

Development Plan

Position Paper 9: Countryside Assessment

September 2015

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Executive Summary

This Position Paper provides the Council with an overview of the Countryside Assessment for the new Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council area which consists of 4 component parts; Environmental Assets Appraisal; Landscape Assessment; Development Pressure Analysis; and Settlement Appraisal.

Any future decision making will need to be made within the context of a Sustainability Appraisal under the provision of Planning (Northern Ireland) Act 2011. This paper is therefore intended to generate members' ideas on how planning can best meet the requirements of the Countryside Assessment.

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

The paper will provide a foundation on which work can commence on a Preferred Options Paper as part of introducing the new Plan Strategy for Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council to replace that contained in the existing Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan.

The aims of the paper are:

- To build the capacity of members to make informed planning decisions, particularly within the plan making context;
- To provide baseline information which will inform Development Plan policy making at local level;
- To assess the current status of the countryside within the council area and

- To link with important ongoing work in relation to the development of a Community Plan and other strategic work being undertaken by the Council.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This paper provides the Countryside Assessment for the new Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council area. This involves an assessment of existing rural assets.
- 1.2 The paper sets out the regional context for the Countryside Assessment which allows members to consider how policy may be formulated within the context of the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) and regional planning policy.
- 1.3 This is followed by an assessment of the existing Development Plan context and an overview of the 4 component parts of the Countryside Assessment for the new Council area.
- 1.4 Information has been derived from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), the Department of the Environment (DOE) and other Council sources where specified.

2.0 REGIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

- 2.1 The Regional policy Context is provided by the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035¹ and regional planning policy statements. A summary of these documents as they relate to plan making and countryside assessment are outlined in the following paragraphs.

Regional Development Strategy (RDS 2035)

- 2.2 The RDS 2035 provides an overarching strategic framework to facilitate and guide the public and private sectors.
- 2.3 Sustainable development is at the heart of the Regional Development Strategy. The RDS aims to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Our society and economies are completely dependent on the

¹ DRD (2010) Regional Development Strategy (RDS 2035) Building a Better Future.

environment which encompasses them and are therefore bound to its limits and capabilities.

2.4 The shared vision of the region is described as:

“Working together to create an outward looking, dynamic and liveable Region with a strong sense of place in the wider world; a Region of opportunity where people enjoy living and working in a healthy environment which enhances the quality of their lives and where diversity is a source of strength rather than division.”

2.5 The 8 aims of the revised RDS are as follows;

1-Support strong, sustainable growth for the benefit of all parts of Northern Ireland.

2-Strengthen Belfast as the regional economic driver and Londonderry as the principal city of the North West.

3-Support our towns, villages and rural communities to maximise their potential.

4-Promote development which improves the health and well-being of Communities.

5-Improve connectivity to enhance the movement of people, goods, energy and information between places.

6-Protect and enhance the environment for its own sake.

7-Take actions to reduce our carbon footprint and facilitate adaptation to climate change.

8-Strengthen links between north and south, east and west, with Europe and the rest of the world.

The Rural Area

- 2.6 The RDS recognises the importance of the rural area and its geographical links within the settlement structure. It defines the rural area as those places outside the Principal Cities, the Main and Local. The population living in these places is around 40% of the total population of Northern Ireland. Recently the rural community living in small towns, villages, and small settlements in the countryside, has experienced the fastest rate of population growth. This reverses a long-term trend of population decline.
- 2.7 The RDS states that given the relatively small geographic scale of the region and our dispersed settlement structure that arguably few areas could be regarded as truly 'remote' as compared to some other parts of the EU. We live in a relatively small geographical island and rely heavily on linkages to our cities and urban centres. The majority of people live within 15 miles of a Hub and within 8 miles of a cluster where they can access most of the services they need. Smaller towns, villages and hamlets perform an important function for rural communities.
- 2.8 It reinforces a commitment to keep our rural areas sustainable and ensure that people who live there, either through choice or birth, have access to services and are offered opportunities in terms of accessing education, jobs, healthcare and leisure. Agriculture is the largest business category in rural areas. Other sectors include Construction, Property and Business Services, Retail and Production. People from rural areas are required to travel longer distances than their urban counterparts in order to access job opportunities. This is particularly true for higher value/paid jobs which tend to be urban located. Mobility of rural dwellers is of the utmost importance so that they can access

and benefit from employment opportunities both locally and at a wider regional level.

- 2.9 To sustain rural communities, new development and employment opportunities which respect local, social and environmental circumstances are required. This means facilitating the development of rural industries, businesses and enterprises in appropriate locations, and ensuring they are integrated appropriately within the settlement or rural landscape. The expansion of rural tourism and associated development that is both sustainable and environmentally sensitive should be encouraged.
- 2.10 There are 3 policies which support the environmental assets and rural area as follows:-

SFG5: Protect and enhance the quality of the setting of the BMUA and its environmental assets

- 2.11 The significance of the existing environmental assets is recognised along with protected areas of high scenic value.
- Protect areas of high scenic value, undeveloped coast line, Belfast Lough, the Lagan Valley Regional Park and the hills around the BMA from development;
 - Protect and enhance the network of open spaces in the BMUA
 - Make use of green space to help manage access to important wildlife sites and minimise the potential for damage due to visitor pressure.

SFG13: Sustain rural communities living in smaller settlements in the open countryside

- 2.12 In rural areas, the aim is to sustain the overall strength of the rural community living in small towns, villages, small rural settlements and the open countryside.

2.13 There is therefore a need for local development to reflect regional differences. Such approaches should be sensitive to local needs and environmental issues including the ability of settlements and landscapes to absorb development. Key considerations will be the role and function of rural settlements and accessibility to services.

2.14 A strong network of smaller towns supported by villages helps to sustain and service the rural community. A sustainable approach to further development will be important to ensure that growth does not exceed the capacity of the environment or the essential infrastructure expected for modern living.

- Establish the role of multi-functional town centres.
- Connect rural and urban areas.
- Revitalise small towns and villages.
- Facilitate the development of rural industries, businesses and enterprises in appropriate locations.
- Encourage sustainable and sensitive development.

SFG14: Improve Accessibility for rural communities

2.15 Rural communities can be disadvantaged by virtue of their remote location from a range of facilities and essential services. This disadvantage can be lessened by innovative use of existing services and the application of new and developing technologies.

- Improve the overall connectivity of rural communities to services and other parts of the Region by exploring innovative ways of bringing these services to the communities.
- Integrate local transport²

² DRD (2010) Regional Development Strategy (RDS 2035) Building a Better Future.

Regional Planning Policy Statements

- 2.16 **Planning Policy Statement 1 General Principles:** PPS1 formerly set out the requirements for a Countryside Assessment (consisting of 4 component parts referred to under part 4.0). This has since been replaced by the Strategic Planning Policy Statement which was published in final form in October 2015.

Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPSS)

- 2.17 The final version of the SPSS was published by the Department of the Environment in September 2015. The provisions of the SPSS must be taken into account in the preparation of Local Development Plans, and are also material to all decisions on individual planning applications and appeals.
- 2.18 It recognises the countryside as one of our greatest assets. In addition to its role and function as a recreational and tourist asset the countryside also supports our important agricultural industry, offers potential opportunities for sustainable growth in new sectors, and is home to a considerable rural population.
- 2.19 The RDS recognises that to sustain rural communities, new development and employment opportunities are required which respect local, social and environmental circumstances. Facilitating development in appropriate locations is considered necessary to ensure proposals are integrated appropriately within rural settlements or in the case of countryside locations, within the rural landscape.
- 2.20 Government policy also recognises that there are wide variations across Northern Ireland in terms of the economic, social and environmental characteristics of rural areas. Policy approaches to new development should therefore reflect differences within the region, be sensitive to local needs and be sensitive to environmental issues including the ability of settlements and landscapes to absorb

development. This may involve recognising areas that are particularly sensitive to change and areas which have lower sensitivities and thus provide opportunities to accommodate sustainable development. It is also important to take into account the role and function of rural settlements and accessibility to existing services and infrastructure. Such approaches should also reflect and complement the SPPS.

2.21 The aim of the SPPS with regard to the countryside is to manage development in a manner which strikes a balance between protection of the environment from inappropriate development, while supporting and sustaining rural communities consistent with the RDS.

2.22 The policy objectives for development in the countryside are to:

- manage growth to achieve appropriate and sustainable patterns of development which supports a vibrant rural community; 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;
- facilitate development which contributes to a sustainable rural economy; and
- promote high standards in the design, siting and landscaping of development.

Role of Local Development Plans

2.23 In preparing LDPs councils shall bring forward a strategy for sustainable development in the countryside, together with appropriate policies and proposals that must reflect the aims, objectives and policy approach of the SPPS, tailored to the specific circumstances of the plan area.

- 2.24 The policy approach must be to cluster, consolidate, and group new development with existing established buildings, and promote the re-use of previously used buildings. This sustainable approach facilitates essential new development, which can benefit from the utilisation of existing services such as access and drainage, whilst simultaneously mitigating the potential adverse impacts upon rural amenity and scenic landscapes arising from the cumulative effect of one-off, sporadic development upon rural amenity and landscape character.
- 2.25 All development in the countryside must integrate into its setting, respect rural character, and be appropriately designed. Development in the countryside must not mar the distinction between a settlement and the surrounding countryside, or result in urban sprawl. The policy approach for development in the countryside will also reflect and complement the overall approach to housing growth across a plan area.
- 2.26 Some areas of the countryside exhibit exceptional landscapes, such as mountains, stretches of the coast or lough shores, and certain views or vistas, wherein the quality of the landscape and unique amenity value is such that development should only be permitted in exceptional circumstances. Where appropriate these areas should be designated as **Special Countryside Areas** in LDPs, and appropriate policies brought forward to ensure their protection from unnecessary and inappropriate development. Local policies may also be brought forward to maintain the landscape quality and character of **Areas of High Scenic Value**.
- 2.27 The LDP process will play an important role for councils in identifying key features and assets of the countryside and balancing the needs of rural areas and communities with the protection of the environment.

This should include an environmental assets appraisal and landscape assessment which will provide the evidence base for the purposes of bringing forward an appropriate policy approach to development in the countryside. This should take into account Landscape Character Assessments.

Planning Policy Statement 21 (PPS21)

2.28 The RDS and SPPS is complemented by the DOE's Planning Policy Statements, the most relevant of which is PPS 21 Sustainable Development in the Countryside which sets out the Departments policies for development in the countryside. For the purpose of this document *the countryside is defined as land lying outside of settlement limits as identified in development plans.*

2.29 The promotion of a sustainable approach to development is now a major tenet of Government policy. The Regional Development Strategy (RDS) for Northern Ireland further recognises that the application of the principles of sustainable development must also be at the heart of future rural development, and in this respect a strategic objective is to:

“conserve and enhance the environment, whilst improving the quality of life of the rural communities and developing the rural economy.”

2.30 The aim of PPS 21 is to manage development in the countryside:

- in a manner consistent with achieving the strategic objectives of the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2035; and
- in a manner which strikes a balance between the need to protect the countryside from unnecessary or inappropriate development, while supporting rural communities.

2.31 The objectives of PPS 21 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.

The Role of Development Plans

- 2.32 The development plan process plays a key role in identifying the countryside assets of different parts of the Region and balancing the needs of rural areas/communities with protection of the environment. This is facilitated by the preparation of Countryside Assessments.
- 2.33 Countryside Assessments are an integral part of the development plan-making process and PPS 1 General Principles advises that they will normally include the following four interrelated strands:
- an Environmental Assets Appraisal;
 - a Landscape Assessment;
 - a Development Pressure Analysis; and
 - a Settlement Appraisal ³
- 2.34 Arising from the process of Countryside Assessment local policies may be brought forward in the development plan to complement or amplify regional policies on matters specific to the local circumstances of particular countryside areas e.g. Areas of High Scenic Value. This will

³ DOE (2015) Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015 Draft Plan: Technical Supplement 11. Vol. 1. Countryside Assessment.

involve consultation with local communities and the public. Policy for Special Countryside Areas (i.e. areas of the countryside with exceptional landscapes) should also be brought forward through the Local Development Plan.

2.35 **Dispersed Rural Communities** are also identified in PPS 21 with 5 criteria for designation (through the local development plan process) as follows:-

- location in a remoter rural area and away from areas of development pressure close to existing towns;
- association with a traditional focal point, where there is convincing evidence of local community activity; with the existence of social and recreational facilities, such as a church, hall, school, community centre or sports club;
- other facilities or services, such as a shop, public house or sewage treatment works;
- a strong community identity. This could manifest itself through a local community association, church organisation or sports club; and
- a locally significant number of dwellings that have been built over time. Although these places are not nucleated settlements, they will have to be more than just open countryside. A build-up or cluster of recently built houses will normally not be considered as fulfilling this criterion.

2.36 It should be noted that the SPPS is silent on Dispersed Rural Communities.

3.0 EXISTING DEVELOPMENT PLAN

3.1 **The Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015** is a development plan prepared under the provisions of Part 3 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 by the Department of the Environment (DOE).

The Plan covers the City Council areas of Belfast and Lisburn and the Borough Council areas of Carrickfergus, Castlereagh, Newtownabbey and North Down. The Plan was adopted on 9th September 2014.

- 3.2 Volume 3 and Volume 5 of BMAP 2015 sets out policies on the former Lisburn and Castlereagh Districts respectively (“District Proposals”). These policies have been developed in the context of the Plan Strategy and Framework contained in Volume 1 of the Plan and are in general conformity with the RDS.
- 3.3 BMAP 2015 outlines the following with respect to the rural assets of Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council area;
- 3.4 **The BMA Countryside and Coast Strategy** set out in the Plan Strategy & Framework (Volume 1) aims to encourage vibrant rural communities; sustain and diversify the rural economy by making provision for employment/industrial use in towns and villages; conserve or enhance the rural landscape protecting the metropolitan setting; and protect the Coastal Area.
- 3.5 **The Rural Community:** the focus is on accommodating more housing in the main towns and villages in order to meet local need, maintained a strong network of settlements in the rural area, and sustain the rural community. During the past two decades, the small towns and villages in the Belfast ‘travel to work’ area have experienced a rapid rate of population growth. The Plan Proposals therefore recognise that some settlements in the rural area will require more measured growth in order to protect their identity, character and setting.
- 3.6 **The Rural Economy:** it is recognised that a living and working countryside requires a strong, diversified and competitive rural economy. Agriculture remains important to the rural economy and is

also a significant factor in shaping and maintaining landscapes. The Plan Proposals provide new opportunities for business development to facilitate the growth and diversification of the rural economy by zoning land for business and industry in a number of towns and villages in the rural area, including Carryduff and Moira.

- 3.7 **Agriculture:** is particularly important in the rural areas of Lisburn. In common with the rest of Northern Ireland, farm incomes in the Plan Area are falling in real terms, leading to an increased demand for alternative employment on and off the farm. The need for farmers to diversify into non-agricultural activities in order to supplement their farming income is accepted.
- 3.8 **Woodland and Forestry:** Forest Service (DARD) carries out forestry operations within the Plan Area. The Forest Service also assists in the planting and management of privately owned woodlands through the payment of grants. The National Trust and other bodies manage and enhance (by providing interpretative material) the biodiversity and amenity value of a number of Parks. *See Map No. 3.*
- 3.9 **Fishing:** Recreational fishing takes place along inland rivers such as the Glenavy River. The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) has brown and rainbow trout lakes in the council area, including Stoneyford Reservoir. The western boundary of the council area is defined by a section of Lough Neagh. This supports a substantial commercial fishery, mainly for eels. This supports a valuable export market and sustains local employment. *See Map No. 4.*
- 3.10 **Minerals:** Mineral exploration and development provides employment and necessary materials for construction in localised areas where useful deposits occur. However, extraction and processing can have a

significant impact on the countryside. The need for a sustainable approach that takes account of the need to protect and conserve environmental resources is recognised.

3.11 **The Rural Environment:** The rural environment throughout Northern Ireland/the council area is undergoing significant change in response to the restructuring of agriculture and increasing urban dispersal pressures. The challenge throughout the rural area is to accommodate future development while protecting and caring for the environment, and maintaining the rural character of the countryside. See *Map No. 1*.

3.12 **Countryside and Coast Policies and Proposals:** Within the BMA, landscapes which are particularly sensitive because of their quality/location/pressures for development are afforded special protection. Those of relevance to the Lisburn & Castlereagh Council area include:-

- Rural Landscape Wedges (Policy COU 1)
- Areas of High Scenic Value (Designation COU 5 & Policy COU 6)
- Lagan Valley Regional Park (Designation COU 9 and Policies COU 10, COU 11 & COU 12).

3.13 These have been referred to in the previous Position Paper 8 Natural Heritage.

4.0 COUNTRYSIDE ASSESSMENT

Part 1 Environmental Assets Appraisal

4.1 In accordance with regional planning policy the **Environmental Assets Appraisal** seeks to establish and evaluate the environmental resources of the council area. It also assists in defining specific development plan designations.

4.2 The Environmental Assets Appraisal is structured in the following way:

- The Natural Heritage Section provides an overall evaluation of nature conservation resources and **biodiversity** which is referred to below; (see *Position Paper 8 Natural Heritage for designations*)
- The Built Heritage Section provides an overall evaluation of historic, architectural and archaeological resources; (see *Position Paper 7 Built Heritage*) and
- The Landscape Section contains an evaluation of landscape resources.

Biodiversity

4.3 A consultation draft Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment (NIRLCA) has been published by NIEA. This document seeks to divide Northern Ireland into 26 discrete areas, referred to as regional landscape character areas (RLCA). The purpose of the NIRLCA is to provide a regional overview of landscape character, which will form a framework for updating of local-scale assessments that could replace The Northern Ireland Character Assessment 2000 (NILCA)⁴.

4.4 The Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy identifies a range of habitats across Northern Ireland. Those represented in the Council Area include:

- **wetlands** including rivers, streams, lakes, swamp, fen and carr woodland.
- **peatlands** including heathland and bogs.
- **woodlands** including plantations and semi natural woodlands and hedges and other boundary features;
- **grasslands** including arable or cultivated land⁵.

Wetlands

⁴ DOE (2015) Northern Ireland Regional Character Assessment: Consultation draft report.

⁵ DOE (2015) Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015 Draft Plan: Technical Supplement 11. Vol. 1 Countryside Assessment.

- 4.5 The council area contains several important wetland areas. Valuable wetland habitats such as grassland, fen, marsh and carr can be found at Stoneyford Reservoir, Monlough and areas around the River Lagan, Lough Neagh and Portmore Lough.

- Rivers and Lakes

The River Lagan is the largest river in the council area. Many stretches of the River Lagan contain important habitats for wildlife including otter, nesting birds, coarse fish and Spuce's bristle moss. Begney Lake, near Dromara is a Mesotrophic Lake in which otter and curlew have been recorded. Eutrophic Standing Waters include Portmore Lough which has extensive marginal fen and reed vegetation and supports curlew and Aghery Lough which has willow alder scrub with fen and supports marsh fritillary butterfly and Irish damselfly.

- Coastal and Marine

The council area contains a section of Lough Neagh within its boundary to the north of Fuemore. Stretches of these areas are internationally and nationally important for birdlife including roseate tern, golden plover, curlew and seabirds such as cormorants and shags.

Peatlands

- 4.6 Areas of shrub heath (upland heathland) are found around the summits and slopes of Slievenacloy.

Woodlands

- 4.7 Many of the woodland and treed areas in the council area have their origin in former demesnes and estates. Within these woodlands a mixture of mature broadleaves dominate, particularly beech, oak, lime, and sycamore, with ash, birch, elm, yew, maples and horse chestnut. Occasionally the woodlands contain Scots Pine, larch, a variety of

exotic trees and shrubs or small conifer plantations. Examples would include those at Lissue Children's Home and Belvedere.

4.8 Other woodland types found within the Plan Area include Upland Mixed Ashwoods, Wet Woodland and Upland Oakwoods. Upland Mixed Ashwoods are dominated by ash with hazel, alder, beech, birch, rowan or wild cherry for example at Craigantlet. Wet Woodlands dominated by willow and alder can be found at Stonyford Reservoir, the Glenavy River, the River Lagan, Portmore Lough and the Ravernet River.

4.9 Other notable wooded areas within the council area include areas along various rivers and glens including Derriaghy Glen and Drumbo Glen. Elsewhere patches of woodland are found around old quarries, as planting within parklands or around farmsteads.

Grasslands

4.10 Within the council area there are several notable grassland areas. For example at Leathemstown, Slievenacloy, Ballynanaghten and Portmore Lough. Areas of rough grassland are found at Moss-side, Stonyford Reservoir, Standing Stone Hill, Glenavy, Maghaberry and Aghnatrisk.

Landscape and Public Access to the Countryside

4.11 The Plan area contains a wide range of facilities and walks that allows the public to gain access to the countryside and enjoy the different landscapes, consisting of the following:-

- **Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty** – Designated by the DOE in 1965, the **Lagan Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty** is the only AONB in the Plan Area. Most of the AONB lies within the Lagan Valley Regional Park which was designated in 1967. The AONB has a rich heritage, not only through impressive monument's such as the Giant's Ring, Early Christian Rathes and the remnants of fine estates, but also its important industrial archaeology related to linen production and the disused Lagan Canal and its towpath. It includes the hill slopes of the Castlereagh Hills and a number of small towns and villages each with special character and identity.
- **Earth Science Interests and Assets** – Earth science includes both geology and geomorphology which have a major influence in determining the biodiversity of regions and the physical character of the landscape. Within LCCC, the following locations are identified:
 - Cregagh Glen (in part), Purdysburn (in part), Broadwater, and Clarehill Quarry.
- **Public Access** – Public bodies own or manage significant land holdings, either through site based facilities (such as forest parks and lakes) or through accesses intended to provide opportunities to explore wider areas of the open countryside. The following site based facilities are identified in the LCCC area:
 - The Lagan Valley Regional Park (DOE has coordinating role along with other public bodies including the Council)
 - Hillsborough Forest

In terms of accesses to the open countryside, **the Ulster Way** runs through the Castlereagh Hills and the Lagan Valley Regional Park.

More information is available at [The Ulster Way - A Long Distance Walking Route in Northern Ireland](#)

Part 2 Landscape Assessment

4.12 The Plan Area contains a diverse range of landscapes ranging from the Lagan Valley to a section of the Lough Neagh shoreline. The Northern Ireland Character Assessment 2000 (NILCA) identified the characteristics of 130 landscape character areas in Northern Ireland, and 23 of these landscape character areas, **or portions of them**, are contained within Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council Area. Please See **Annex No. 1** and Map No. 2 for further details.

Table 1: Landscape Character Areas within LCCC Area.

Landscape Character Areas Within LCCC Area
East Lough Neagh Points
Portmore Lough Fringe
Donaghcloney Valley
Kilwarlin Plateau
Dromore Lowlands
Slieve Croob Summits
Craggy Dromara Uplands
Hillsborough Slopes
Ravarnet Valley
Ballygowan Drumlins
Castlereagh Plateau
Belfast/Lisburn
Hollywood Hills
Craigantlet Escarpment
Castlereagh Slopes
Lagan Parkland
Hummocky Lagan Lowlands

Broad Lagan Valley
Upper Ballinderry Plateau
Derrykillultagh
Divis Summits
Belfast Basalt Escarpment
Expansive Crumlin Farmland

4.13 Position Paper 8 Natural Heritage deals with the other aspects relating to Landscape Assessment including Areas of High Scenic Value; Rural Landscape Wedges; Local Landscape Policy Areas (LLPAs); and The Lagan Valley Regional Park.

Part 3 Development Pressure Analysis

4.14 The development pressure analysis seeks to identify areas where significant pressure has occurred and/or where local rural character is under threat of significant change.

4.15 The **SPPS** is silent on the issue of a development pressure analysis (and ‘cancels’ PPS 1), however this is still referred to under PPS 21 (Section 4.0 The Role of Development Plans - Countryside Assessments). In accordance with best practice, an analysis will help identify those areas under threat from over-development.

Scope of Development Pressure Analysis

4.16 As referred to previously, PPS 21 which was introduced in June 2010 provides the policy context for all development in the countryside. The analysis that has been used is based on the Department’s computerised records of planning decisions issued in the countryside in Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council area outside of the Settlement Development Limits.

4.17 Evidence has been provided through the BMAP Technical Supplement on rural house builds in ‘Lisburn District’ from January 1992 to

December 2003, as this was the only area identified as rural remainder. All rural residential planning applications between **December 2003 and September 2015** (excluding alterations and extensions) have been identified via the Planning Portal (ePIC) and plotted as a dot map. Applications on the same site will show as one dot only at the scale displayed, however all relevant applications are included in the statistical analysis.

- 4.18 Map no. 5 Rural Development Pressure Analysis shows the distribution of housing stock in the rural area of the Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council area indicating a relatively high density of rural housing stock throughout the Council area. Annex 2 provides statistical information on planning decisions for rural dwellings.

Rural Dwellings (All Categories)

- 4.19 From the beginning of 1992 to the end of 2003, there was an estimated 3,266 decisions relating to single dwellings in the open countryside in Lisburn District. A total of 1,858 (57%) of these decisions related to Green Belt or Countryside Policy Areas (CPAs). The annual approval rate in the Green Belt/CPA increased from 58% in 1992 to 77% in 2002 before declining to 64% in 2003, averaging at a 67% success rate between 1992 and 2003. Outside the designated Green Belt/CPA the annual approval rate has generally remained above 65%, exceeding 70% in 8 out of the 12 years.
- 4.20 From the period 1st April 2011 to 31st May 2014 there was an estimated 679 planning applications submitted relating to single dwellings in the countryside across the Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council area. 650 decisions were issued (approval or refusal) with the remaining 29 applications being withdrawn prior to the issuing of a decision. The annual approval rate for April 2011 to May 2014 ranged between 81% - 86%.

Rural Dwellings (New Dwellings)

- 4.21 During the period from 1992 to 2003, 2,106 (64%) of all decisions in the rural area of Lisburn District related to new dwellings, with a 59% average approval rate during the 12-year period.
- 4.22 From the period 1st April 2011 to 31st May 2014, 509 (74%) of all decisions in the rural area related to new dwellings, with an 84% average approval rate during the 3 year period.

Rural dwellings (Replacements)

- 4.23 Between 1992 and 2003, 1,160 decisions (36%) related to replacement dwellings, with 1,024 (88%) being approvals and 136 (12%) being refusals.
- 4.24 Between 1st April 2011 to 31st May 2014, 177 decisions (26%) related to replacement dwellings, with 141 (79%) being approvals and 25 (14%) being refusals

General Patterns of Development Pressure

- 4.25 There has been a significant increase in the total number of decisions for single rural dwellings in Lisburn District during the 5-year period from 1999 to 2003. During this period, the number of decisions more than doubled, increasing from 219 in 1999 to 465 in 2003. This indicates an increased pressure for development in all parts of the rural area in recent years. The development pressure analysis shows that in recent years, particularly 2003, there was a growing pressure for single rural dwellings in all rural parts of Lisburn District ⁶.
- 4.26 For the period from 1st April 2011 to 31st May 2014 it is noted that application numbers have increased from 191 in 2011 -12 to 234 in 2013-14. 158 approvals issued in 2011-12, 192 in 2012-13 and 190 in 2013-14. This illustrates an increasing pressure upon the rural area within the district.

⁶ DOE (2015) Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015 Draft Plan: Technical Supplement 11. Vol. 1 Countryside Assessment.

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Settlement Appraisal

4.27 Appraisals of the towns, villages and small settlements within the BMA have provided the basis for identifying Settlement Development Limits and other Plan Proposals including policies, zonings and designations. Each appraisal is structured into, where applicable, a short description of character, availability of facilities, assets and constraints on future development and a justification of identified Settlement Development Limits, that takes into account relevant factors.

4.28 The information contained in the Countryside Assessment will assist in the definition of land use zonings, the designation of development limits, and will form the basis for the definition of the following protective designations:

- Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance (SLNCIs)
- Areas of Townscape Character (ATCs)
- Areas of Significant Archaeological Interest
- Areas of Archaeological Potential
- Local Landscape Policy Areas (LLPAs)

4.29 Arising from the process of Countryside Assessment local policies may be brought forward in the development plan to complement or amplify regional policies on matters specific to the local circumstances of particular countryside areas e.g. Areas of High Scenic Value. This will involve consultation with local communities and the public.

4.30 In addition there are some areas of the countryside with exceptional landscapes, such as stretches of the coast or lough shores, and certain views or vistas, wherein the quality of the landscape and unique amenity value is such that development should only be

permitted in exceptional circumstances. Based upon the Countryside Assessment, these areas will be identified and designated as Special Countryside Areas in development plans and local policies brought forward to protect their unique qualities⁷.

- 4.31 In the interests of promoting rural regeneration, and in recognition of the strong sense of belonging and sense of place in certain rural areas the planning authority, through the development plan process, will identify and designate Dispersed Rural Communities (DRC) after consultation with local communities and the public. The development plan may also bring forward local policies, to amplify and complement regional policy, on matters specific to the local circumstances which exist within particular DRCs (see Para 2.35).
- 4.32 Although these places are not nucleated settlements, they will have to be more than just open countryside. A build-up or cluster of recently built houses will normally not be considered as fulfilling this criterion.
- 4.33 The countryside is a unique resource. It contains landscapes of considerable quality and amenity, important indications of our cultural heritage and is also significant in terms of nature conservation and biodiversity by providing habitats for wildlife, flora and fauna. It is a recreational resource and a considerable tourist asset. The countryside is also home to our agricultural industry and to a considerable and growing rural community.
- 4.34 However, while the countryside has traditionally contained a substantial number of individual houses and other buildings, significant concern has been expressed by many about development trends and the enhanced pressures being exerted on the countryside, particularly in view of the Executive's commitment to sustainable development.

⁷ DOE (2015) Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015 Draft Plan: Technical Supplement
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- 4.35 Over development in the open countryside would have the potential to bring with it significant environmental, financial and social costs. These can be manifest through for example suburban sprawl, habitat loss and adverse impact upon water quality particularly from the increased use of non-mains sewerage systems. It also has the potential to impact upon the sustainable growth of our towns and villages.
- 4.36 Agriculture continues to be of major importance to the economy of the rural area. With the restructuring of the industry ongoing in response to the continuing change to agricultural support measures by the European Union, agricultural diversification is likely to increase in importance as a means of maintaining or increasing farm income and employment. The planning system will therefore continue to sympathetically view appropriate farm diversification schemes.
- 4.37 Opportunities also exist for tourism growth, particularly through the sympathetic conversion or re-use of existing buildings in the countryside. Exceptionally, new build accommodation may also be acceptable.
- 4.38 Appropriate industrial and commercial enterprises, including minerals development and necessary infrastructure will be facilitated, as well as proposals for new community buildings and uses where these meet local needs.
- 4.39 **Annex 3** sets out the Settlement Appraisal for the towns, villages and small settlements across the Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council area.
- 4.40 A separate Urban Appraisal will be prepared for the areas identified in BMAP as 'Metropolitan Lisburn' and 'Metropolitan Castlereagh'.

5.0 KEY FINDINGS

5.1 A summary of the key findings are as follows:-

- To consider ways for managing development and plan for future development within the rural area of Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council Area taking into account the details of the Countryside Assessment.
- **Environmental Assets** – there is a wealth of environmental assets both built and natural across the Council area. Opportunities may exist to identify new features considered worthy of protection. Additionally accesses to these assets could be further considered to consider ways of opening up opportunities for sympathetic development and to contribute towards improving people’s health and well-being.
- **Landscape Assessment** – the variety of landscape types across the Council area adds to the character and setting of the towns, villages and small settlements. These should be taken into account with any future proposals resulting from the Settlement Appraisal.
- **Development Pressure Analysis** – this analysis indicates the trend of rural house builds across the Council area. From the period 1st April 2011 to 31st May 2014 there was an estimated 679 planning applications submitted relating to single dwellings in the countryside across the Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council area with an approval rate of between 81% - 86%.
- **Settlement Appraisal** – to consider any future opportunities for growth or restriction of the settlements within the Council area, taking into account the environmental and landscape characteristics, and considering ways to manage those areas

which have experienced, or are continuing to experience, development pressure.

6.0 CONCLUSION

6.1 The purpose of this paper has been to provide base line information on the rural area within the Lisburn City & Castlereagh City Council area.

6.2 It is therefore recommended to members that:

- (i) This report is considered and revised as necessary.
- (ii) Local and regional organisations representing groups under Section 75 are identified, included in the Statement of Community Involvement and consulted with as part of the process of formulating a new development plan.
- (iii) The needs identified are used as a working draft for the preparatory studies for the Local development Plan, and are taken into account when formulating both the aims and objectives of the plan and future policy.
- (iv) Consideration is given to the countryside assets of the council area and Members' suggestions on change/future improvements will be subjected to a sustainability appraisal.

Annex 1: Landscape Character Area Descriptions

East Lough Neagh Points:

A rolling agricultural landscape with relatively small fields and overgrown hedgerows on an area underlain by Lough Neagh Clays on the eastern fringes of Lough Neagh. There is a strong contrast in the scale and pattern of the farmland between the rolling margins of the basalt plateau and the flat clay landscape on the fringes of Lough Neagh. Linear shelterbelts subdivide the farmland and mature hedgerow oaks and willows line the roads in this flat clay landscape. The large arable fields are drained by straight ditches and enclosed by gappy hedgerows. The rolling farmland to the east is mostly small in scale, with overgrown hedgerows and numerous smallholdings.

The fringes of Lough Neagh are renowned for their wildlife and habitat value. Extensive areas are designated as ASSI for fen/marsh and moss habitats, which support many rare examples of flora and fauna. The entire fringe of Lough Neagh is also designated as a Special Protection Area (recognising its importance as a habitat for breeding birds)⁸.

Portmore Lough Fringe:

An area of pasture and fen on the low-lying flat landscape on the shores of Portmore Lough. The area is underlain by Lough Neagh Clay and becomes increasingly waterlogged towards the margins of the lough. The larger pastures on higher land towards the edges of the Lough Neagh Shores are enclosed by overgrown hedgerows, but the fields become progressively overgrown by regenerating scrub and fen carr on the margins of Portmore Lough. There are few views to Portmore Lough, as it is screened by dense fen carr. The traditional settlement pattern is of tiny houses many of which

⁸DOE (2015) Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015 Draft Plan: Technical Supplement 11. Vol. 1. Countryside Assessment.

were thatched scattered along narrow roads, and small farmsteads at the end of narrow, straight tracks. There has been some recent ribbon development but this is limited and the landscape retains a rather wild, remote character. The ancient moated churchyard to the west of the village of Lower Ballinderry has a special, remote character; it is on an island virtually surrounded by fen carr⁹.

Donaghcloney Valley:

The Donaghcloney Valley is at the head of the broad River Lagan valley. It is a broad, flat-bottomed valley which lies between the Upper Ballinderry Plateau to the north and the Kilwarlin Plateau to the south. The River Lagan meanders tightly at the entrance to the broader valley to the north east and is a prominent focus in views.

The principal settlement of Magheralin has a clustered form. It is surrounded by open arable farmland, although the river corridor has a relatively small-scale landscape pattern, with some prominent lines of mature trees¹⁰.

Kilwarlin Plateau:

The escarpment slopes of the Kilwarlin Plateau overlook the Lagan Valley and extend from Hillsborough to Moira. The plateau dips very gradually to the west, from a height of 146m at Fort Hill to 122m at Red Hill. It has an undulating surface, with rounded summits echoing the drumlin form. The plateau is an extension of the Hillsborough ridge but the landform is less dissected and has a more tranquil, rural character.

The farmland is subdivided into medium-sized fields by neat hedgerows. There are numerous mature hedgerow trees - principally oak, ash and sycamore – scattered throughout the landscape. The hedgerows on more

⁹ http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/land-home/landscape_home/country_landscape/63/63-land.htm

¹⁰ http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/land-home/landscape_home/country_landscape/80/80-land.htm

elevated land contain gorse and have a clumpy character, but in general, the landscape pattern is very consistent, with few irregularities¹¹.

Dromore Lowlands:

The Dromore Lowlands is a relatively low-lying landscape to the south of the Kilwarlin Plateau. This is an area of small, rounded drumlins surrounded by low-lying rough pastures, moss and regenerating scrub. The largest of these, Big Bog, is an extensive, waterlogged area of low scrub. The network of narrow roads connects tracts of higher ground and their associated farms and settlements. The low hills are dominated by a smooth patchwork of pastures, bounded by straight hedgerows. This pasture contrasts with the rough texture of the moss. There are many small groups of farm and residential buildings along roads on higher land, with clusters of houses at the intersection of roads. Views open and close as roads skirt around the larger areas of moss. There are many hedgerow trees and stands of trees associated with farmsteads¹².

Slieve Croob Summits:

The Slieve Croob Summits are a series of rounded summits formed from intrusive igneous rocks within a surrounding lowland area of sedimentary rocks. They stand out as distinct massive rocky summits with thin grass cover and shattered rocky screes. The land rises to a height of 534m at Slieve Croob. The lower slopes are marginal pasture divided by broken stone walls and small stone cottages, many of which lie derelict. Stunted, wind-sculpted trees stand against these cottages or nestle in the more sheltered slopes of this exposed environment. The summits are an open, rugged landscape, with only a few conifer plantations. Drumkeeragh Forest, on the slopes of White

¹¹ DOE (2015) Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015 Draft Plan: Technical Supplement 11. Vol. 1. Countryside Assessment.

¹² http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/land-home/landscape_home/country_landscape/82/82-land.htm

Hill, is the largest. Few roads cross the landscape but viewpoints such as Windy Gap allow panoramic views over the surrounding lowlands, as well as across to the Mourne Mountains. The prominent ridge-lines are visible from miles around, particularly those formed by the Slieve Croob/Slievenisky complex and Slievegarran. Cashels, raths and standing stones are found on many of the slopes leading to the Slieve Croob summits. The most important is the Legananny Dolmen, an important chambered grave site¹³.

Craggy Dromara Uplands:

An elevated drumlin landscape to the east of Dromara with a rugged, relatively wild character and a rough texture. The summits are separated by a rolling plateau of marginal farmland and the rounded drumlin landform is broken by numerous rocky outcrops and clumps of gorse. Pastures are of varied shapes and sizes and many are enclosed by low, broken stone walls. Overgrown hedgerows, clumps of gorse, rocky outcrops and patches of marshy farmland give the landscape an untamed character, although these pockets of rough land are interspersed by rolling pastures. There are no woodlands, but stands of Scot's pine and groups of mature oak trees shelter some of the older farmsteads. Holly is characteristic of hedgerows. Traditional white farmsteads with stone barns are prominent and are often sited close to dramatic rocky outcrops. A rath, sited on a local skyline to the north west of Dromara, is a special local landscape feature and forms part of the setting for the attractive historic mill buildings at Woodford¹⁴.

Hillsborough Slopes:

¹³ http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/land-home/landscape_home/country_landscape/87/87-land.htm

¹⁴ DOE (2015) Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015 Draft Plan: Technical Supplement 11. Vol. 1. Countryside Assessment.

The Hillsborough Slopes are found to the west of the Ravarnet Valley. The area includes the elevated ridge on which the town of Hillsborough is sited, together with the rounded ridges and hills of its marginal slopes. The gently rolling, shallow ridges and rounded hills on the slopes of the Hillsborough ridge have no particular alignment but the centre of the landscape character area is dominated by a number of broad, rounded ridges, each with an east-west alignment. On the lower slopes, the landform is strongly influenced by the drumlin form and there are many egg-shaped and rounded summits. The farmland is divided into an orderly patchwork of fields and hedgerows. All the fields have straight edges but they vary in shape and size; large arable fields predominate on the broader slopes but these are interspersed with pockets of smaller paddocks, particularly on the ridge-tops and close to areas of residential development. Scattered hedgerow trees have a strong visual influence. They have no discernible pattern, although the number of trees increases towards the lower slopes and there are sometimes clusters of trees close to traditional farmsteads. The ridge-tops have a relatively open character and the scattered farmsteads are focal points in all views. They are generally set back from the road and are reached by long tracks; cottages and barns (some derelict) are sited along the many narrow roads. Hillsborough Park dominates the highest point of the ridge, the walled woodland providing a strong contrast in character with the open farmland¹⁵.

Ravarnet Valley:

The Ravarnet Valley landscape is found to the south of Lisburn, in the broad valley of the Ravarnet River and its tributaries. The lowland has an undulating landform, with numerous shallow drumlins and elongated, rounded hills. Many of the drumlins have a rather amorphous form and are separated by shallow hollows; the inter-drumlin hollows are often poorly drained, with patches of marsh and a hummocky, uneven terrain. The broader floodplains have a more remote, tranquil character and the relatively long views in these areas

¹⁵ DOE (2015) Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015 Draft Plan: Technical Supplement 11. Vol. 1. Countryside Assessment.

contrast with the enclosure of the surrounding drumlin landscapes. The neat patchwork of fields and hedgerows on the drumlins is less predictable in the floodplains and is sometimes interrupted by patches of dense carr woodland, rushes and gorse. There are some Loughs on parts of the valley floor, particularly in areas where the valley floor has a slightly undulating landform. The group of Loughs to the north of Magheraknock are particularly attractive.

The area has a fairly homogeneous character, with a patchwork of farmland and hedgerows, interspersed with numerous small farmsteads. The farms are always sited on the mid slopes of the drumlins and are linked by winding, narrow roads which follow the higher ground. Hedgerow trees are scattered thinly throughout the landscape and have an important visual presence. Stands of mature trees are concentrated around farmsteads and patches of damp woodland thrive in waterlogged areas. A larger area of woodland persists at Larchfield estate, on the eastern slopes of Windmill Hill, although it is largely hidden behind the high stone walls which surround the estate¹⁶.

Ballygowan Drumlins:

The Ballygowan Drumlins area is underlain by ancient Silurian rocks which have been covered by glacial deposits. The smooth, rolling drumlin landforms create a dynamic landscape pattern and the eye is constantly drawn to landmarks, such as prominent houses and hilltop features. Ground levels fall gradually towards Strangford Lough and in more low-lying areas, the drumlins exhibit a relatively waterlogged character.

To the south east of Dundonald, the Enler Valley has a particularly subtle, intimate landscape. The scenic, lush valley slopes provide a contrast to the wetlands and meadows of the valley floor, where the abandoned, overgrown railway embankments are a local landscape feature¹⁷.

¹⁶ DOE (2015) Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015 Draft Plan: Technical Supplement 11. Vol. 1. Countryside Assessment.

¹⁷ http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/land-home/landscape_home/country_landscape/95/95-land.htm

Castlereagh Plateau:

This landscape character area occupies much of Castlereagh and extends into adjacent areas to the west and south. It is underlain by Silurian sedimentary rocks but its geomorphology has been strongly influenced by glaciation which has created a compact rolling landform of small hummocks and narrow valleys. Its fertile soils create rich pasture, which is the predominant land use of the area. Small fields are partitioned by hedges, which rise and fall across the landscape, emphasising its contours. The hedges, although often unmanaged and gappy, imbue the landscape with a prominent structure and texture, occasionally enhanced by hedgerow trees. Although large woods are scarce, hedgerow trees and small copses create the impression of a well-wooded landscape, especially within low-lying hollows and valleys. Occasional areas of marsh also help to break up the impression of uniform pasture.

Due to its proximity to Belfast, the area is well settled and is also dissected by a network of roads and small lanes. The landscape possesses an intriguing mix of scales, sometimes offering long distance views to the sea or the mountainous backdrop of Slieve Croob across a rhythmic rolling landform, and sometimes presenting a more intimate, small scale experience due to the enclosure by hills, hedges and trees¹⁸.

Belfast/Lisburn:

The Belfast/Lisburn Landscape Character Area encompasses the Belfast and Lisburn urban areas, together with their broader landscape setting. It is

¹⁸ DOE (2015) Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015 Draft Plan: Technical Supplement 11. Vol. 1. Countryside Assessment.

defined by the steep ridges and escarpments, which enclose the Lagan Valley at the head of Belfast Lough. Belfast is mostly contained within the valley, although urban development has spread along the narrow coastal strips to the north and south of the Lough and inland along the Lagan and Enler Valleys. The City of Lisburn is also sited on the River Lagan but is further upstream and enclosed by slightly lower slopes. There are long views over both urban areas from the surrounding upland landscapes.

The steep escarpments and ridges on the margins of the city provide a series of landmarks. The Belfast Basalt Escarpment to the north has a rugged, untamed character; Carnmoney Hill, an outlier to the north west of the basalt escarpment, dominates the landscape setting of Newtownabbey; the Craigantlet Escarpment on the fringes of the Holywood Hills encloses East Belfast and the slopes of the Castlereagh Escarpment provide a continuous backdrop to the urban districts of South Belfast and Castlereagh¹⁹.

Hollywood Hills:

The Hollywood Hills extend across west North Down Borough, forming an area of undulating upland in the centre of a ring of settlement which includes Belfast, Holywood, Bangor, Newtownards and Dundonald. Proximity to these settlements makes the area an important recreational resource and its easy accessibility, rural identity and exposed, wild character are important characteristics. The plateau drops steeply to Belfast/Lisburn to the south west, and to the Bangor Coastline to the north.

A landscape of undulating pastures, conifer plantations, deciduous shelterbelts and estate woodlands creates a well wooded character; views are short and there is a sense of enclosure, except on the highest summits. The numerous large reservoirs add an extra visual and recreational element to the landscape. The hills retain a relatively undeveloped, rural character.

¹⁹ DOE (2015) Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015 Draft Plan: Technical Supplement 11. Vol. 1. Countryside Assessment.

This is, in part, a result of the undulating landform and tree and hedgerow cover, which provides a visual screen. Scattered housing is rarely dominant along the network of small roads²⁰.

Craignantlet Escarpment:

The Craignantlet Escarpment is a prominent ridge of Silurian rocks, which forms the escarpment to the Holywood Hills. The escarpment encloses and shelters the urban edge of east Belfast, which pushes up against the ridge, extending into the woodlands at Stormont. The government buildings stand out as a major landmark, situated high up on the ridge. A dense network of woodlands and avenues gives the landscape a robust structure, particularly around Stormont. Green pastures extend along the ridge, divided by hedgerows and shelterbelts. The rural/urban interface is strong and well defined. There are clear views to the ridge from the surrounding lowlands and adjacent escarpments, including an important view across Belfast Lough from the M2 at Newtownabbey; any development on the ridge is highly visible²¹.

Castlereagh Slopes:

The Castlereagh Slopes are the steep slopes of the north western margins of the Castlereagh Plateau, to the south east of the Belfast/Castlereagh urban area. The prominent ridge has a smooth, rolling landform and a steep gradient. It averages 130m but at Braniel Hill, reaches an approximate height of 170m. It is deeply dissected by steep glens, which are generally well wooded. The broad slopes of the ridge are divided into a patchwork of undulating pastures and hedgerows. The remnant landscapes of the many historic estates and country houses of the Lagan Valley remain an important

²⁰ DOE (2015) Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015 Draft Plan: Technical Supplement 11. Vol. 1. Countryside Assessment.

²¹ DOE (2015) Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015 Draft Plan: Technical Supplement 11. Vol. 1. Countryside Assessment.

influence. Avenues and lines of mature beech trees mark the entrances, carriage drives and former estate boundaries and the buildings themselves are often important features in the landscape²².

Lagan Parklands:

An amenity parkland landscape set within the historic, designed landscapes of a series of 18th and 19th century estates. The undulating, steep slopes of the narrow river valley are well-wooded, with a variety of formal designed landscapes, commercial forests and natural habitats. There is a linked sequence of wooded spaces and the deep river valley seems remote from its immediate urban surroundings. Golf courses, public open space and playing fields dominate areas of flatter land on the upper fringes of the river valley. To the south of the river, a neat, rolling agricultural landscape of estate farmlands has belts of mature trees. Winding, linear woodlands follow the local streams and narrow roads, which characterise the landscape close to the foot of the Castlereagh Slopes.

The river corridor is characterised by its early industrial heritage. This is reflected in the surviving mill buildings, the disused canal and by numerous minor artefacts such as the weirs, sluices and other ruins along the canal towpath²³.

Hummocky Lagan Lowlands:

This hummocky lowland landscape, at the foot of the Castlereagh Slopes, has an irregular and varied pattern. Pasture predominates and the patchwork of small fields is divided by overgrown hedgerows. However, in some areas,

²² DOE (2015) Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015 Draft Plan: Technical Supplement 11. Vol. 1. Countryside Assessment.

²³ DOE (2015) Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015 Draft Plan: Technical Supplement 11. Vol. 1. Countryside Assessment.

especially towards the south and west of the lowland, the former field pattern has been eroded to leave only remnant hedgerows and odd clumps of trees. There are areas of waterlogged land and extensive patches of scrub scattered throughout the lowland. The landscape is an assortment of pasture, recreational areas, the remnants of historic estates and private grounds. It has a fairly open character, with views to the city and the many large industrial and institutional buildings on the urban fringe²⁴.

Broad Lagan Valley:

The River Lagan flows in a winding, narrow channel across a very broad, flat valley to the west of Lisburn. The river is relatively inconspicuous towards the centre of the valley. Arable fields predominate, but there are also pockets of smaller pastures and paddocks, particularly on the edges of settlements. All the fields are enclosed by hedgerows, with those closer to the river having a scrubby, overgrown character and containing willow and downy birch. There are numerous hedgerow trees throughout the valley and they contribute character and variety to views. The majority of hedgerow trees are ash and oak but there are also many beech trees, especially towards the edges of the valley. The valley is well settled, with linear villages and farmsteads along a dense, branching network of narrow roads which follow minor ridges. Some of the larger houses and farms have avenues of mature beech trees and shelterbelts which are prominent features in this flat landscape²⁵.

Upper Ballinderry Plateau:

A rolling, relatively prosperous farmland landscape on the southern and western fringes of Derrykillultagh, which extends to the edge of Lurgan. The area has a different land ownership pattern to the upper plateau, with fewer

²⁴ DOE (2015) Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015 Draft Plan: Technical Supplement 11. Vol. 1. Countryside Assessment.

²⁵ DOE (2015) Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015 Draft Plan: Technical Supplement 11. Vol. 1. Countryside Assessment.

larger farmsteads and many estates. There are consequently fewer roads and the built development has a more clustered character, with houses concentrated into nuclear villages, often with grand avenues of beech trees and prominent churches. There is a steep escarpment along the southern margins of the landscape, overlooking the Lagan valley; Friars Glen, between the village of Aghalee and Soldierstown, also has a fairly steep, wooded character²⁶.

Derrykillultagh:

The area is characterised by rounded hills and shallow slopes, although there are some gullies and the southern boundary of the landscape character area is marked by a steeper escarpment slope. Many slopes are divided by straight, narrow glens, which form a ladder pattern in views from below. The plateau descends gently to the west, where there is a gradual transition to the claylands on the edge of Lough Neagh.

The farmland landscape often has a relatively untidy character, with patches of gorse and scrub and a rather disconnected hedgerow network. The shallow valleys often contain areas of marsh and many fields are partially infested with rushes. Gorse and holly are typical hedgerow species and often mark the transition to marginal farmland. There are typically small farms and smallholdings which are surrounded by paddocks and scattered barns, although there is a gradual transition to a landscape of larger fields, hedgerow trees and more prosperous farmsteads on the western margins of the plateau. Most farmsteads consist of small, white rendered buildings sited on the mid-slopes or local ridges and connected to roads by straight, right-angled tracks. The older farmsteads are often focal points in the landscape, particularly where they are associated with lines and stands of mature trees.

²⁶ DOE (2015) Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015 Draft Plan: Technical Supplement 11. Vol. 1. Countryside Assessment.

A network of straight roads follow the ridges and connect linear villages; most junctions are staggered cross-roads²⁷.

Divis Summits:

The Antrim basalt plateau ends in a series of broad, rounded summits overlooking Lisburn and Belfast. The principal summits of Black Mountain, Squires Hill and Cave Hill reach up to 400m, with Divis standing at 478m. They generally have gentle slopes, with some gullies and abrupt, steep slopes in places. However, the summits along the edge of the basalt escarpment have much steeper slopes, which plummet towards Belfast. Between the summits, the upper plateau has extensive areas of shallow, partially waterlogged moss, which is surrounded, by areas of marginal farmland. The landscape is relatively open, with extensive areas of windswept moss and rough farmland. However, the valley slopes have a more farmed character, with straight, overgrown hedgerows, belts of mature trees and farmsteads. There are important archaeological remains, particularly on the summits of Cave Hill. The landscape has a rather irregular, patchy pattern, with areas of scrub and wasteland which are often associated with abandoned mineral workings, derelict farmsteads and areas of waterlogged or unfarmed land.

Belfast Basalt Escarpment:

The edge of the Antrim basalt plateau is well defined by a steep scarp slope which wraps around and contains the north west edge of Belfast. The black basalt outcrops have a distinctive, sheer profile, which is broken by a series of

²⁷ DOE (2015) Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015 Draft Plan: Technical Supplement 11. Vol. 1. Countryside Assessment.

steep, wooded glens. The Hills are pitted with quarries and have a rugged, almost brutal character. They provide a dramatic contrast to the dense urban areas below. The dark basalt overlies a thin band of chalk, which forms a strong contrast in colour whenever it is visible. Belfast Castle, at the northern end of the narrow strip, is set in a densely wooded designed landscape, which contrasts with the rugged, rural character of the scarp edge.

The lower escarpment slopes are a mixture of hummocky open pasture with gappy hedgerows and stands of deciduous woodland on steeper slopes. There are extensive areas of regenerating scrub and gorse. Narrow roads provide steep links between the ridge-top road and Belfast, winding up the basalt edge. The slopes are pitted with quarries. Most are abandoned and have a rugged, untidy character and many are associated with fly tipping. The quarries are prominent and a strong influence on landscape character and quality. The basalt edge provides an opportunity for panoramic views over the city of Belfast²⁸.

Expansive Crumlin Farmland:

The Expansive Crumlin Farmland lies near the eastern shores of Lough Neagh, occupying a relatively flat area underlain by rocks of the Upper Basalt formation. The land slopes gently from the lower slopes of the Belfast Hills (Derrykillultagh) to the fringes of Lough Neagh to the west. Clady Water, Dunmore River and the Crumlin River flow from the hills across the farmland but do not have a strong presence in the landscape. The valleys of the Clady and Crumlin rivers are narrow and steep-sided so the water channels are relatively inconspicuous. The extensive network of overgrown hedgerows gives the area a well treed character, although many are over-mature.

²⁸ DOE (2015) Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015 Draft Plan: Technical Supplement 11. Vol. 1. Countryside Assessment.

Scattered farms and small villages form the main settlements; farms are typically sited at the end of straight tracks, at a distance from the road, while more recent housing tends to be sited right alongside the road. The largest settlement in the area is the compact town of Crumlin²⁹.

²⁹ http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/land-home/landscape_home/country_landscape/113/113-land.htm

Annex 2: Statistics Planning Decisions for Rural Dwellings (DOE)

Decided and Withdrawn Full, Outline and Reserved Matters rural single and replacement dwellings in Lisburn and Castlereagh¹ between 1st April 2011 and 31st May 2014

		2011-12				2012-13				2013-14				2014-15 (01/04/2014 to 31/05/2014)			
		Decided			With- drawn	Decided			With- drawn	Decided			With- drawn	Decided			With- drawn
		Approved ²	Refused	Total		Approved ²	Refused	Total		Approved ²	Refused	Total		Approved ²	Refused	Total	
Full	New single rural dwellings	75	5	80	1	54	6	63	2	52	5	60	3	6	1	7	1
	Replacement single rural dwellings	20	8	28	1	35	5	40	3	28	5	33	1	5	0	5	0
	Total	95	13	108	2	89	11	103	5	80	10	93	4	11	1	12	1
Outline	New single rural dwellings	39	15	55	0	62	8	70	1	49	19	68	9	9	1	10	1
	Replacement single rural dwellings	6	3	9	0	12	4	16	4	18	0	19	1	1	0	1	0
	Total	45	18	64	0	74	12	86	5	67	19	87	10	10	1	11	1
Reserved Matters	New single rural dwellings	15	0	15	0	20	0	20	0	39	0	40	1	4	0	4	0
	Replacement single rural dwellings	3	0	3	0	9	0	9	0	4	0	4	0	0	0	0	0
	Total	18	0	18	0	29	0	29	0	43	0	44	1	4	0	4	0
Total	New single rural dwellings	129	20	150	1	136	14	153	3	140	24	168	13	19	2	21	2
	Replacement single rural dwellings	29	11	40	1	56	9	65	7	50	5	56	2	6	0	6	0
	Total	158	31	189	2	192	23	215	10	190	29	219	15	25	2	27	2

Notes:

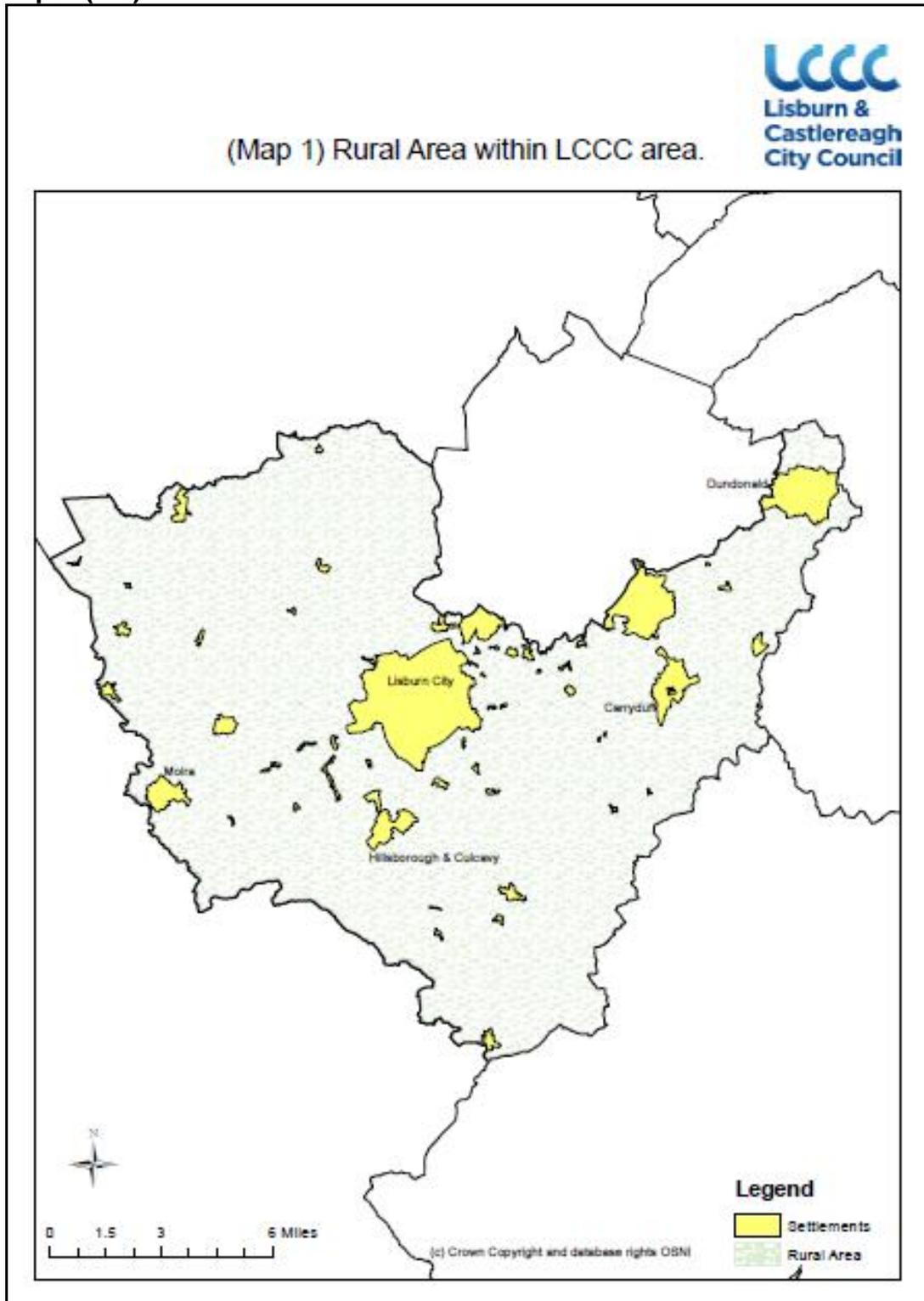
- 1 The New Council Area has been calculated using the x and y co-ordinates of each application.
- 2 The number of applications approved is based on the number of decisions issued in the same time period.

Annex 3: Settlement Appraisal

See attached PDF

Do we need to insert this into the document? (200+ pages!)

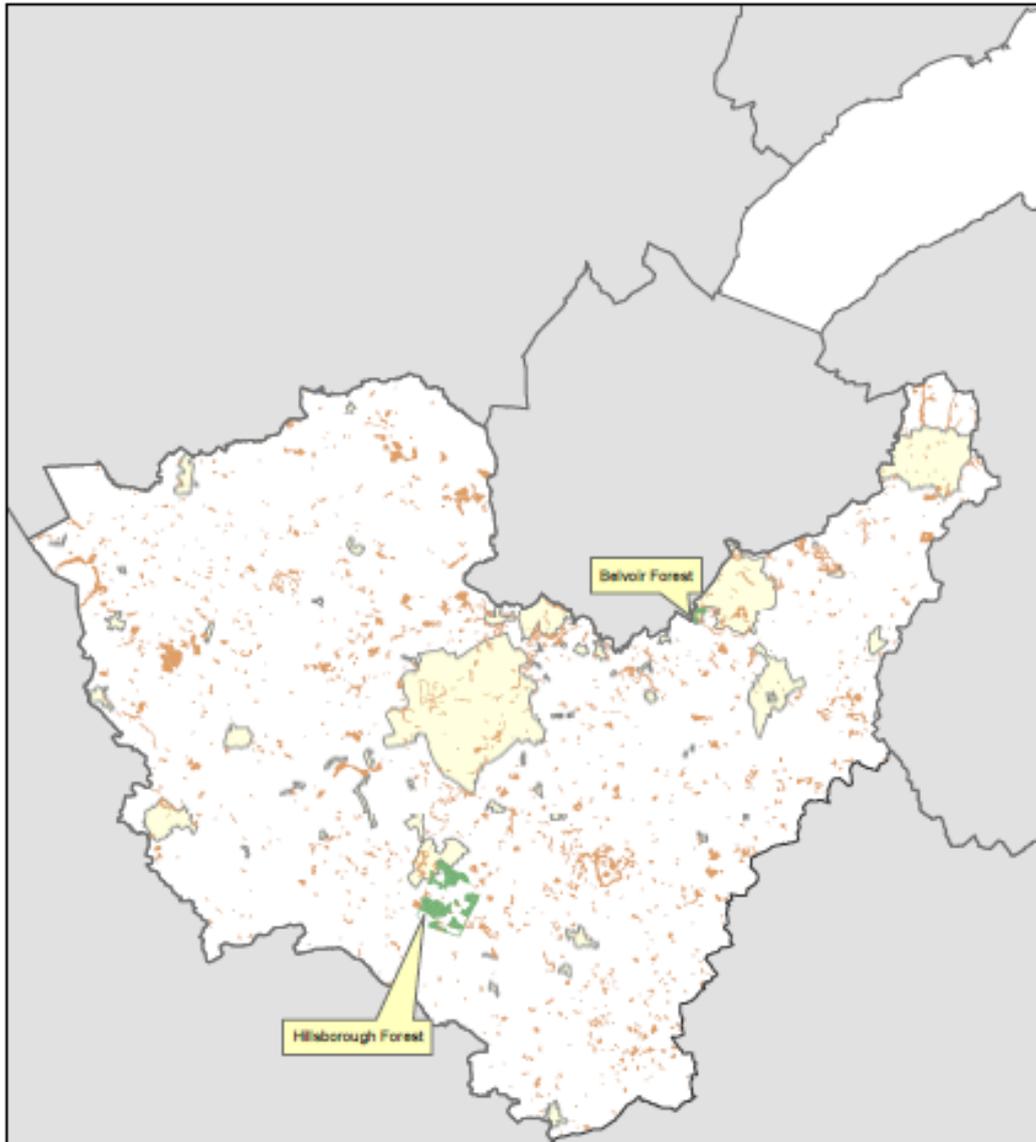
Maps: (1-5)



(Map 2) NIEA Landscape Character Areas (Full Extent)



Map No. 3
Forest Service & Non Forest Service Woodland within LCCC area.



0 1.5 3 6 Miles



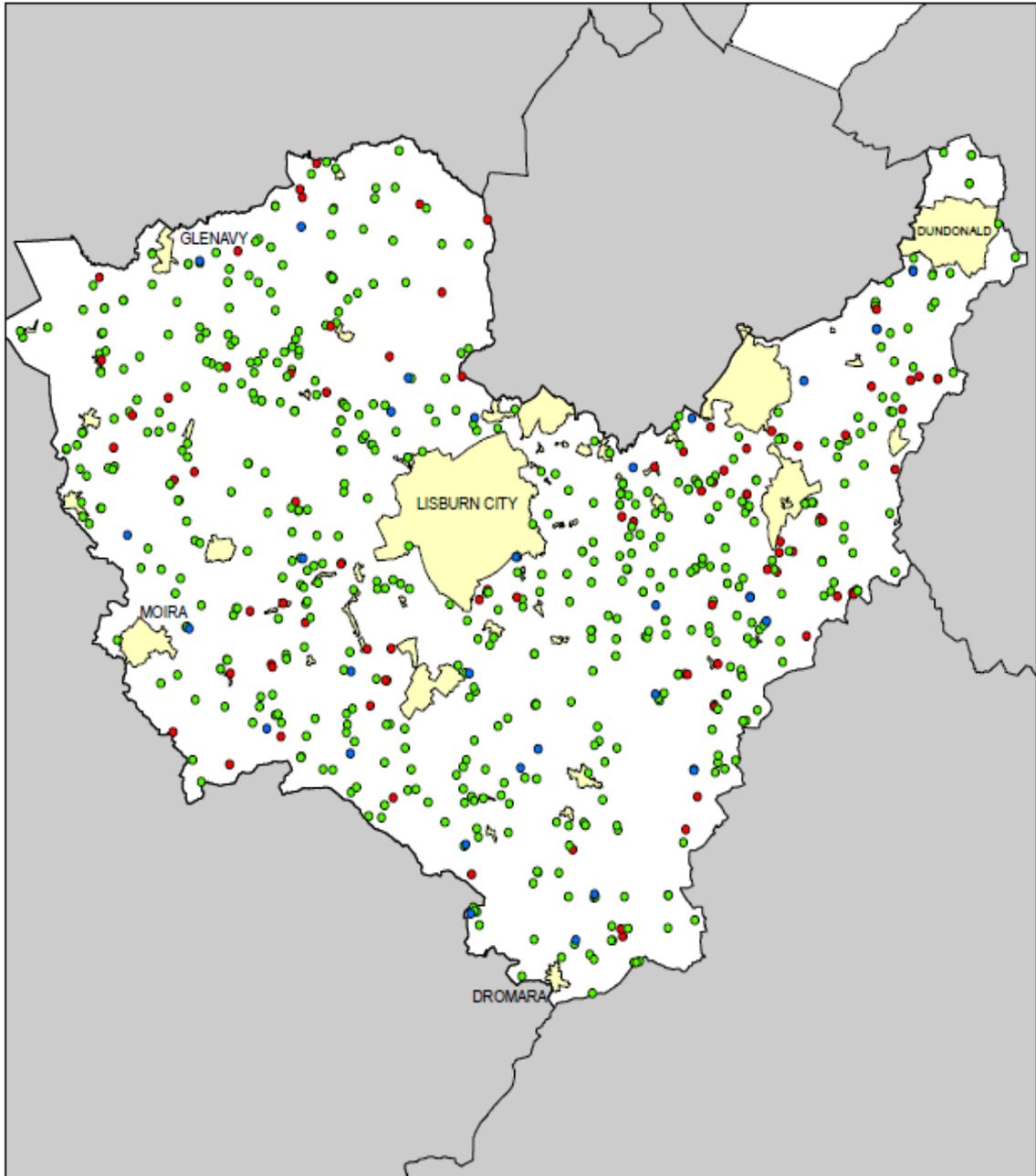
Legend

-  Settlements
- Woodland**
-  Forest Service
-  Not forest Service

Map No. 4:
Lough Neagh, Portmore Lough & Stoneyford Reservoir.



Map No. 5
 Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council Rural Housing April 2011-May 2014.



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