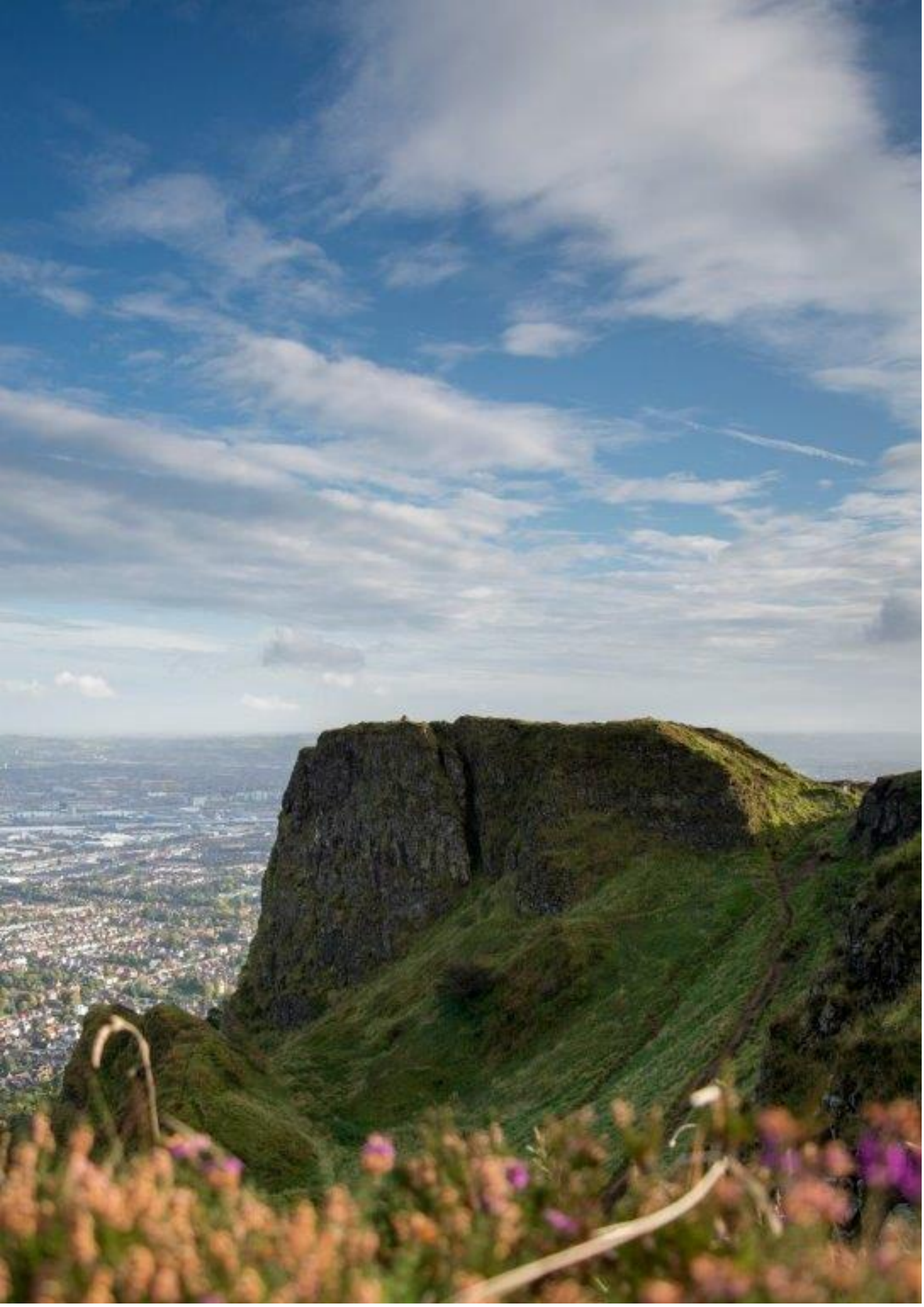




# Belfast Local Development Plan

**Technical Supplement 12**  
**Development in the countryside**  
August 2018





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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### Purpose of this document

- 1.1 This technical document has been prepared to draw together the evidence base that has been used to inform the preparation of the Belfast Local Development Plan (LDP) 2035. It is one of a suite of topic-based Technical Supplements that should be read alongside the LDP to understand the rationale and justification for the policies proposed within the draft Plan Strategy.
- 1.2 It builds upon the suite of 18 thematic Topic Papers prepared and published alongside the Preferred Options Paper (POP), which established the baseline position as at April 2017 and identified the key issues that need to be addressed by the LDP. This Technical Supplement therefore updates this baseline position and, along with the previous topic paper, sets out the evidence base that has informed the transportation policies within the draft Plan Strategy.
- 1.3 Again, it forms part of a series of thematic reports to accompany the draft Plan Strategy. Whilst each of the Technical Supplements can be read separately, there are inevitably some important related matters and background evidence within other Technical Supplements also.
- 1.4 It should be noted that the evidence base collected to inform the LDP also informs the basis on which a series of additional assessments and appraisals required as part of the plan preparation process, most notably the Sustainability Appraisal and Countryside Assessment. By combining the evidence gathering stages for both the Sustainability Appraisal and the Local Development Plan, we aim to streamline the documentation produced and avoid duplication. It will also help to ensure that sustainable development is embedded in the planning process and that the Sustainability Appraisal is one of the main drivers informing the preparation of the LDP.

### Planning and development in the countryside

- 1.5 Across Northern Ireland around 40% of people live in rural areas. For the purposes of this technical supplement, 'rural' is defined as land outside the settlement development limits set out in the development plan.
- 1.6 Whilst the Belfast City Council area is predominantly urban, it contains a portion of open countryside. In this case, the countryside is defined as lands outside the settlement development limits, as set out by the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (BMAP). It comprises a small area of upland landscape at Craigtantlet to the east of the city, 'the Belfast Hills', which frame the city to the north and west and part of the Lagan Valley Regional Park to the south. Belfast countryside accounts for 30% (or 40.75 km<sup>2</sup>) of the total Belfast City Council area.
- 1.7 'The Belfast Hills' are a striking landscape feature which provides Belfast with its unique natural setting. While the hills have suffered a substantial degree of degradation over the years, the rich historic landscape, natural diversity and scenic

attractions make them a valuable resource which needs to be carefully managed.

- 1.8 Northern Ireland's rural area is a unique resource with significant long term potential as places to live and work. Its diverse ecosystems and biodiversity propound the need to retain the sensitive landscape character of our rural resource for future generations. The LDP is responsible for protecting the environment as a sustainable asset for future generations. Recognition of the precautionary principle is also vital when plan-making and, in particular, when outlining proposed land use policy and settlement limits.
- 1.9 To sustain rural communities, new development and employment opportunities that 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.
- 1.10 Rural and urban areas are recognised as interdependent e.g. rural areas depend on urban areas for a range of services and jobs while providing quality recreational and leisure experiences for the urban population. Appropriate rural diversification should be embraced to support businesses, land managers and farmers expand or start new enterprises in appropriate circumstances and at an appropriate scale.
- 1.11 The LDP policies for the countryside aim to protect and enhance the character and value of the countryside resource, including for landscape, recreation and nature conservation, whilst providing for the essential needs of the rural communities and the rural economy. Particular consideration is given to:
- Facilitating appropriate rural uses and associated development where demonstrated to be necessary at a particular location or site to meet local rural needs;
  - Appropriate protection of natural heritage resources, including nature conservation and landscape designations and biodiversity; and
  - Integration of any permitted development with the landscape and environmental context.

## 2.0 POLICY CONTEXT

### National and Regional Policy Context

2.1 The regional planning policy context is provided by the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035, the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) and regional Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) and guidance. A summary of these documents as they pertain to the LDP is provided in the following sections.

### Regional Development Strategy 2035

2.2 The RDS sets the context for the sustainable development of Northern Ireland to 2035. The RDS acts as the spatial strategy of the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government and sets the overarching planning framework for the region. The RDS offers two types of strategic guidance; Regional Guidance (RG) which applied to the entire region which relates to the three themes of sustainable development – Economy, Society and Environment; and Spatial Framework Guidelines (SFG) which is additional regional guidance shaped specifically to address the 5 elements of the Spatial Framework<sup>1</sup>.

2.3 The 8 aims of the RDS encourage sustainable and balanced development in the countryside through:

- Support strong, sustainable growth for the benefit of all parts of Northern Ireland. A growing regional economy will benefit from strong urban and rural areas. Balanced regional growth, building a better future and tackling regional imbalance are critical issues for the region.
- Strengthen Belfast as the regional economic driver and Londonderry as the principal city of the North West
- Support our towns, villages and rural communities to maximise their potential. Our rural areas including our towns and villages have a key role in supporting economic growth. They offer opportunities in terms of their potential for growth in new sectors, the provision of rural recreation and tourism, and their attractiveness as places to invest, live and work, and their role as a reservoir of natural resources and highly valued landscapes.
- Promote development which improves the health and well-being of communities.
- Improve connectivity to enhance the movement of people, goods, energy and information between places. Improved connectivity will support the network of towns and their associated hinterlands. Neighbouring towns support each other and their hinterlands in the provision of services. Good linkages between towns and rural areas for access to services and business opportunities are vital.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Spatial Framework enables coherent strategic decisions to be made in response to developmental and infrastructural investment challenges. It sets out priorities to achieve sustainable development and is focused on the main hubs and clusters of the region. The five areas are, the metropolitan area of Belfast, Derry – principle city of the North West, hubs and clusters of hubs, the rural area and gateways and corridors.*

- Protect and enhance the environment for its own sake. Protecting the environment is essential for enhancing the quality of life of current and future generations. Northern Ireland's environment is one of its greatest assets, with its stunning landscapes, an outstanding coastline, a complex variety of wildlife and a rich built and cultural heritage for the ecosystem services it provides, and its sense of place and history for all.
- Take actions to reduce our carbon footprint and facilitate adaptation to climate change. Everyone should contribute to reducing the Region's carbon footprint.
- Strengthen links between north and south, east and west, with Europe and the rest of the world.

### **Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS)**

2.4 The Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) was adopted in September 2015 to consolidate and simplify planning guidance. The SPPS sets objectives to:

- Promote sustainable development in an environmentally sensitive manner;
- Tackle disadvantage and facilitate job creation by ensuring the provision of a generous supply of land suitable for economic development and a choice and range in terms of quality, size and location to promote flexibility and meets specialised needs of specific economic activities;
- Support the re-use of previously developed economic development sites and buildings where they meet the needs of particular economic sectors;
- Promote mixed use development and improve integration between transport, economic development and other land uses, including housing whilst ensuring compatibility and availability by all members of the community; and
- Ensure a high standard of quality and design for new economic development.

2.5 The SPPS contains five core planning principles, including one directly linked to the built and natural environment, 'Preserving and Improving the Built and Natural Environment'. It stresses the importance of the scenic quality of Northern Ireland's landscapes to our cultural identity, history and sense of place and reflects the Executive's commitment to preserve and improve the built and natural environment and halt the loss of biodiversity.

2.6 SPPS identifies that areas of the countryside that exhibit exceptional landscapes, such as stretches of the coast or lough shores and certain views or vistas, where the quality of the landscape and unique amenity value is such that development should only be permitted in exceptional circumstances. It states that, where appropriate, these areas may be designated as Special Countryside Areas with appropriate policies 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 (AHSV).

2.7 The policy objectives of the SPPS 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.

### **Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland (1993)**

2.8 The purpose of this Strategy is to contribute to the quality of life in Northern Ireland. It is an attempt to meet rural society's development needs and aspirations, to protect the environment and to encourage environmentally sustainable development. The Strategy establishes the objectives and the policies for land use and development appropriate to the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland and which need to be considered on a scale wider than the any individual council area.

2.9 The strategic objectives of the Strategy are to:

- Protect and enhance the natural and man-made environment;
- Meet the future development needs of the rural community;
- Facilitate regeneration of the rural economy;
- Accommodate change, while maintaining the character of the countryside;
- Revitalise rural towns and villages in order to make them more attractive places in which to live and work; and
- Promote a high quality of design new development.

2.10 The majority of strategic policies contained within the Strategy have now been superseded by various Planning Policy Statements.

### **Planning Policy Statements**

2.11 The RDS is complemented by a suite of Planning Policy Statements (PPS). These cover a wide range of planning topics, including sustainable development in the countryside, natural heritage, housing, economic development, access, flooding and open space. In addition, there is supplementary planning guidance on topics such as sustainable design in the countryside, anaerobic digestion and wind energy development, which are intended to supplement policy documents, including the PPSs and development plans. The following are of particular relevance to this document.

2.12 Planning Policy Statement 21 'Sustainable Development in the Countryside' was published in June 2010. The policy 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.

2.13 **‘Building on Tradition’: A Sustainable Design Guide for the Northern Ireland Countryside** provides assistance to all those involved with sustainable development in the Northern Ireland countryside to understand the requirements of PPS21. The guide promotes quality and sustainable building design in Northern Ireland's countryside.

2.14 **(Draft) Supplementary Planning Guidance: Anaerobic Digestion** sets out advice and guidance in relation to proposals for anaerobic digestion (AD). It provides a brief overview of this renewable technology; advice and guidance on the key planning issues raised by AD developments; details on the type of information that may be requested in processing a planning application for AD; and advice and guidance in relation to environmental impact assessment (EIA). In addition, this document provides guidance for those seeking to improve their farm waste management practices and/or the farm business viability through the consumption and/or sale of renewable electricity generated on the farm.

2.15 **Wind Energy Development in Northern Ireland's Landscapes** provides broad, strategic guidance in relation to the visual and landscape impacts of wind energy development. The guidance is based on the sensitivity of Northern Ireland's landscapes to wind energy development and contains an assessment of each of the 130 landscape character areas (LCAs) in Northern Ireland by referencing the characteristics and values associated with each LCA. The guidance:

- Sets out the background to the landscapes of Northern Ireland, and to wind energy development in these landscapes;
- Explains the approach and methodology that was used to assess wind energy development in relation to the landscape of each Landscape Character Area;
- Contains general principles and guidance relating to wind energy development in the landscape and associated sensitivities, opportunities and challenges. This includes principles and guidance relating to site selection, siting, layout and design and the assessment of landscape, visual and cumulative impacts;
- Considers cumulative wind energy development in Northern Ireland's distinctive landscapes in October 2007 and highlights landscape issues that need to be carefully considered in the future;
- Provides practical guidance relating to the use of this guidance and the preparation and submission of wind energy proposals.

## Local Policy Context

- 2.16 The current planning policy context at a local level is complex as a result of a successful legal challenge to the adoption of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015. There are therefore five existing development plans that relate to parts of the Belfast district, alongside draft BMAP. All of these documents will be superseded at the adoption of the new Belfast LDP 2035.

### **Belfast Urban Area Plan (BUAP) 2001**

- 2.17 The current development plan for the majority of the Belfast district is the Belfast Urban Area Plan (BUAP) 2001, which was adopted in December 1989. The area covered by the plan included the whole of the administrative area of the former Belfast City Council area, together with the urban parts of the former district council areas of Castlereagh, Lisburn and Newtownabbey as well as Greenisland and Holywood.
- 2.18 The purpose of the BUAP was to establish physical development policies for this broad urban area up to 2001, clarifying the extent and location of development and providing a framework for public and private agencies in their investment decisions relating to land use. Although alterations were made in 1996, the BUAP is now largely out-of-date and was formally superseded by the BMAP in September 2014. However, BMAP was quashed as a result of a judgement in the court of appeal delivered on 18 May 2017, meaning that the BUAP 2001 remains the statutory development plan for most of the council's area.

### **The Lisburn Area Plan 2001**

- 2.19 The change in council boundary as a result of the local government reform on 1 April 2015, and the subsequent quashing of BMAP, means that the Lisburn Area Plan 2001 remains the statutory development plan for a small portion of Belfast's district around Dunmurry. Adopted on 4 July 2001, the Lisburn Area Plan sought to establish physical development policies for Lisburn and its surroundings up to 2001. However, as work on the development of BMAP had commenced at the time of adoption, an element of provision had been incorporated so that the area's reasonable housing development needs could continue to be met with some certainty until such time as the successor BMAP was in place.

### **Lagan Valley Regional Park Local Plan 2005**

- 2.20 The quashing of BMAP also means that the Lagan Valley Regional Park Local Plan (adopted in 1993) was re-instated as the statutory development plan for the Lagan Valley Regional Park (LVRP). It sets out the strategy and policies associated with the protection and enhancement of the natural and man-made heritage of the LVRP. Its main objectives are to conserve the landscape quality and features of the Lagan Valley and to enhance recreational use by the public.

### **Belfast Harbour Local Area Plan 1990-2005**

- 2.21 The quashing of BMAP also means that the Belfast Harbour Area Local Plan (adopted in 1991) was also re-instated as the statutory development plan for Belfast Lough and its foreshores, encompassing land east of the Belfast to Larne railway line and west of the

Sydenham By-Pass and the Belfast to Bangor road. It was prepared within the strategy set out in the Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001 and underlines the importance of the harbour area to Belfast and to the Northern Ireland economy.

### **North Down and Ards Area Plan 1984-1995**

- 2.22 A small section of the Belfast District at Knocknagoney was subsumed into Belfast as part of local government reform in 2015. The quashing of BMAP means that this area reverts back to the original North Down and Ards Area Plan 1984-1995 (adopted 1989).

### **Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015**

- 2.23 Although formally adopted in 2014, this process of final BMAP adoption was declared unlawful as a result of a judgement in the court of appeal delivered on 18 May 2017. This means the Belfast Urban Area Plan (BUAP) 2001 and the other Development Plans provides the statutory plan context for the area. However, BUAP was published in 1990, nearly 30 years ago. The Belfast City Council Plan Area has undergone massive transformation since then, particularly in the city centre. The formal development plans which apply are dated and silent on many of the planning issues pertinent to needs of current planning decision making. In recognition of this unique circumstance and taking account of the short term transitional period in advance of the adoption of the Local Policies Plan it is important to provide clarity in relation to the application of planning policy.
- 2.24 Draft BMAP, in its most recent, post-examination form remains a significant material consideration in future planning decisions. It was at the most advanced stage possible prior to formal adoption. Draft BMAP referred to throughout the LDP Draft Plan Strategy documentation therefore refers to that version. However, the council has also had regard to the provisions of the draft BMAP which was published in 2004, the objections which were raised as part of the plan process and the Planning Appeals Commission Inquiry report.
- 2.25 The SPPS's transitional arrangements provide for continuity until such times as a new LDP for the whole of their council area is adopted to ensure continuity in planning policy for taking planning decisions.
- 2.26 BUAP contains fewer zonings or designations than draft BMAP and delineates a city centre boundary which has expanded significantly since then by virtue of the application of Draft BMAP. The council therefore intends to use a number of the existing designations contained in the draft BMAP, insofar as it relates to the Belfast City Council Plan Area, to form the basis of decision making until the LDP is adopted in its entirety. A list of the existing draft boundaries and designations is contained in Appendix A of the LDP Draft Plan Strategy.
- 2.27 Appendix 1 sets out further details of the policies and designations in draft BMAP that are relevant to the Belfast countryside area.

### **The Belfast Agenda**

- 2.28 The Council took on responsibility for community planning in 2015 as a result of local government reform. It is a process whereby councils, statutory bodies and communities themselves work together in partnership to develop and implement a shared vision for their area, to make sure that public services work together with communities to deliver real improvements for local people. The Belfast Agenda, which is the adopted community plan, sets out a joint vision and long-term ambitions for Belfast's future, as well as outlining priorities for action over the next four years.
- 2.29 The vision for Belfast in 2035 set out in the Belfast Agenda is:  
*“Belfast will be a city re-imagined and resurgent. A great place to live and work for everyone. Beautiful, well connected and culturally vibrant, it will be a sustainable city shared and loved by all its citizens, free from the legacy of conflict. A compassionate city offering opportunities for everyone. A confident and successful city energising a dynamic and prosperous city region. A magnet for talent and business and admired around the world. A city people dream to visit.”*
- 2.30 Delivery of this vision is based on a number of strategic outcomes, together with four bold ambitions to be achieved by 2035, including an additional 66,000 residents living in the city. The LDP is recognised within the Belfast Agenda as one of the key tools available to shape the physical future of Belfast in a sustainable way. Its development is described as one of several immediate priorities, under the theme of City Development, where it explains that the LDP will be vital to the delivery of the outcomes in the Belfast Agenda.
- 2.31 Councils must take account of their current Community Plan when preparing the LDP, which will provide a spatial expression to the community plan, thereby linking public and private sector investment through the land use planning system.

### **3.0 Belfast's Rural Profile**

3.1 There are 3 small settlements located within rural Belfast; Hannahstown, Loughview and Edenderry. The following is a breakdown of the character, facilities, assets and constraints of each settlement along with a justification of the settlement limits for each. Appendix 2 shows the extent of the rural area of Belfast and the settlements located within them.

#### **Hannahstown**

##### **3.2 *Character***

Hannahstown is located on the Belfast Hills, within Belfast Basalt Escarpment Area of High Scenic Value. The settlement is sited on the steeply rising Hannahstown Hill Road and the elevated Upper Springfield Road, 4km west of Belfast City Centre, adjacent to Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council. Hannahstown comprises of 3 nodes and is of a linear form.

##### **3.3 *Facilities***

- St Joseph's Catholic Church.
- Playground just outside settlement limit.
- Lamh Derg GAA Complex just outside settlement development limit.
- Graveyard and parochial house.
- Community Hall.

##### **3.4 *Assets and Constraints***

- Area of high landscape quality.
- Two areas considered to be of greater amenity value, landscape quality or local significance, worthy of protection from undesirable or damaging development by Local Landscape Policy area designation.
- Scheduled and unscheduled archaeological sites as well as monuments within the area, including a souterrain.
- Designated Rural Landscape Wedge.
- Lack of footpath from community centre to Lamh Dhearg.
- Linkages with the Belfast Hills, from Divis Mountain through to Colin Glen and Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park.

##### **3.5 *Justification of Settlement Development Limit***

The Settlement Development Limit is designated in draft BMAP (see Appendix 3):

- To Prevent coalescence of the three nodes;
- To protect the environmental quality, as well as the landscape and visual amenity of the high landscape quality where it is located;
- To prevent ribboning and urban sprawl extending into the surrounding countryside;
- To prevent coalescence with the Belfast urban area.

## **Loughview**

### 3.6 **Character**

Loughview is a small settlement located 6.5km south east of Belfast City Centre. The settlement developed along the Church Road and was encouraged by the opening of Loughview Integrated Primary and Nursery School in 1993.

### 3.7 **Facilities**

- Graveyard.
- Castlereagh Presbyterian Church and Hall opposite.
- The Learning Tree pre-school.
- Loughview Integrated Primary School.
- Young Ones Nursery School.
- Henry Jones Playing Fields.

### 3.8 **Assets and Constraints**

- Loughview is within an area of High Scenic Value.
- An archaeological site and monument lies just outside the settlement development limit.

### 3.9 **Justification of Settlement Development Limit** (see Appendix 5):

- Settlement limit in draft BMAP reflects the linear built form of the settlement along Church Road and provide development opportunities in line with the scale, character and role of the settlement.
- To restrict the ribboning of development along Church Road and prevent the potential coalescence.

## **Edenderry**

### 3.10 **Character**

Edenderry is a small settlement located approximately 8km south of Belfast City Centre and 8km North East of Lisburn City Centre. The settlement is within the Lagan Valley Regional Park and lies North East of the River Lagan. The mill industries on the River Lagan led to the development of the settlement and it is now a mix of traditional terraced redbrick and newer semi-detached suburban dwellings.

### 3.11 **Facilities**

- Playground
- Edenderry Gospel Hall.
- 

### 3.12 **Assets and Constraints**

- The settlement has been designated as an area of village character.
- The area surrounding the settlement development limit has been designated as a Local
- Landscape Policy Area as well as a site of Local Nature Conservation Importance.
- An ASAI and State Care Monument, Giants Ring, is located just outside the settlement development limit to the North West.

- Lack of services and facilities;
- Location within Lagan Valley Regional Park , Set within Lagan Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
- Proximity to River Lagan
- Two Listed Buildings;
- Proximity to Lisburn and Belfast City Centres;
- Quality Landscape Setting; and
- On public transport route.
- No meeting place.

3.13 ***Justification of Settlement Development Limit*** (see Appendix 4):

The Settlement Development Limit is designated in draft BMAP:

- To retain a compact form while including existing development commitments such as the redevelopment of the St. Ellen's Industrial Estate mill buildings;
- To protect the landscape and visual amenity of the Lagan Valley Regional Park and the Lagan Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; and
- To exclude lands of high environmental quality and wildlife value, together with features that are historically and archaeologically important.

**Rural Development Pressure Analysis**

- 3.14 Rural development pressure analysis seeks to identify those areas where significant development pressure has occurred and/or where local rural character is under threat of significant change. Development pressure analysis typically involves an assessment of the cumulative impact of one-off single dwellings in the countryside and of renewable energy applications in the countryside.
- 3.15 It is acknowledged that other types of development, such as mineral extraction, agricultural or industrial buildings, can also have potential adverse visual impacts on the visual amenity and character of the countryside. As well as visual impacts, development can have a significant impact on archaeological remains below ground level, including unrecorded remains. However, with such forms of development it is widely considered that sufficient control is already provided by prevailing regional policy. Additionally, the LDP will include specific policies to manage such development in the countryside, as appropriate.
- 3.16 Following a request by Belfast City Council, the Department for Infrastructure (DFI) provided records of planning decisions (approvals and refusals) issued for all single rural dwellings and replacement rural dwellings within the Belfast City Council area from 2004 until 2016. The analysis of such applications by the City Council has continued to date.
- 3.17 Due to the urban nature of the Belfast City Council area, the number of rural single house and replacement applications compared to other councils is minimal. For example, in 2015/2016 there were 2,746 applications in Northern Ireland and of these only 3 were in the Belfast City Council area. Since 2004 there have been 39 applications for rural single houses in Belfast, with 26 approvals and 13 refusals giving



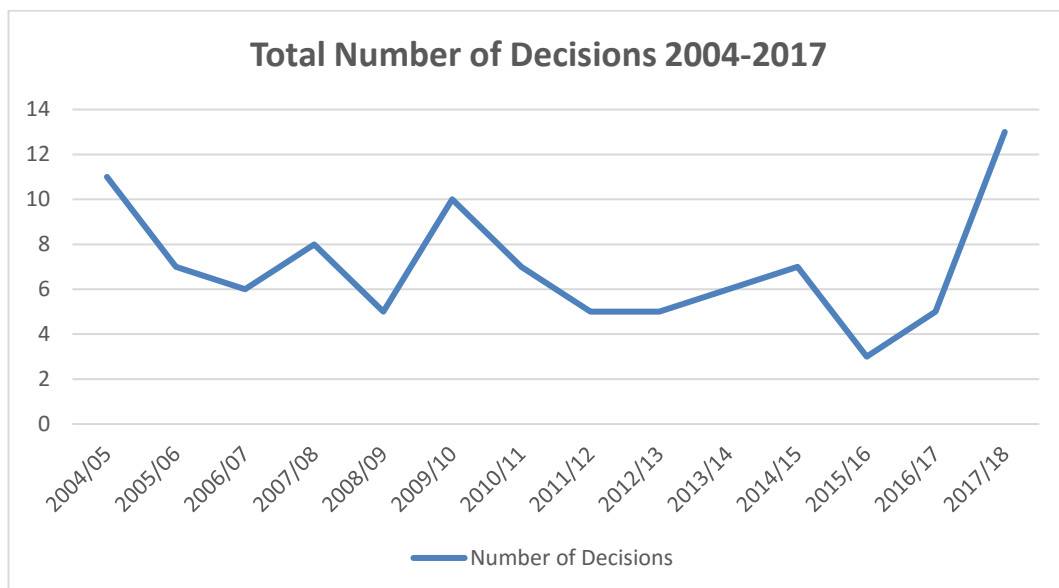
an approval rating of 67%. There were 59 applications for replacement dwellings in Belfast, with 55 approvals and 4 refusals giving an approval rating of 93%.

3.18 Figure 1 below shows the number of new and replacement single dwelling approvals and refusals in Belfast. Over the 14 year period, 81 single rural dwellings have been approved in Belfast. The location of dwellings approved between 2004 and 2016 can be viewed in Appendix 6: Single Rural Dwelling Approvals 2004-2016.

Year	Approvals			Refusals			TOTAL
	New	Replacement	Total	New	Replacement	Total	
2004/05	4	4	8	3	0	3	11
2005/06	2	3	5	2	0	2	7
2006/07	0	5	5	0	1	1	6
2007/08	1	7	8	0	0	0	8
2008/09	0	5	5	0	0	0	5
2009/10	0	9	9	0	1	1	10
2010/11	3	3	6	1	0	1	7
2011/12	0	3	3	2	0	2	5
2012/13	1	2	3	2	0	2	5
2013/14	2	2	4	1	1	2	6
2014/15	5	1	6	1	0	1	7
2015/16	1	2	3	0	0	0	3
2016/17	1	4	5	0	0	0	5
2017/18	6	5	11	2	0	2	13
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>98</b>

**Figure 1: Single Rural Dwelling Approvals 2004-2018 (All Categories)**

Appeals included. Reserved Matters applications relating to an Outline application decided within the study period are not included - no new/additional pressure. Applications seeking to renew an existing approval previously decided within the study period are not included - no new/additional pressure. Where there is more than one application/appeal decision relating to the same site within the study period, only one decision is included - no new/additional pressure



**Figure 2: Number of rural single and replacement dwelling decisions**

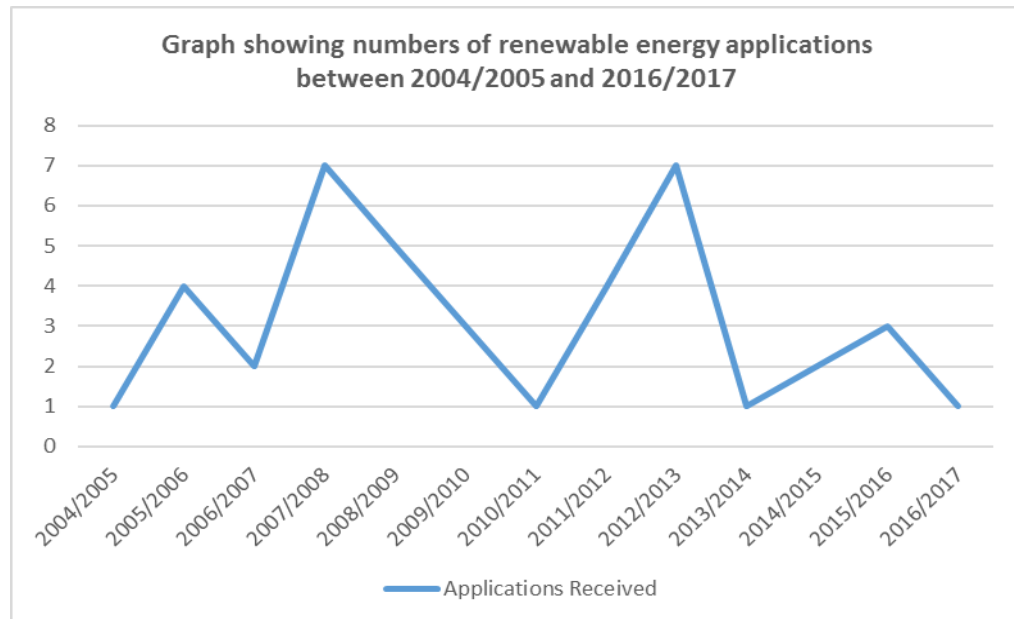
- 3.19 The analysis indicates that there was an initial spike in 2004/05 before a general downward trend, until further spikes in 2007/08 and 2009/10. Nevertheless, this is within a context of very low numbers in Belfast. Since the introduction of PPS 21 there was an initial gradual increase in decisions until 2015/16 when they then dropped to their lowest point, accounting for 0.11% of decisions made. The economic climate may have influenced these types of applications. Decisions in 2017/2018 have increased gradually however numbers of decisions remain relatively low (a total of 6 new dwellings approved) and as a result it is considered that there is no increased development pressure.

### **Spatial Analysis**

- 3.20 A location map of single rural dwellings (2004-2016) that have been the subject of planning decisions (approved or refused) was prepared for the Countryside Assessment for the Preferred Options Paper and this can be viewed in Appendix 6. In order to assess the spatial distribution of development pressure, all new and replacement dwellings with permission have been plotted as green circles and triangles, while refusals have been plotted as red circles and triangles. This is combined with sensitive areas mapping, such as the Lagan Valley AONB, meaning that development pressure on the sensitive areas within the countryside can be effectively assessed.
- 3.21 The map at Appendix 6 shows that development in the countryside is not uniform and there are relatively small geographical areas where applications are more concentrated, reflecting the limited demand and limited opportunities for dwellings in the countryside in the rural part of the City Council area. The Lagan Valley AONB has had 12 single housing applications approved within it but the pressure is minimal due to restrictive planning policy. This represents limited development pressure within the AONB. Since map was produced, an additional 6 new and 5 replacement single rural dwellings have been approved within the council area. This represents very limited ongoing development pressure within the countryside area of Belfast. It also must be acknowledged that much of the rural area is also covered by landscape and natural heritage designations that apply additional controls over new development.

### **Renewable Energy**

- 3.22 Belfast City Council has utilised the Northern Ireland Planning Renewable Energy Monthly Statistics from April 2004 to March 2018 in analysing renewable energy applications. In comparison to other councils, Belfast receives very few applications for renewable energy technologies in the city's countryside area. Of the 58 renewable energy applications received in 2017/2018 in Northern Ireland, Belfast received 1 application for solar panels. This represents the fewest applications within any council in Northern Ireland.



**Figure 3: Renewable Energy applications between 2005/2005 and 2016/2017**

- 3.23 The graph in Figure 3 above shows there has been no discernible pattern regarding renewable energy applications. There have been very few applications for single wind turbines and there have been no applications for a wind farm. Since 2004, there have been only 14 applications compared to 3,714 of Northern Ireland as a whole. This would be expected due to Belfast being predominately an urban area.
- 3.24 The applications for single wind turbines are located in the north, south and west of the city, there have been no applications in the east. There have only been three applications for large wind turbines with heights over 30 metres. Of these three applications, two have been approved and constructed. The remainder of applications are for micro turbines.
- 3.25 There has been only one single wind turbine application (Z/2011/0937/F) located within a sensitively designated area. The application is situated south west of the Ballyutoag Road is within an Area of High Scenic Value. This is a sensitive area and has been protected due to its particular landscape merit.
- 3.26 There have been more applications within Belfast for solar panels than any other type of renewable energy. Since 2004, there have been 22 applications.
- 3.27 The approval rate for renewable energy application is high at 97%, with only one refusal since 2004. This takes account of PPS 18 - Renewable Energy which sets a target of 15% of all energy from renewable sources and PPS 21 - Sustainable Development in the Countryside which encourages the use of renewable energy.

## 4.0 Draft Plan Strategy Policy Approach

- 4.1 The LDP Preferred Options Paper (POP) set out the proposed vision, key aims and objectives for the new Belfast LDP and the public consultation has indicated wide general support for the proposed approach. The overall structure of the draft Plan Strategy (DPS) generally retains the thematic approach used in the POP, set under an overall vision and development strategy.
- 4.2 Sustainable and inclusive development is at the heart of the LDP and the LDP is required to strike a balance in meeting the economic, social and environmental needs of the current population, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This includes a presumption in favour of sustainable development to improve and enhance the balance between economic, social and environmental conditions to deliver economic success and a better quality of life for people living in Belfast.
- 4.3 The POP identified a series of objectives to help deliver sustainable growth for Belfast. Whilst many of the objectives ultimately affect development in the countryside, insofar as the LDP can influence this, the general approach is to protect and enhance the character and value of the countryside resource, including for landscape, recreation and nature conservation, whilst providing for the essential needs of rural communities. The following objectives are of particular relevance to this document:
- To promote and deliver high quality design by including policies to protect and enhance the build environment that fosters local distinctiveness.
  - To protect, enhance and link natural environment and biodiversity by managing the location and design of new development
- 4.4 In the POP, we proposed to include strategic policies to ensure that all new developments maximise opportunities to promote the health and wellbeing of communities, neighbourhoods and places. We also propose to protect and enhance an attractive natural setting reinforcing uniqueness and accessibility to all who live work and enjoy the city. Our preferred approach received significant public support in the POP consultation.
- 4.5 Following on from the POP stage, the DPS includes a number of strategic policies that over-arch the entire plan. These also relate to the overall vision and provide a link to the more detailed operational policies. They seek to improve health and wellbeing, social cohesion and inclusion whilst also creating better places and more sustainable neighbourhoods.
- 4.6 The SPSS sets out a number of requirements that LDPs must comply with in relation to development in the countryside. These include requirements to make provision for rural development, including new and replacement houses, to meet local needs. These requirements are similar to the policy approach in PPS21, which provides criteria-based policies for various types of rural development.

- 4.7 Taking the above into account, the DPS has addressed the issues around sustainable development in the countryside in accordance with the SPPS and the provisions of PPS21. The DPS sets out an overall policy for countryside development, based on general planning principles. There are also clear linkages to other policies, including those relating to healthy communities, housing, design, transport and natural heritage. The DPS acknowledges the need to support rural housing whilst balancing the need for conservation, protection and enhancement of the countryside from detrimental impacts.
- 4.8 The rural area around Belfast city and within the district boundary is particularly sensitive to development pressures, primarily due to its unique landscape character and special role in providing a quality environmental setting for the urban area. It is acknowledged that, in the main, it is a working landscape, where agriculture, existing settlement and some commercial uses occur alongside public access and recreation and nature conservation interests. In addition, the rural ecosystems, biodiversity and landscape character are important assets for the rural environment. Nevertheless the LDP acknowledges its role as a green area around the city is of primary importance, whilst ensuring that the needs of existing communities in the rural area are met, including the small settlements of Edenderry, Hannahstown and Loughview.
- 4.9 The DPS seeks to sustain rural communities. However a balance is needed in assessing rural development proposals that supports necessary rural development whilst minimising any environmental impacts. The DPS aims to support rural housing, replacement dwellings, the conversion and re-use of existing buildings in certain specific and limited circumstances. It seeks to control inappropriate development in the countryside whilst supporting social, economic needs of businesses. It seeks to control new development on an active and established agricultural or forestry holdings. The DPS also aims to promote forms of diversification that are sustainable and appropriate in the countryside and support the rural economy and communities. It is important to recognise that much of the city's countryside area is also designated for nature conservation or landscape purposes and that the relevant LDP policies will apply in addition to the LDP countryside policies. This includes policies for the Lagan Valley Regional Park and Belfast Hills, as well as policies for specific landscape and natural heritage designated site.
- 4.10 The DPS does not set out site-specific policies, proposals or designations. These will be considered at the next stage of the LDP, the Local Policies Plan (LPP). In the event that there are site-specific land use implications for the countryside, these will be included in the LPP. In the meantime, any development proposals will be assessed against the relevant policy framework set out in the DPS.
- 4.11 Further to the above, and as a transitional measure, the council intends to use a number of the existing designations contained in the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015, insofar as it relates to the Belfast City Council area, to form the basis of decision making until the LDP is adopted in its entirety. These include designations that may affect the countryside area. Further details of this is provided in Technical Supplement No. 17.

## **APPENDIX 1:**

### **Draft BMAP COUNTRYSIDE DESIGNATIONS AND POLICIES**

#### **Rural Landscape Wedges**

Rural Landscape Wedges consist of buffer landscapes and open areas that can fulfil any of the following objectives set out in Policy COU 1:

- distinguish and maintain the separate identities of the component parts of the Metropolitan Area;
- prevent the merging of the component parts of the Metropolitan Area;
- provide an important element in defining and protecting the setting of settlements; and
- maintain the rural character of the countryside.

There are four 'Rural Landscape Wedges' within the Belfast City Council area:

- Hannahstown
- Glencregagh, Castlereagh Countryside (43.88ha of total 62.80ha (69.9%))
- Mosside (rural), Lisburn Countryside (15.57ha of total 162.54ha (9.6%))
- Holywood, North Down Countryside (9.98ha of total 82.61ha (12.1%))

It is essential that Rural Landscape Wedges are protected from inappropriate development. Within the Rural Landscape Wedges identified above, all proposals will be assessed against prevailing regional planning policies for development in the countryside. In addition, proposals will be required to demonstrate how they will maintain the open nature of the wedge to ensure visual separation and protect the identities of the component areas. It will therefore be important to consider the impact of any proposed development on the integrity of the wedge, and on the need to retain separation between settlements.

Policy COU 1 is primarily intended to prevent coalescence and maintain visual separation between settlements. This distinguishes it from Policy CTY 15 of PPS 21: 'The Setting of Settlements', which relates to urban sprawl and development that mars the distinction between a settlement and the surrounding countryside.

#### **BMA Coastal Area**

The designated BMA Coastal Area follows the coastline of Belfast Lough and extends to the Low Water Mark, including the narrow strips of coast between the High Water Mark and the Low Water Mark with the exception of the designated urban included in the BMA Coastal Area, it contains many environmentally sensitive areas, and also listed buildings and scheduled monuments with an industrial heritage value. Any development for employment and port related activities within the harbour area will need to take these factors into account.

Policy COU 3 states that within the BMA Coastal Area, planning permission will only be granted to development proposals which meet the following criteria:

- the proposed development is of such national or regional importance as to outweigh any detrimental impact on the coastal environment; or
- it can be demonstrated that any proposal will not harm the qualities of the coastal landscape, while still protecting nature conservation value.

### **Areas of High Scenic Value**

Areas of High Scenic Value (AHSV) are designated to protect the setting of the Metropolitan Urban Area and other areas of particular landscape merit. Policy COU 6 – ‘Areas of High Scenic Value’ states that planning permission will not be granted for development proposals that would be likely to have a significant adverse effect on the quality, character and features of interest in AHSVs.

Any assessment of quality and character in the AHSV shall include consideration of:

- Location of the site within the landscape & positioning of the proposal within the landscape;
- undue prominence, particularly in more open and exposed landscapes;
- integration of development into the landscape including degree of natural enclosure and relationship with surrounding buildings; and
- design, including form, scale and massing.

There are portions of three AOHSV in Belfast:

- Belfast Basalt Escarpment (191.73 of 3012.79ha (6%))
- Castlereagh Slopes (2.48 of 1257.64ha (0.2%))
- Castlereagh Escarpment (275.30 of 904.73ha (30.4%))

A landscape analysis must accompany development proposals in these areas to indicate the likely effects of the proposal on the landscape.

### **Belfast Hills Access Points**

Emulating SFG5 of the RDS, BMAP 2015 recognises that the “Belfast Hills make a particularly important contribution to the setting of the Metropolitan Area, and extend for over 16 km from Lisburn, through Belfast, to Carnmoney Hill in Newtownabbey. They are regarded as one of Northern Ireland’s finest assets, and include a variety of landscapes, ranging from the pastoral farmland of the western slopes to the dramatic cliffs of Cavehill on the eastern side, together with the open expanses of the upland moors”.

Policy COU 8 – ‘Belfast Hills Access Points’ allows for development of limited access and small-scale interpretative/visitor facilities dependent upon proposals: improving access to the Belfast Hills; being small scale and integrating with the landscape; and having no adverse impact no adverse impact on the quality or character of the landscape.

### **Lagan Valley AONB**

The Lagan Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) was designated in 1965 and most of it also falls within the Lagan Valley Regional Park. It is the only AONB in the Belfast Council area. The river valley of the Lagan outside the urban areas of Belfast and Lisburn is predominantly natural in character and is characterised by a concentration of woodland which provides the undulating canopies and vast mixture of texture and tones which highlight the rolling countryside. Much of the Regional Park’s amenity landscapes are within the historic parks, gardens and demesnes, such as Barnett Demesne, that have their own distinctive character. These areas have a historic designed landscape with a variable urban and recreational character, mature woodlands and grassland diversity.

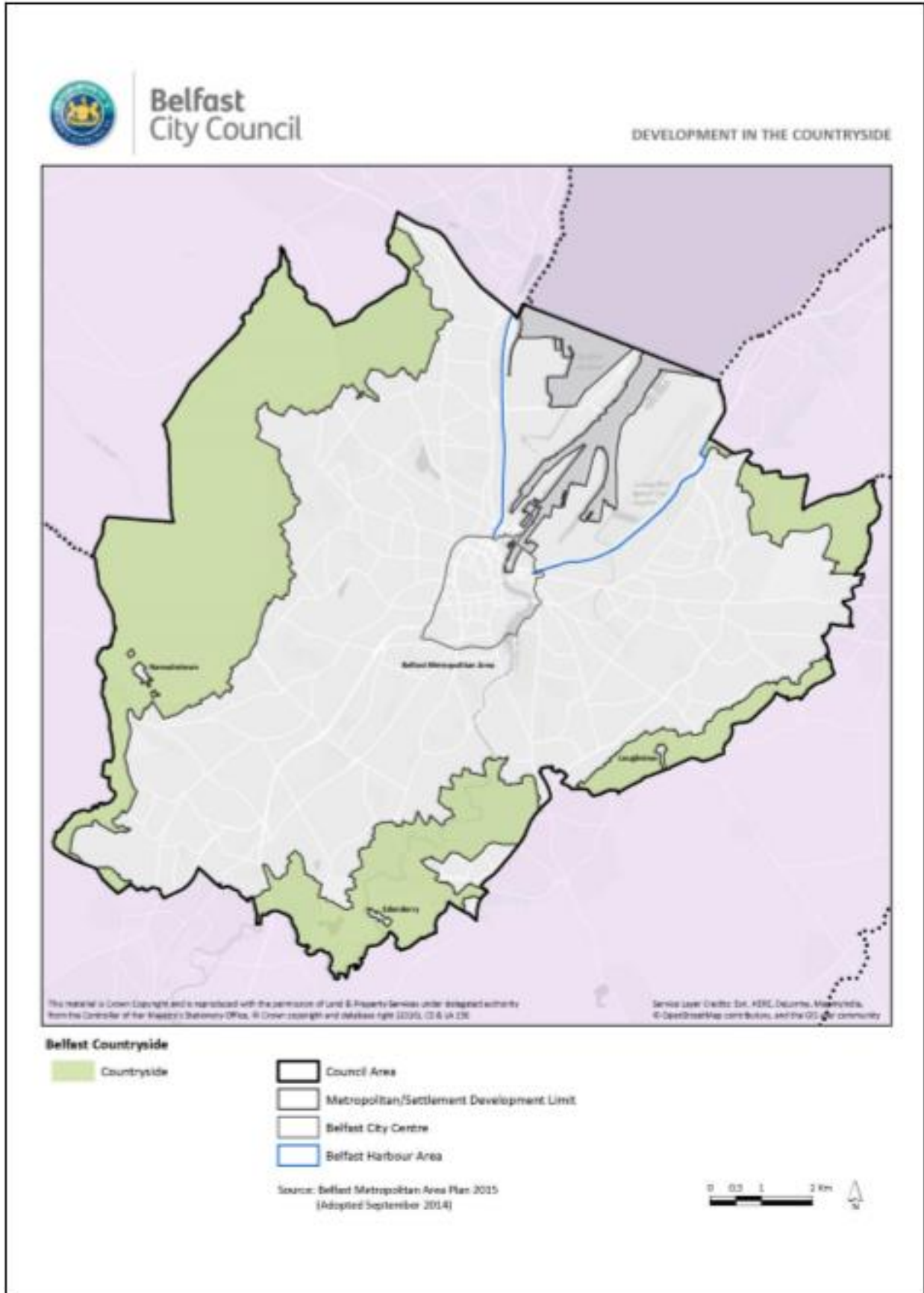
## Technical Supplement 12: Development in the countryside

BMAP 2015 contains three policies to limit inappropriate development within the Lagan Valley Regional Park:

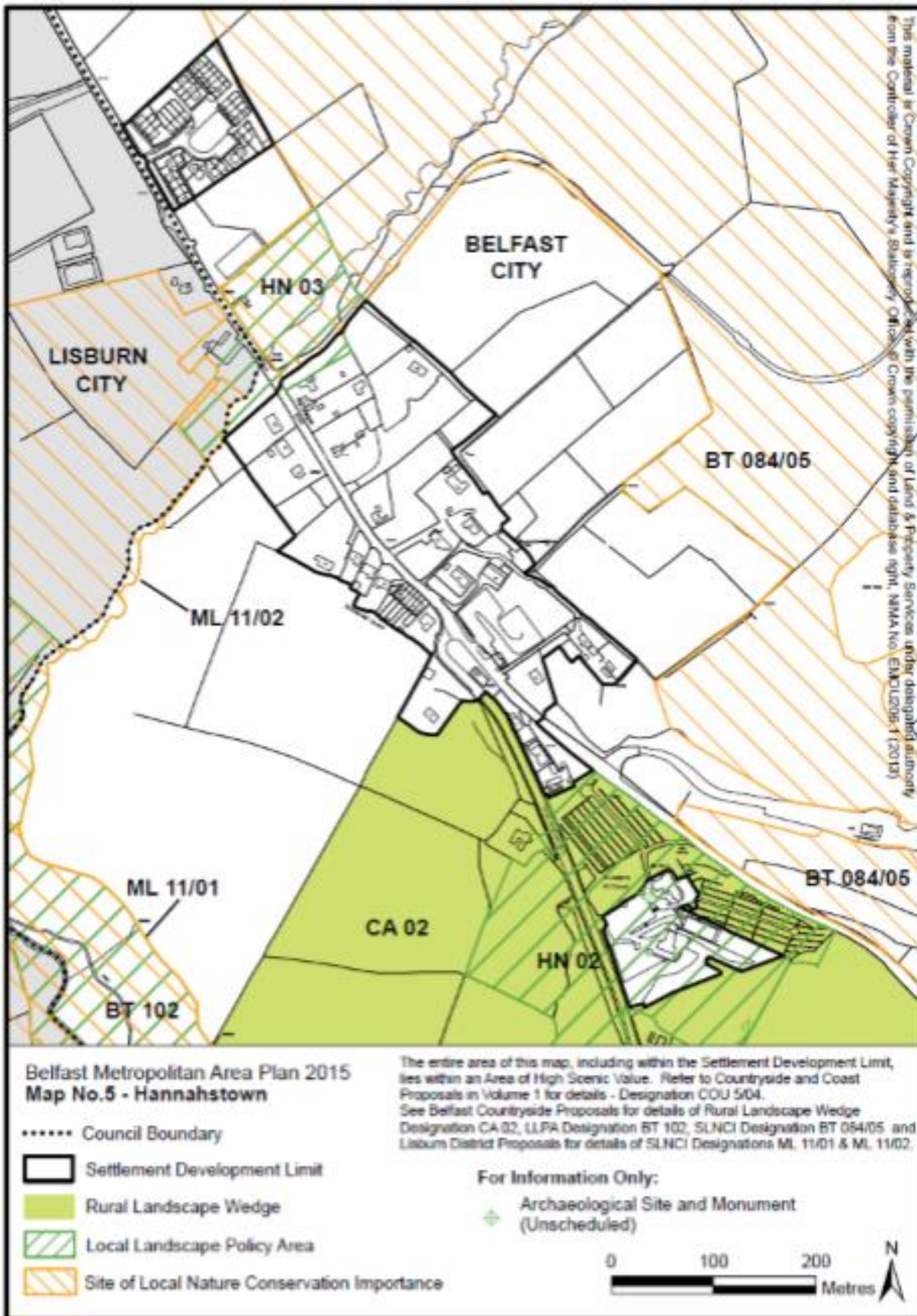
- **Policy COU 10** - Development Proposals outside the Metropolitan Development Limit and Settlement Development Limits in the Lagan Valley Regional Park;
- **Policy COU 11** - Lagan Valley Regional Park Nodes (planning permission will be granted to development proposals for appropriate and sensitively designed recreational, tourist, interpretative and educational facilities); and
- **Policy COU 12** - Development Proposals in the Lagan Valley Regional Park within the Metropolitan Development Limit and Settlement Development Limits.



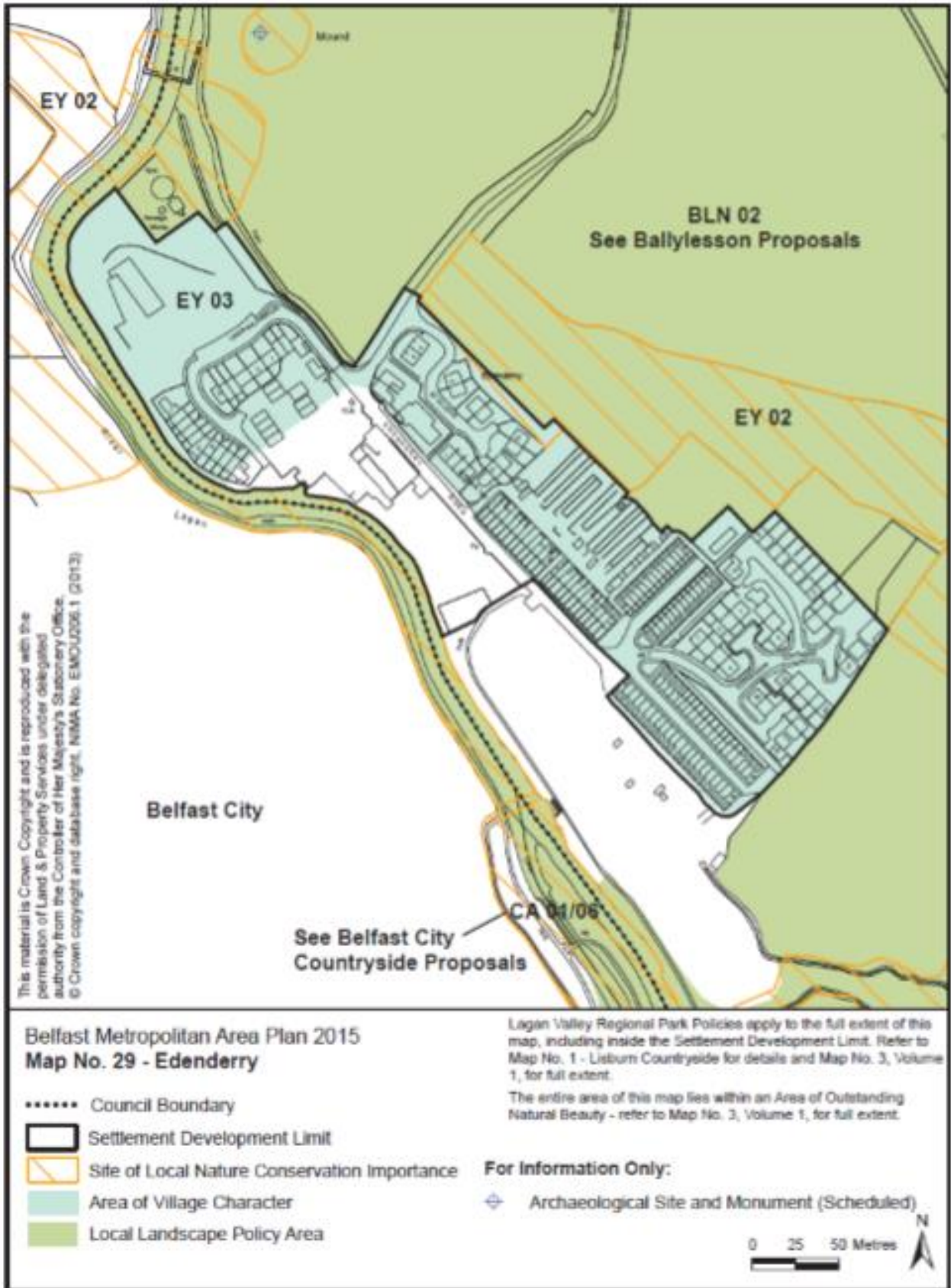
**APPENDIX 2: MAP OF BELFAST'S RURAL AREA (Countryside)**



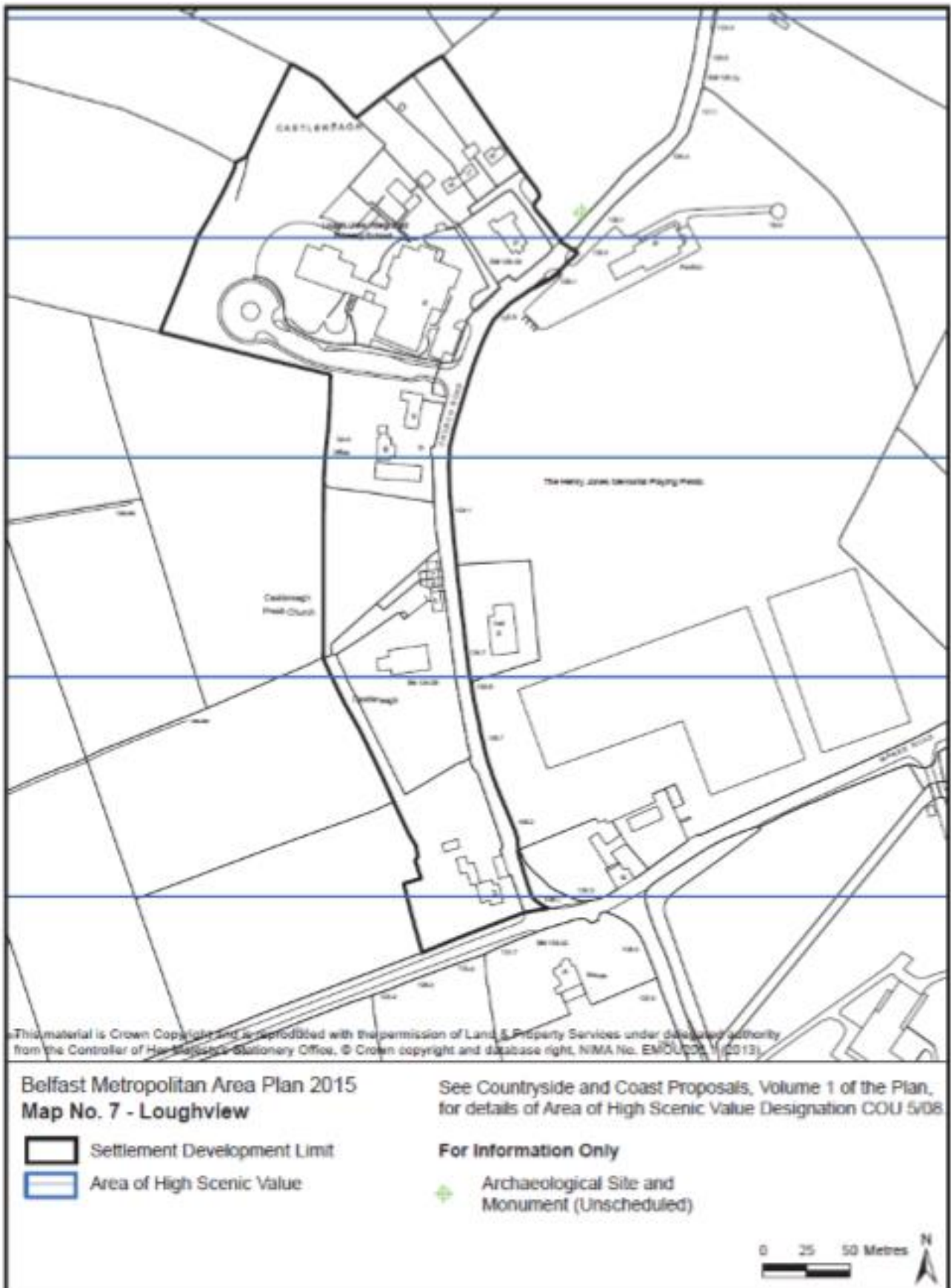
**APPENDIX 3: MAP OF HANNAHSTOWN (Draft BMAP)**



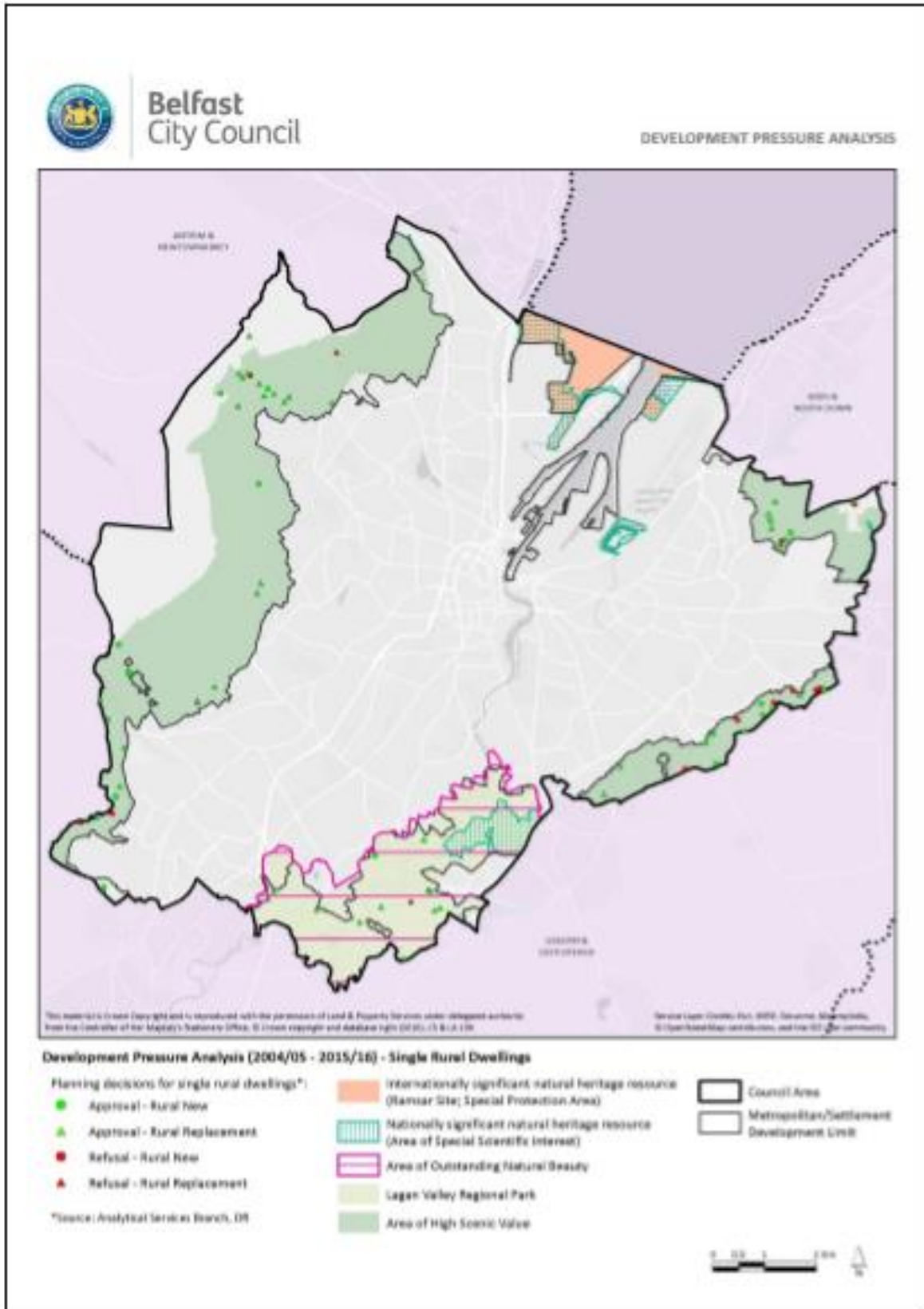
**APPENDIX 4: MAP OF EDENDERRY (Draft BMAP)**



**APPENDIX 5: MAP OF LOUGHVIEW (Draft BMAP)**



APPENDIX 6: MAP OF SINGLE RURAL DWELLING APPROVALS 2004-2016



## Belfast Planning Service

Belfast City Council  
Cecil Ward Building  
4-10 Linenhall Street  
Belfast BT2 8BP

 [www.belfastcity.gov.uk/LDP](http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/LDP)

 [planning@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:planning@belfastcity.gov.uk)

 028 9050 0510

 @belfastcc

 @belfastcitycouncil

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