Strategy, 2017

2.27 This Strategy was compiled with the aim of developing a strategic framework for the future provision of sports facilities in Newry, Mourne and Down District Council. It identifies the need for provision and the priorities for investment into sports facilities, informed by evidence of need, consultation with key stakeholders and a supply and demand analysis.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Sports Facilities Strategy-Multi Sports Hub Review Strategic Recommendations, 2022

2.28 In June 2022 the Council commissioned a review of its Sports Facilities Strategy 2017 in relation to Multi Sports Hubs within the Council's seven DEAs, addressing association football, gaelic games, rugby, hockey, cricket, lawn bowls, athletics, water sports. The findings of the audit informed the need-based recommendations which are outlined for the strategic development of facilities in each of the DEAs.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Play Strategy Review 2024-2029

2.29 The Play Strategy Review 2024-2029 provides an impact review of the Council's 2017 Play Strategy and includes a review of current population needs against fixed play park provision and the progress towards the development of non-fixed play opportunities across the district.

Newry, Mourne and Down Be Active: A Sport and Physical Activity Strategy 2024-2029

2.30 This Strategy acknowledges that participation in physical activity and sport leads to significant health and wellbeing benefits. It highlights that the Council is the biggest provider of facilities and services in the district for sport and physical activity, both indoor and outdoor, some of which include: leisure centres each offering a range of facilities, be active for life programme, be active for health initiative, summer sports camps, minor and major capital grants, annual sports awards, generic training programme and elite athlete scheme.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Active Travel Masterplan 2021

2.31 In January 2021, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council commissioned Sustrans to produce an Active Travel Masterplan for the district. It provides guidance on the development of cycling and walking infrastructure and complimentary measures over a 10-year period. It sets out a suite of recommendations that would improve conditions not only for people choosing to cycle and walk in the district, but also all residents who suffer from the negative effects of too much motor vehicle traffic.

Guidance Documents

Living Places – An Urban Stewardship and Design Guide for Northern Ireland (2014)

2.32 This document sets out the key qualities of good place making. It seeks to inform and inspire all those involved in the process of managing and place making of urban places, with a view to raising standards across NI. Open space is referenced in a number of key qualities, particularly 'accessible' and hospitable' which recognise linking paths to open space can contribute to a valuable network of green infrastructure and encourage active travel.

Other Relevant Strategies

Exercise – Explore- Enjoy: A Strategic Plan for Greenways

2.33 The purpose of this Strategic Plan for Greenways (DfI) is to provide a framework to assist councils and other bodies to develop their own local schemes as part of a Greenway Network for NI. It aims to encourage an increase in the number of people walking and cycling as a regular part of everyday life through the building of a connected and accessible regional Greenway Network which significantly increase the length of traffic-free routes. It identifies routes that should be explored to develop a Primary Greenway Network which could progressively extend across the region. Four routes pass through Newry Mourne and Down, one of which (Newry to Craigavon) is part of the Primary Network.

2.34 The Northern Ireland Government has launched several important policy documents in recent years which promote the delivery of enhanced facilities for open space, sport and recreation. These strategies re-affirm the importance of sport and recreation and are expected to be delivered by a combination of central government departments together with Council and the community/voluntary sectors. They include:

- Sports Matters: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009-2019
- OFMDFM Play and Leisure Policy Statement for Northern Ireland
- Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety – Fitter Future for All 2012-2002
- Our Great Outdoors – Outdoor Recreation Action Plan for Northern Ireland – DCAL, DETI and DoE (now the Department for Communities) (2014)
- Sports Facility Strategy for Northern Ireland 2009-2019
- Active Places Research for 2009 Report and 2014 update
- Our Passion, Our Place – NIEA Strategic Priorities 2012 – 2022
- DARD – The Rural White Paper Action Plan (2012)
- Northern Ireland Changing Gear – A Bicycle Strategy for Northern Ireland 2015
- Active School Travel Initiative
- Your School, Your Club – A Practical guide to achieving community use of School Sports Facilities (2014)

Cross Boundary Policy Context

2.35 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. The following table offers a short summary of each Council's position with regards to open space, sport and outdoor recreation.

Table 1: Cross Boundary Policy Context

Neighbouring Council	Position
Ards and North Down Borough Council	Ards and North Down Borough Council published its Preferred Options Paper in March 2019. Ards and North Down Council's relevant preferred options are: OS1 – Protection of Open Space, OS2 – Public Open Space and New Residential Development, OS3 – Outdoor Recreation in the Countryside, OS4 – Intensive Sports Facilities, OS5 – Noise Generating Sports and Outdoor Recreation Facilities, OS6 – Development of Facilities Ancillary to Watersports and OS7 – The Floodlighting of Sports and Outdoor Recreational Facilities. ANDBC considers the relevant polices are generally working well and should therefore be taken forward with a number of minor amendments. For policy OS1, the exceptions under which the loss of open space may be granted should be clarified in the supporting text. OS2 stipulates that provision of a play park is needed for 100+ units, however there is a need to address the conflict with council play park provision to avoid duplication of facilities within close proximity to each other. Policy OS2 should also highlight the need to provide genuinely useable areas of public open space as an integral part of the design concept. Stricklands Glen should be highlighted as a designated 'Quiet Area' in policy OS5. Amplification of policy OS7 should include details of the supporting information required for floodlighting applications such as light overspill contour maps and lighting specifications.

Lisburn and Castlereagh City Borough Council	Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council published its Local development Plan in September 2023. Lisburn and Castlereagh City Councils relevant policies are: OS1 Protection of Open Space, OS2 Intensive Sports Facilities, OS3 Noise-Generating Sports and Outdoor Recreational Activities, OS4 Facilities Ancillary to Water Sports, OS5 Floodlighting of Sports and Outdoor Recreational Facilities and OS6 Outdoor Recreation in the Countryside. LLC have provided a broader range of policies to support the protection and enhancement of Open Space within its area. The relevant polices will provide a Strategy for Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation which will provide for a strategic and joined-up network of Greenways and protect and safeguard existing open space recognising the long-term benefits this provides to communities.
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Brough Council	Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council published its Preferred Options Paper in March 2018. Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Councils relevant preferred options are: Key Issue SOC 4 Protecting open space and key issue SOC 5 Facilitating open space / play provision in new largescale residential developments. The approach ABC has taken in relation to SOC Protecting Open Space will be supported by a new strategic policy on the protection of open space to be brought forward in the Plan Strategy, which will be broadly in line with the existing Policy OS 1 (PPS 8), as well as the SPPS. This will include a clear definition of open space, to aid the interpretation of policy in the determination of planning applications.
Louth County Council	Louth County Council published its draft Development Plan in September 2021. Louth County Council relevant polices

	are: SC 13 To ensure that sufficient land is identified for the provision of a variety of public open spaces on a hierarchical basis throughout the County in order to achieve a choice of active and passive open space, recreational and amenity areas to suit all individuals, SC 14 To resist the loss of existing public open space, unless satisfactory alternatives in suitable locations are available, SC 15 To facilitate and encourage open space areas and greenway corridors to be planned for on a multifunctional basis incorporating measures to promote and protect ecosystems, climate change measures and to incorporate key landscape features including archaeological considerations into their design, SC 16 To support the provision of playgrounds in a variety of land use zoning categories where appropriate, SC 17 To require the provision of play features that can be used for recreational purposes in all new housing developments exceeding 100 residential units or more, SC 18 To maximize the range of public play opportunities available to all children, SC 18 To support the objectives of Louth Local Sports Partnership Strategic Plan 2018-2022 and/or any subsequent Plan prepared during the lifetime of the Development Plan and SC 20 To support and facilitate the provision, improvement and expansion of sports and recreational facilities, in particular through land use zoning, where appropriate. The approach Louth County Council has taken in relation to outdoor recreation, sport and open space has been a proactive approach towards achieving balanced provision of parks, open spaces of different sizes and functions distributed throughout the County.
Monaghan County Council	Monaghan County Development Plan 2025-2031 was adopted 26 May 2025 and shall have effect from 7 July 2025.

	The issue of 'Open Space' is divided between sections on Sports Facilities and Recreation, Parks and Public Open Space Facilities. A single objective is set out for Sports Facilities (CFP3) and four are set out for the other issues (CFO20-23), all of these objectives seek to protect existing facilities from being lost and to promote the development of new facilities in appropriate locations. The potential for using former railways for greenways and the development of cycling facilities is identified.

2.36 The Council has engaged and responded to neighbouring Councils POP's or draft Plan Strategies (where published). The Council is also represented on a number of working groups to discuss cross-boundary issues, including the Development Plan Working Group.

2.37 In addition, members of the Plan team have also met with officials with neighbouring Councils during the preparation of the POP and draft Plan Strategy to discuss any cross-boundary issues.

2.38 The draft Plan Strategy was presented to neighbouring councils in a workshop on 9th 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 the south on 8th 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. Further detail is outlined in the Neighbouring Council Consultation Report (see supporting documents to the draft Plan Strategy on the Council's website).

2.39 In consideration of neighbouring Council's development plan documents and discussions held with their officials, it is the opinion of the Council that no conflict is apparent with our draft Plan Strategy insofar as it is related to open space, sport and outdoor recreation.

3.0 Preferred Options Paper

3.1 Publication of the Preferred Option 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 which drew upon operational experience and changes in regional planning policy to identify issues to be addressed through the preparation of the LDP.

3.3 The POP identified one key issue in relation to open space provision:

Key Issue 10 – Open Space Provision

Options for Open Space Provision:

3.4 Option 1: Protect existing and zoned open space provision as identified in the BNMAP and the ADAP.

Option 2: Identify and evaluate current open space provision in the district. Protect existing and any subsequent additional land required for open space, sport and recreation.

Preferred Option for Open Space Provision

3.5 The Council's preferred option was Option 2. Justification for this choice, as outlined in the POP was as follows: 'Option 2 offers the opportunity to identify and evaluate the current provision of open space across the district in an equitable way in addition to identifying any future need'.

3.6 The majority of respondents on this issue broadly agreed with the preferred option. DfI: Water & Drainage Policy Division stated that consideration should be given to the policy implications of 'Sustainable Water – A long term water strategy' in particular, the potential use of open space to resolving flood issues and the potential to create open space through the introduction of SuDS. DfI: Rivers stated that open space for recreation can incorporate flood alleviation measures and highlighted that some development connected with sports facilities such as changing rooms may be located within floodplains as mitigation measures are provided.

4.0 District Profile

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

4.2 The district has a wide-ranging provision of open space. It benefits from several country estates, forest parks, walking trails, greenways, beaches and activity centres, all of which provide a range of outdoor recreational opportunities and attract large numbers of visitors daily.

4.3 The Council owns and maintains a variety of open space, including parks, sports facilities, children's play areas, woodlands and amenity green space in housing developments. There are also many areas of open space and sports facilities within private ownership and school sites across the district that help to serve the need of sports clubs (including soccer, rugby, cricket, Gaelic games and golf).

4.4 Open space, particularly those based on the natural resources in the district, are important contributors to the character and appearance of the district. They encourage people to visit, live, work and invest in the district. The provision of open space also has important benefits in terms of the environment. It provides for various habitats and species and includes many of our natural features that make our landscape so distinctive. Within the urban areas it also provides green lungs, visual breaks, buffers between land uses, recreational opportunities and wildlife habitats.

4.5 The district currently has two Greenways, the Newry Canal Towpath and the Carlingford Lough Greenway, which utilises both the towpath of the Newry Canal and part of the Dundalk, Newry and Greenore Railway and runs from the centre of Newry, through Victoria Locks to the Border. Proposals exist for additional Greenways along the former Newry to Armagh railway, and on the former Belfast and County Down Railway around Downpatrick.

4.6 In 2024 the Council commissioned Ironside Farrar to carry out an audit of open space provision within the district (Appendix 8A and Appendix 8B), this included allotments and community gardens, amenity spaces, civic spaces, community greenways, indoor sports facilities, natural and semi-natural urban green spaces, outdoor sports (playing pitches and other outdoor sports), parks and gardens; and play areas. This audit quantified the scale of provision of open space, the quality of the open space and how accessible they are. The findings have informed the preparation of the Council's draft Open Space Strategy (Appendix 8C).

Standards for Open Space, Sport and Recreation

4.2 Governments throughout the UK have called for more clearly defined and adopted policies for planning standards for open space, sport and recreation including outdoor facilities for sport and play. They called for local determination and adoption of standards relating to quantity, quality and accessibility. That said, the nature of the NPFA's own recommendations have been changed to recognise this and are still recognised as a useful tool for planning authorities to refer to, use or adopt.

4.3 The SPPS advises that in preparing local development plans existing open space provision should be assessed against the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) recommendation of a minimum of 2.4 hectares of outdoor playing space per 1000 population. This is commonly referred to as the Six Acre Standard (SAS), comprising of 1.6 hectares (4 acres) for outdoor sport and 0.8 hectares (2 acres) for children's play. It is noted that the National Playing Fields Association became the Fields in Trust (FIT) in 2007. The SAS was established as a guide to ensure that sufficient land is set aside in appropriate locations to enable the population to participate in sports, outdoor play, games and other physical recreation.

Outdoor Playing Space

4.4 Outdoor Playing Space is made up of two components. The first is land provided for outdoor sport, principally for adults and youths. This refers to all playing pitches and other outdoor recreational sports grounds such as bowling greens and tennis courts which are available for use by the public. It also includes private sports facilities which serve the recreational needs of their members or the public.

4.5 The second is play space for children which consists of Casual Play areas and Equipped Playgrounds that can be complemented by other facilities including multi-use games areas (MUGAs) and skateboard parks etc.

4.6 The NPFA standard is a useful way to measure formal outdoor playing space but it does not take into account indoor sport and recreation facilities or other outdoor areas including Parks and Country Parks, general Amenity Areas such as riverside walks or private Playing Fields including stadiums or pitches that are not available for general public use that can all contribute to recreation provision.

4.7 Table 2 shows the Fields in Trust (FiT) recommended benchmark guidelines for formal outdoor space for outdoor sports by typology.

Table 2: FiT Recommended Benchmark Guidelines

Open Space Typology	Quantity Guideline (hectares per 1000 people)	Walking Guideline (walking distance: metres from homes)
Outdoor Sports Pitches	1.20	1200m
Other Outdoor Sports - Courts, greens, tracks, trails or sports equipment	0.4	1200m
Equipped/ designated play areas	0.25	LAPs - 100m LEAPs - 400m NEAPs - 1000m
Informal Play Provision (incl. MUGAs or pump tracks)	0.30	700m
Open Space Typology	**Quantity Guideline (hectares per 1000 people)**	**Quantity Guideline (metres squared per person)**
Parks and Gardens	0.80	$8m^2$
Amenity green space	0.60	$6m^2$
Natural and semi-natural	1.8	$18m^2$

Source: 'Fields in Trust Standards: Creating great spaces for all, 2024'

Allotments and community gardens

4.10 Allotments facilitate physical exercise and the opportunity to increase education surrounding healthy foods for residents in urban areas. There are currently three allotments and community gardens within Newry, Mourne and Down in Newry, Saintfield and Downpatrick.

Other Open Space

4.11 In addition to playing pitches and children's play areas there are many opportunities for outdoor recreation that do not contribute to the NPFAs formal outdoor sports standard provision but still provide valuable opportunities for outdoor activity and recreation. The district is renowned for its wealth of opportunities for outdoor recreation.

4.12 There are a number of Public Rights of Way (PROWs) in district. Public Rights of Way are created through the 'Access to the Countryside (Northern Ireland) Order 1983.

4.13 The Ulster Way is a 625mile (1000km) circular walking route that encircles the six counties of Northern Ireland. Within the district the Ulster Way comprises of five sections:

- The Lecale Way (Strangford to Newcastle) 34 miles (55km)
- Mourne Way (Newcastle to Rostrevor) 26 miles (42km)
- Rostrevor to Newry 10 miles (16km)
- Ring of Gullion Way (Newry to Carnbane) 37 miles (59km) and;
- Newry Canal Way (Carnbane to Portadown) 17.5 miles (28km)

4.14 These routes provide important linkages to other town, villages and areas of open space.

4.15 There are three national cycle network routes that run through the district. The Regional Route (No. 20) runs along the shore of Strangford Lough from Comber to Downpatrick. The National Route 99 runs along the southern shores of Strangford Lough to Newcastle while the National Route 9 follows the Newry Canal Towpath from Portadown to Newry and then veers off towards Bessbrook and Camlough finishing close to Slieve Gullion Courtyard Complex.

4.16 CycleNI has identified over twenty cycle routes in the district ranging from 0-60 miles in length. The district is also a popular Mountain Bike destination with two of NI's three National Mountain Bike Trails in Rostrevor and Castlewellan. (Rostrevor won multiple Mountain Bike NI Awards in 2016). There is also a regional trail in Castle Ward and a local facility in Tollymore.

4.17 There are numerous country parks, forests, parks and gardens throughout the district that are owned by public bodies, including the Council, which offer valuable open space and recreation opportunities for activities such as walking, hiking, running, cycling and mountain biking.

4.18 The district has 100miles of coastline and is home to Strangford Lough, Carlingford Lough, a number of beaches and inland waterways including canals, rivers and lakes that all offer water-based activity opportunities including canoeing, kayaking, diving, bird watching, fishing, swimming, boating, yachting, jet skiing, pier jumping, banana boating and wet bouldering.

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 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 Open Space, Recreation and Leisure within the district was presented to Council in March 2017. The purpose of the paper was to provide the Council with an overview of matters relating to open space, recreation and leisure and implications for land use across the district.

5.3 The draft Plan Strategy Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation policies were presented to the planning committee on 8th April 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 In bringing forward the open space, sport and outdoor recreation policies for the district, the Council has been mindful to ensure that changes to operational policies, as set out in Planning Policy Statement 8: Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation and the current LDPs are aligned with regional policy requirements for Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation currently contained within the SPPS.

6.2 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 resists the loss of open space and to enable provision of high-quality open space and recreation spaces within Newry, Mourne and Down Council area.

6.3 The draft Plan Strategy approach is provided in the context of the Open Space Strategy and Strategic Policy OSS1 in Part 1 which provides the overall context for the supporting operational policies in Part 2. Operational Policies OS1- OS10 are largely reflective of the existing policy context, primarily PPS 8 Open Space. Additional policies have been developed which include Policy OS8 Green and Blue Infrastructure, OS9 Community Growing Spaces and Allotments and OS10 Cemeteries and Burial Space. The draft Plan Strategy has been developed in conjunction with the POP paper and relevant responses to it.

6.4 The objectives of the LDP seek to protect and enhance the provision of open space across the district to support health and wellbeing, whilst providing quality public spaces and 'shared spaces' that are accessible to all.

Strategic Policies

6.5 Part 1 of the Draft Plan sets out a number of strategic policies and a Spatial Growth Strategy in support of the Plan's objectives. These in turn link into the operational policies contained within Part 2. The following policies relate to Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation:

- Strategic Policy OSS1 Protecting and Enhancing Open Space.

6.6 Part 1 also contains the Open Space Strategy which is a key component underpinning the Spatial Growth Strategy. It recognises the role the LDP can play in promoting healthy living and contributing to mental and physical wellbeing through the protection of existing open space and the provision of new, quality open space within or close to settlements.

6.7 Strategic Policy OSS1 Protecting and Enhancing Open Space provides a number of criteria to support proposals that protect and safeguard areas of public open space and sets the context for operational policies provided in Part 2.

Operational Policies

6.8 Part 2 of the Draft Plan Strategy sets out the operational planning policies, and also contains a General Policy GP1, which applies to all developments. In relation to Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation recognises the impact of development proposals on the 'Quality of the Environment and Amenity' and also the 'Historic Environment and Natural Heritage'.

6.9 A total of 10 policies relating to Open Space are set out, headed policies OS1 – 10. These policies are largely updated from existing policies from PPS 8 to reflect the current regional planning policy approach. They also take into account the LDP Aims and Objectives and the Key Issues identified in the POP.

7.0 Soundness

7.1 The LDP has been prepared to achieve the indicators of soundness as set out in the DfI Development Plan Practice Note: Soundness (Version 2, May 2017). The draft Plan Strategy, in relation to the open space, sport and recreation subject policies and other relevant policies in this document is regarded as sound, as it is considered they have met the tests of soundness as summarised below:

Table 3: Soundness

Procedural Tests	
P2	Councils Open Space, Sport and Recreation policies have been developed from and evolved from the POP, POP Consultation Report, Consultee and Councillor Engagement.
P3	Open Space, Sport and Recreation policies OSS1 and OS1–OS10 have been subject to a Sustainability Appraisal. Details of which are in the Sustainability Appraisal Report.
Consistency Tests	
C1	Open Space strategy and policies OSS1 and OS1–OS10 have taken account of the Regional Development Strategy, with focus on RG7.
C2	Policies OSS1 and OS1-OS10 have taken account of the Council's Community Plan, providing a framework for the determination of planning applications to provide open space, sport and outdoor recreation facilities, which help to achieve the identified outcome, whilst protecting land designated for such facilities from inappropriate development.
C4	The open space strategy and policies have been developed by taking account of the existing development plans and Council strategies relating to open space within Newry, Mourne and Down area.
Coherence and the effectiveness tests	
CE1	The LDP policies OSS1 and OS1–OS10 have been developed alongside other Councils published and emerging LDPs, no conflict has been identified and the equivalent provisions of this LDP, as per paragraphs 2.35- 2.39.
CE4	Open Space, Sport and Recreation policies OSS1 and OS1–OS10 have been formulated on a sound evidence base, drawing on the baseline information set out in LDP Preparatory Paper 10, which has been updated as required during the preparation of this Technical Supplement and will be reviewed at Plan Review Stage, and at the Local Policies Plan stage, as appropriate.

8.0 Evolution of Policies

Table 4: Evolution of Policies

Existing Policy PPS8: Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation	Regional Planning	POP Options	Comments received to POP	Draft Plan Strategy Policy
Policy OS 1: Protection of Open Space Policy outlines development will not be permitted that would result in the loss of existing open space or land zoned for the provision of open space. This presumption against the loss of existing open space will apply irrespective of its physical condition and appearance. Policy outlines the circumstances whereby an exception to the policy will be permitted.	**6.205** The SPPS states that there will be a policy presumption against the loss of open space to competing land uses in Local Development Plans irrespective of its physical condition and appearance.	Adopt a policy led approach. Carry forward Policy OS 1 and take account of provisions outlined in the SPPS.	**The Housing Executive (NIHE)** advocated for the inclusion of a similar policy to OS1 of PPS8 within the LDP. This policy currently allows for redevelopment of lands where it can be demonstrated that this would bring substantial community benefits.	**OS1 Protection of Open Space**: The policy carries forward the existing policy with some clarification and changes to reflect the wording of the SPPS.
Policy OS 2: Public Open Space in New Residential Development Policy outlines that proposals for new residential development of 25 or more units, or on sites of one hectare or more will only be permitted where public open space is provided as an	**6.206** The SPPS states Council must bring forward policy to require new residential development of an appropriate scale (generally 25 or more units, or on sites of one hectare and above) to provide adequate and well-designed open space as an	Adopt a policy led approach. Carry forward Policy OS 2 and take account of provisions outlined in the SPPS.	**Lagan Homes** stated open space provision should relate to the proposed population projections and housing requirements.	**OS2 Public Open Space in New Residential Development** The policy carries forward the existing policy with some clarification and changes to reflect the

integral part of the development. In smaller residential schemes the need to provide public open space will be considered on its individual merits. Exceptions to this policy in relation to apartment buildings or specialised housing is outlined within the policy. An exception will also be considered in cases where residential development is designed to integrate with and make use of adjoining public open space. The precise amount, location, type and design of open space provision will be negotiated with applicants taking account of the specific characteristics of the development, the site and its context.	integral part of the development.			wording of the SPPS.
Policy OS 3: Outdoor Recreation in the Countryside Policy outlines 8 detailed criteria development in the countryside must met in order to be considered	**6.212** The SPPS expresses The Northern Ireland countryside lends itself to accommodating a wide range of recreational activities. LDPs should contain policy	Adopt a policy led approach. Carry forward Policy OS 3 and take account of	No comments received from statutory consultees or public respondents to this policy.	**OS3 Outdoor Recreation in the Countryside** The policy carries forward the existing policy with some clarification

acceptable. The amplification provides further guidance on individual types of recreation e.g. Golf courses, driving ranges, equestrian uses etc.	for the consideration of development proposals for outdoor recreation in the countryside. In doing so councils should have regard to a range of issues including: • visual and residential amenity; • public safety, including road safety; • any impact on nature conservation, landscape character, archaeology or built heritage; and • accessibility.	provisions outlined in the SPPS.		and changes to reflect the wording of the SPPS.
Policy OS 4: Intensive Sports Facilities Policy outlines sports facilities, including stadia, leisure centres and sports halls, are generally only permitted in settlements. Policy outlines an exception where the listed criteria are met.	**6.207** The SPPS states 6.207 The precise location of intensive sports facilities49 can be contentious, and by their very nature and scale can give rise to particularly complex planning considerations such as impact on amenity, and sustainability issues. Such facilities shall be located within settlements in order to maximise the use of existing infrastructure. As an exception a sports stadium may be	Adopt a policy led approach. Carry forward Policy OS 4 and take account of provisions outlined in the SPPS.	No comments received from statutory consultees or public respondents to this policy.	**OS4 Intensive Sport Facilities** The policy carries forward the existing policy with some clarification and c hanges to reflect the wording of the SPPS.

	allowed outside of a settlement, but only where clear criteria is established, which can justify a departure from this approach.			
Policy OS 5: Noise Generating Sports and Outdoor Recreational Activities Policy outlines the circumstances whereby noise generating sports and outdoor recreational activities are permitted.	**6.208** The SPPS expresses that particular attention should be paid to those development proposals which generate high levels of noise such as motorsports, shooting, water skiing and paintball adventure games. These activities are more likely to conflict with, disturb and cause nuisance to nearby noise sensitive uses (For example schools, hospitals, places of worship, and residential neighbourhoods). Such sports or activities can also be disruptive to farm animals and wildlife and may also have a detrimental effect on the natural environment, as well as local character. These developments must only be permitted where there is no unacceptable level of disturbance.	Adopt a policy led approach. Carry forward Policy OS 5 and take account of provisions outlined in the SPPS.	No comments received from statutory consultees or public respondents to this policy.	**OS5 Noise Generating Sports and Outdoor Recreational Activities** The policy carries forward the existing policy with some clarification and changes to reflect the wording of the SPPS.
Policy OS 6: Development of	**6.213** The SPPS states that Planning authorities should	Adopt a policy led approach.	No comments received from statutory	**OS6 Development of Facilities**

Facilities ancillary to Water Sports Policy outlines circumstances where the development of facilities ancillary to water sports are permitted. Policy also outlines circumstances where the development of facilities ancillary to water sports adjacent to inland lakes, reservoirs and waterways are permitted.	carefully consider development proposals for all sport and outdoor recreational activities, including facilities ancillary to watersports. Relevant planning considerations will include: location, design, hours of operation, noise, impact upon visual and residential amenity, access and links to public transport; floodlighting; landscaping, public safety (including road safety); nature conservation, biodiversity, archaeology or built heritage.	Carry forward Policy OS 6 and take account of provisions outlined in the SPPS.	consultees or public respondents to this policy.	**ancillary to Water Sports** The policy carries forward the existing policy with some clarification and changes to reflect the wording of the SPPS.
Policy OS 7: The Floodlighting of Sports and Outdoor Recreational Facilities Policy outlines the floodlighting of sports and outdoor recreational facilities is only permitted when 3 set criteria can be met. There must be no unacceptable impact on nearby residential amenity, no adverse impact on visual amenity or character of the locality and no prejudice to public safety.	**6.213** The SPPS states that Planning authorities should carefully consider development proposals for all sport and outdoor recreational activities, including facilities ancillary to watersports. Relevant planning considerations will include: location, design, hours of operation, noise, impact upon visual and residential amenity, access and links to public transport; floodlighting;	Adopt a policy led approach. Carry forward Policy OS 7 and take account of provisions outlined in the SPPS.	No comments received from statutory consultees or public respondents to this policy.	**OS7 Floodlighting of Sports and Outdoor Recreational Facilities** The policy carries forward the existing policy with some clarification and changes to reflect the wording of the SPPS.

	landscaping, public safety (including road safety); nature conservation, biodiversity, archaeology or built heritage.			
New Policy OS8:Green and Blue Infrastructure			**NIEA Natural Environmental Division** have concerns that the provision for green and blue infrastructure has not been brought forward as an option within this Key Issue. **The National Trust** recommend that in identifying and evaluating current open space provision that the Natural Capital Accounting Method is applied. They also reference the SPPS in relation to designating landscape wedges, public access to and along the coastline, sympathetically designed linear	Policy outlines that planning permission will not be granted for development either within or adjacent to a designated strategic or community greenway which could prejudice the retention, enhancement or further development of an identified route.

			open spaces for walkers and cyclists and the importance of sustaining and enhancing biodiversity. **NIEA Natural Environmental Division** have concerns that the provision for green and blue infrastructure has not been brought forward as an option within this Key Issue.	
New Policy **OS9: Community Growing Spaces and Allotments**				Policy outlines the criteria that community growing spaces and allotments must meet.
New Policy **OS10: Cemeteries and Burial Space**				Policy outlines that all existing cemeteries and burial spaces will be protected from inappropriate development.

9.0 Appendices

Appendix 8A - Open Space Audit Technical Report

Appendix 8B - Open Space Audit

Appendix 8C - draft OpenSpace Strategy

Note: The above Appendices are separate documents and can be viewed on the Council's website.

0330 137 4000
info@nmandd.org
www.newrymournedown.org

facebook.com/nmdcouncil
x.com/nmdcouncil

Oifig an Iúir
Newry Office
O'Hagan House
Monaghan Row
Newry BT35 8DJ

Oifig Dhún Pádraig
Downpatrick Office
Downshire Civic Centre
Downshire Estate, Ardglass Road
Downpatrick BT30 6GQ

Comhairle Ceantair
an Iúir, Mhúrn agus an Dúin
Newry, Mourne and Down
District Council