



Topic Paper: Natural Heritage

# Local Development Plan 2020-2035



Belfast  
City Council

# Executive Summary

## Context

Northern Ireland has a unique natural resource with its diverse ecosystems and biodiversity assets propound the need to retain its sensitive landscape character. Its capital City, Belfast, is framed by its hills and offers rich biodiversity assets, and valuable scenic landscapes. It is our responsibility to help to protect and conserve our natural heritage as valuable assets for future generations as once it is lost, it's lost. Ecological networks, including the protection of priority species, are needed to maintain environmental process and help to conserve and enhance biodiversity

Landscape is everywhere and all landscapes matter to someone. Landscape will continue to evolve. Whilst change is constant, the management of changes is essential to achieving sustainable place making, which will be the key role of the Local Development Plans (LDP). The Landscape Character Assessments set a baseline that can not only help us understand our landscapes but also can go some way in assisting the decision making process of land management as a tool in identifying landscape features that give a locality a 'sense of place'.

It is our responsibility to protect the environment as a sustainable asset for future generations. In this way, the Regional Development Strategy advises the policy objectives the natural environment are to 'Conserve, protect and, where possible, enhance our built heritage and our natural environment'. Complementary to this Planning Policy Statement 2 'Natural Heritage' seeks to further the conservation and enhancement of the quality, diversity and distinctiveness of natural heritage by meeting international, regional and local responsibilities in their protection. Whilst the policy supports economic diversification, the use of the precautionary principle in furthering sustainable development is key in plan making. In developing the LDP the use of the precautionary principle is vital in plan making in particular when outlining proposed land use zonings, locations for development and settlement limits where it must take full account for implications on natural heritage features and landscape character. Through effective planning practices, the potential for adverse environmental impact can be minimised and enhancement features secured.

The importance to protect and integrate natural heritage features when zoning sites is imperative for development through key sites requirements. The LDP should seek to ensure development proposals be sited and designed to include provision for the retention and integration of priority habitats to prevent their fragmentation and isolation. Proactive habitat management and conservation management plans can ensure important features of the site are maintained or enhanced.



Sensitive management through the promotion of additional green and blue infrastructure will add value to the provision and enhancement of the City as well as its connection to open space and habitats in and around settlements.

Greater emphasis on the protection of our trees and woodlands and their positive contribution to the social, cultural and physical environment benefits i.e. habitats, flood protection and amenity value is important.

## Evidence Base: Hierarchy of Designations

Many areas in Belfast are important for their natural heritage interest. Several of these areas have merited statutory designation and are protected under international (including European), national or local legislation and convention. In developing policy to protect our habitats and wildlife, it is a requirement that our statutory obligations are met. Certain species and habitats also benefit from legal protection. Whilst this evidence is applicable throughout the plan area, the key areas are

### International

Special Protection Areas – protected under Wild Birds Directive (2009/147/EC), 2 SPA's are designated in Belfast. NIEA have proposed an agglomeration of a number of sites into one East Coast Marine SPA.

Special Areas of Conservation – protected under the Habitats Directive, There are no SACs located directly within Belfast. There is one proposed SAC for Harbour Porpoise where the boundary runs across Belfast Lough and is therefore not on the Belfast City Council

Ramsar Sites - regulated under Habitats Directive, there is 1 site at Belfast Lough

### National

4 Areas of Special Scientific Interest e.g. Inner Belfast Lough, Craiganlet Woods, Belvoir and Bellevue

Marine Nature Reserves – Outer Belfast Lough  
Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty - Lagan Valley

### Local

17 Priority Habitats, 200 Priority Species of which 8 are considered fully marine or have marine features.

3 Areas of High Scenic Value

Local Nature Reserves and Wildlife Refuges e.g. Bog Meadows, Hazelwood & Ballyaghagan

Sites of Nature Conservation Importance - 60 SLNCI's in Belfast, of which 7 are Geodiversity sites

Local Landscape Policy Areas – 86 in Belfast

Belfast Hills Access Points – 16 access points to Belfast Hills

Belfast Metropolitan Area Coastal Area  
Rural / Urban Landscape Wedges

6 areas of Earth Science Interest and assets

## Social, Economic & Environmental Factors

- Protect and maintain ecological networks, including the protection of priority species, biodiversity and habitats.
- The precautionary principle is vital in plan making in particular when outlining proposed land use zonings, locations for development and settlement limits where it must take full account for implications on natural heritage features and landscape character
- The importance to protect and integrate natural heritage features when zoning sites is imperative for development through key sites requirements
- Sensitive management through the promotion of additional green and blue infrastructure will add value to the provision and enhancement of the City as well as its connection to open space and habitats in and around settlements.
- Greater emphasis on the protection of trees and woodlands and their positive contribution to the social, cultural and physical environment benefits i.e. habitats, flood protection and amenity value
- Protect and maintain our sensitive landscapes from obtrusive development and explore opportunities for their enhancement

## Opportunities

- Further exploratory work on the viability of natural tourism as an economic product for the city whilst protecting habitats and biodiversity.
- How do we strike the balance between protecting designated sites with housing/industry demands when considering the plan objective of growing our city?
- To identify further site of local nature conservation importance, local landscape policy areas for the protection, conservation and enhancement of our natural heritage.
- Contribute to the emerging Belfast Local Biodiversity Action Plan
- Build upon and explore the viability of green and blue infrastructure and its surrounding environs as a potential source of outdoor recreation whilst protecting habitats, biodiversity and landscape.
- Can we improve biodiversity in City Centre?
- How can we innovatively improve the green and blue infrastructure?

## Trees and Woodland

Trees provide rich habitats for a variety of species. Appropriate environmental designation will be

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## 1.0 Introduction

### Purpose of this document

- 1.1 This is one of a series of 17 topic papers which have been put together to inform the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report for the Belfast Local Development Plan (LDP).
- 1.2 Each topic paper provides a summary of the evidence base required for the Sustainability Appraisal, Preferred Options Paper and Local Development Plan. They establish a baseline position and identify the key issues that need to be addressed.
- 1.3 By combining the evidence gathering stages for both the Sustainability Appraisal and 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 sustainability appraisal is one of the main drivers informing the preparation of the Local Development Plan.
- 1.4 Each topic paper can be read separately but, inevitably, there are important related matters in other topic papers and background evidence.

### Member Workshops

- 1.5 A series of 17 Topic Papers were drafted in the early part of 2016 to provide elected members with baseline information to inform the preparation of the Local Development Plan. As such the information presented within this topic paper is intended to:
  - Build the capacity of the members to make informed planning decisions, particularly within the plan making context;
  - Provide baseline information which will inform Development Plan Policy making at a local level;
  - Consider the Settlement Hierarchy within the new Belfast Local Government District;
  - Assess the land use needs of a growing population within the Belfast City Council area and to consider the adequacy of the existing growth strategy; and
  - To link with important ongoing work in relation to the development of a Community Plan (the Belfast Agenda) and other strategic work being undertaken by the Council.
- 1.6 These papers were presented to members for discussion at a series of informal workshops with Planning Committee Members throughout the Spring 2016, with key issues and opportunities for the City identified for consideration. The original Topic paper entitled 'Natural Heritage' was presented at a workshop on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2016. It has since been updated to ensure the statistics referenced are up to date for publication alongside the Preferred Options Paper.
- 1.7 Belfast owes its existence and name to its rivers. The city itself originated as a prehistoric settlement with the twelfth century English Conquest. A Norman Castle was built in the early 13th century however, it was not until the 17th and 18th centuries that the settlement began to develop as a market place and port for the surrounding countryside. Located in a sheltered location nestled between the Belfast and Castlereagh Hills, at the marshy crossing point where both the River Lagan and the River Farset met, and with easy access to the deep waters of Belfast Lough. Whilst the settlement of Belfast has changed beyond all recognition following the rapid urbanisation associated with the industrial revolution, the city's dramatic landscape setting is still crucial to Belfast's identity.

- 1.8** This responsibility extends from the sensitive management of the most scenic landscapes to the protection of ecosystems and biodiversity. Belfast's Local Biodiversity Action Plan emphasises that biodiversity and people are inextricably linked as "...biodiversity is essential for our survival: a healthy environment for wildlife means a healthy environment for people" (BCC 2007: p.2). The provision of healthy environments also involves ensuring that residents and visitors can access good quality open spaces and sports facilities which connect communities, improve health and make the city more attractive to investors.
- 1.9** This paper will discuss how the local development plan relates to the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (2015): Natural Heritage.

## **Planning and Natural Heritage**

- 1.10** Cognisance of our natural heritage during the formulation of a Local Development Plan is key in balancing development pressures along with the restoration and conservation of our natural heritage and environment. The plan process will identify Belfast's environmental features including our rural and countryside assets through the preparation of a Countryside Assessment which, previous to the adaption of Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) in 2015, included four interrelated strands identified in the now superseded PPS1, which, under 'Development of the Countryside' is also a requirement in SPPS:
- Environmental Assets Appraisal
  - Landscape Assessment
  - Development Pressure Analysis; and
  - Strategic Settlement Appraisal
- 1.11** This paper will provide an overview of the natural heritage and environmental assets of the Belfast City Council area and will detail the relevant environmental statutory and policy framework for preparing the Local Development Plan.

## **The Role of the Local Development Plan**

- 1.12** The protection of the environment is paramount unless there are imperative reasons of overwhelming public interest. Cognisance of the precautionary principle is vital when plan making in particular when outlining proposed land use zonings, locations for development and settlement limits must take full account of the implications on natural heritage features and landscape character. With careful planning practices, the potential for environmental adversity can be minimised and enhancement features brought out.
- 1.13** The SPPS outlines,
- LDP's should seek to protect and integrate certain features of the natural heritage when zoning sites for development through 'key site requirements' (KSRs). In addition, LDPs should seek to identify and promote green and blue infrastructure where this will add value to the provision, enhancement and connection of open space and habitats in and around settlements.
  - Natural heritage features and designated sites should be identified as part of the plan making process. Where appropriate, policies should be brought forward for their protection and/or enhancement. LDPs should also identify and promote the design of ecological networks throughout the plan area which could help reduce the fragmentation and isolation of natural habitats through a strategic approach
  - LDPs should consider the natural and cultural components of the landscape and promote opportunities for the enhancement or restoration of degraded landscapes.
  - Councils should ensure that potential effects on landscape and natural heritage, including the cumulative effect of development are considered when preparing LDPs and policies.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> DOE (2014) A Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS)



## 2.0 Policy Context

### The Statutory Framework

#### European Landscape Convention

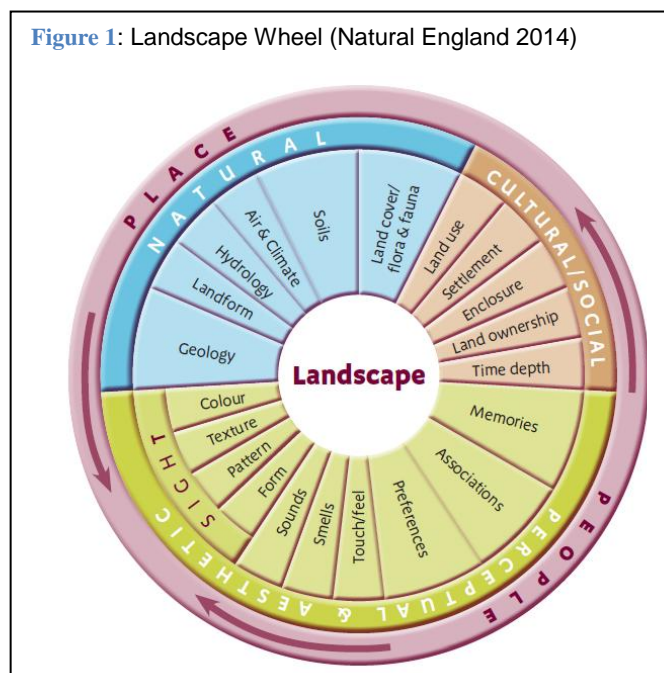
- 2.1** The European Landscape Convention was signed in Florence in October 2000. It was ratified by the United Kingdom in November 2006 and entered into force for the United Kingdom in March 2007. The Republic of Ireland has also ratified the European Landscape Convention. The European Landscape Convention defines ‘landscape’ as ‘an area as perceived by people whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors’.
- 2.2** The Convention states that; “... every planning action or project should comply with landscape quality objectives. It should in particular improve landscape quality, or at least not bring about a decline. The effects of projects, whatever their scale, on landscape should therefore be evaluated and rules and instruments corresponding to those effects defined. Each planning action or project should not only match, but also be appropriate to the features of the places.”
- 2.3** The scope of the concept of landscape, which formerly focussed solely on conserving the most scenic designated areas, has been extended to include entire territory of the Parties and covers natural, rural, urban and peri-urban areas. It includes land, inland water and marine areas. It concerns landscapes that might be considered outstanding as well as every day or degraded landscapes. This democratisation of the concept of landscape and inclusion of the urban and everyday means that if the Local Development Plan follows the spirit of the Convention that some landscape policies would relate to the entire council area and not just rural landscapes and historic parklands.

#### Protecting Landscape

- 2.4** *“Landscape reflects the relationship between people and place, and the part it plays in forming the setting to our everyday lives. It is a product of the interaction of the natural and cultural components of our environment, and how they are understood and experienced by people”* (Natural England 2014: p.6).

- 2.5** Our landscapes are a vital part of our cultural heritage as the histories and legends associated with them strongly influence contemporary identities. With careful planning, stewardship and design landscapes can be promoted to improve the relationship between people and the natural world to the benefit of both. Belfast is blessed with an unmistakable landscape setting as the city has grown along the Lagan Valley from Belfast Lough.

Figure 1: Landscape Wheel (Natural England 2014)



**2.6** Figure 1 shows Natural England’s landscape wheel which emphasises the multi-faceted nature of landscapes. It encompasses the elements that comprise physical landscapes and also how they are perceived which results in the production of a Landscape Character Assessment.

### **Landscape Character Assessments (LCA)**

**2.7** Landscape is everywhere and all landscapes matter to someone. Landscape will continue to evolve. Whilst change is constant, the management of change is essential to achieving sustainable place making, which will be the key role for LDPs.

**2.8** LCA’s are a tool in identifying the landscape features that give a locality its ‘sense of place’. The LCA grew out of the European Landscape Convention. The process applied to the LCA’s can help to inform the makeup of urban areas including our City and townscape areas as well as our rural assets. Landscape Character Areas set a baseline that can not only help us understand our landscapes but also assist in making decisions about managing development.

**2.9** The Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands Order (NI) 1985 (NALCO) is the current legislative basis for protecting landscapes. The Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment 2000 (NILCA) identified 130 distinct LCAs as fragile landscapes at risk of development pressures. Of which, there are 7 in Belfast:

- LCA 97 Belfast/Lisburn
- LCA 104 Craigantlet Escarpment
- LCA 105 Castlereagh Slopes
- LCA 106 Lagan Parkland
- LCA 110 Derrykillultagh
- LCA 111 Divis Summits
- LCA 112 Belfast Basalt Escarpment

**2.10** Appendix 1: Map 1 shows the locations of the LCA’s and Appendix 2 gives a description of the key characteristics for each LCA including the landscape condition and sensitivity to change, principles for Landscape Management and accommodating new development. Geomorphology and a biodiversity profile is also provided.

### **NIEA Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG): Wind Energy Development in Northern Irelands Landscapes (2010)**

**2.11** In conjunction with PPS18: Renewable Energy, the SPG provides guidance on the visual and landscape impact of wind energy development. The guidance is based on an assessment of the overall sensitivity level of wind energy development of each of the 130 LCAs. The LCAs are given an overall sensitivity level using a five point scale –

- |                               |        |                           |
|-------------------------------|--------|---------------------------|
| 1. High sensitivity           | ↑<br>↓ | Very vulnerable to change |
| 2. High to medium sensitivity |        |                           |
| 3. Medium sensitivity         |        |                           |
| 4. Medium to low sensitivity  |        |                           |
| 5. Low sensitivity            |        | Less vulnerable to change |



## 2.12 The LCAs identified as being vulnerable to change include:

- LCA 97 Belfast/Lisburn: High to Medium Sensitivity

The LCA has a highly urban landscape which means there is limited space for any significant wind energy development. The basin landform creates visually prominent skylines and edges, which are sensitive. Brownfield or industrial areas are most suited to wind energy development but caution must be paid to other significant constraints i.e. airport, habitats etc.

- LCA 104 Craigantlet Escarpment: High Sensitivity

Due to its intrinsic character, small scale features and visually prominent location on the edge of the urban area this LCA is highly sensitive to wind energy development.

- LCA 105 Castreagh Slopes: High Sensitivity

This landscape is highly sensitive to wind energy development due to its intrinsic character which includes many small scale features. It is visually exposed and has a prominent location on the edge of the urban area. It is a key part of Belfast's landscape setting and is highly valued, notwithstanding the presence of some existing man-made influences and issues of landscape management.

- LCA 106 Lagan Parkland: High Sensitivity

The LCA is regarded for its high scenic value and is designated an AONB and is a recreational and heritage asset to Belfast and the adjacent urban areas which gives rise to its inherent highly sensitive rating to wind energy development.

- LCA 110 Derrykillultagh: High to Medium Sensitivity

Whilst, in theory, this landscape could potentially be suited to wind energy development, the northern parts of the LCA, which is visually in the lee of the Belfast Hills when viewed from Belfast and Lisburn. Its southern half is generally much more sensitive in terms of both scale and visibility.

- LCA 111 Divis Summits: High Sensitivity

The iconic character of Belfast Hills framing the city, is the most sensitive of all the upland and escarpment landscapes. Whilst each individual summit is a landmark in its own right, together the summits bear strong influence on the settlement formation of Lisburn, Newtownabbey and the natural formation of Belfast Lough. It is arguable whether wind energy development would alter the character of the Hills, the visibility of the natural, cultural and recreational values associated with the Belfast Hills would heighten its sensitivity.

- LCA 112 Belfast Basalt Escarpment: High Sensitivity

Despite localised issues of intrusion and poor landscape quality, the distinctive character of the escarpment, has bore strong influence on the physicalities of Belfast and Belfast Lough. Alongside the practical obstacles of wind energy development, the character of the escarpment would be fundamentally altered. The visibility would be a burden upon the landscape and would affect the scenic, natural, cultural and recreational value of the LCA.

## Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment (NIRLCA)

2.13 The Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment (NIRLCA), was published in February 2016, identifies 26 regional scale landscape character areas and provides a regional framework for landscape character and an impartial evidence base comparable to the rest of the UK which will guide strategic decisions about landscape and set the context for more detailed local landscape studies in the future. There are 4 RLCA's within the Belfast City Council area. The following descriptions have been taken from NIRLCA:

#### **2.14** South Antrim Hills and Six Mile Water (No.19)

This RLCA comprises the Six Mile Water valley and the hills that surround it, including the southern flanks of the Antrim Plateau at Browndod and Drumadarragh Hill. To the south of the Six Mile Water, the Belfast Hills form a prominent ridge to the north of the Belfast Lough, overlooking both the lough and the city.

**2.15** The Belfast Hills run from the hills above Larne Lough, south-westwards to North Carn and Woodburn Forest, before dropping to Newtownabbey and Carnmoney Hill. Further south-west, the hills rise again to Collinward, Squires Hill, Divis and White Hill. These hills form an open and windswept upland plateau with a transition to more sheltered farmland with more substantial hedges on the gentle northern slopes. Fields are enclosed by gappy hedges or stone walls. On the plateau there are shallow valleys with marshy areas or loughs, often surrounded by conifer and mixed woodland plantations. The southern slopes of the hills, within RLCA 21, form a dramatic basalt escarpment above Belfast and the lough shores. Carnmoney Hill acts as a landmark feature on the approach to Newtownabbey as its natural rugged setting is in contrast to the settlement and industrial developments around it.

#### **2.16** Belfast Lough and Islandmagee (No.20)

Belfast Lough is a U-shaped glacial valley, with a sea-flooded floor and steep sides. The Belfast Lough RLCA encompasses the valley sides, between the sea and the break of slope at the top of the scarps of the Belfast Hills and the Castlereagh Hills. The valley continues inland, where the floor is settled (RLCA 21) and the side slopes diminish.

#### **2.17** Belfast and Lagan Valley (No.21)

The Belfast and Lagan Valley follows the lower part of the River Lagan from Moira near Lough Neagh eastwards to the sea at Belfast. Downstream of Moira, the river has a broad flat flood plain that is heavily settled.

**2.18** The valley is framed to the north by the dramatic slopes of the Belfast Hills including Black Mountain and Cave Hill, with a sharp contrast between the heavily urbanised and built up area in the valley and the exposed and upland character of the hills. To the south, the landform change is less dramatic, rising gently to undulating drumlin farmland south of Newtownbreda. Further east, Craigantlet Escarpment runs between Dundonald and Holywood and forms part of the backdrop to Belfast. It has deep wooded glens and encroachment of development on the ridge, including the Parliament Buildings at Stormont that stand out as a major landmark on the ridge. To the west, there is a transitional area between the Lagan Valley and the Lough Neagh basin.

**2.19** Settlement in the valley includes Belfast and its industrial port, airport, city centre and surrounding residential areas. Settlement is more or less continuous through Dunmurry to Lisburn. Wetlands along the river exclude development and former estate parklands, golf courses and the racecourse break up the settlement pattern and provide public open space. At the fringes of the settlements, and upstream of Lisburn, there is farmland with hedged medium scale pastoral fields and numerous hedgerow trees tending to be of ash, oak and beech. The Lagan towpath forms an important recreational route along the river, which is used for recreational water activities including rowing.

**2.20** This area is heavily influenced by communications, both in the form of a dense network of roads including the A2, but also railways and power lines. The valley does, however, have a contained character, when seen from high surrounding land the settlement can be seen to stop where the land rises, and from within settlements, the hill slopes that frame the valley are visible.

## 2.21 Down Drumlins and Holywood Hills (No.22)

The Down Drumlins and Holywood Hills form part of the extensive drumlin field that extends across Armagh and Down, with an almost continuous covering of drumlins. The area takes in rural lowland with subtle underlying relief including the upper Lagan Valley and the River Ravarnet valley, as well as the undulating Castlereagh Hills and Holywood Hills, which rise to 200m.

## Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy

**2.22** The NI Executive's 'Everyone's Involved – Sustainable Development Strategy' includes six priority areas for action; the most relevant of which is "striking an appropriate balance between the responsible use and protection of natural resources in support of a better quality of life and better quality environment". This priority action contains the following strategic objectives.

1. Ensure an appropriate policy and legislative framework is in place supported by a regulatory regime which will deliver statutory environmental standards in respect of air, water and other environmental pollution.
2. Promote sustainable land management.
3. Promote sustainable marine management.
4. Ensure our built heritage is used in a sustainable way.
5. Improve the quality of life of our people by planning and managing development in ways which are sustainable and which contribute to creating a better environment.
6. Take action to reduce biodiversity loss.

**2.23** Local Development Plans should reflect these strategic aims of the Executive within the plan strategy and local policies plan. These objectives relate to this paper with its focus on the city and its relation with the natural world in terms of its landscapes, biodiversity, development constraints in terms of flood plains and recreational opportunities from formal parks to playing fields and rural rights of way.

## Marine Plan for Northern Ireland (draft expected early 2016)

**2.24** At 650km in length, the coast of Northern Ireland is relatively short - yet it supports an exceptional diversity of marine wildlife and their habitats. The coast, and the seas around it, includes highly productive and biologically diverse ecosystems, with features which serve as critical natural defences against storms, floods and erosion. A number of species and habitats are recognised as internationally important and the majority of the coastline is protected for its special interest. This dynamic area supports tourism, agriculture, recreation, aquaculture, inshore fisheries, industry, commercial harbours and quays, as well as being used for waste disposal and power generation.

**2.25** The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 require the Department of the Environment, as the Northern Ireland Marine Plan Authority, to prepare and adopt marine plans that would manage the Northern Ireland marine area and contribute to its sustainable development.

**2.26** The composition of the Northern Ireland marine area, as defined by section 2 of the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 and section 322 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, means that legislatively there will be two marine plans in Northern Ireland -that is, one for its

inshore region (out to 12 nautical miles) and another for its offshore region (an area beyond 12 nautical miles). However, for administrative and practical purposes, the intention is that these two marine plans will be combined into a single document to establish a “single” marine plan for Northern Ireland.

- 2.27** The interaction between the land and sea planning systems is important. Terrestrial planning extends to the Mean Low Water Mark while marine planning and licensing extend to the Mean High Water Mark. Therefore, the requirement to work effectively together to achieve harmonisation is recognised and the Local Development Plan will have to be cognisant of the emergence of the Marine Plan for Northern Ireland.

### **Northern Ireland Priority Species (NIPS)**

- 2.28** Northern Ireland priority species are those which require conservation management and require conservation action due to their decline, rarity and/or importance to the environment. NIEA have reviewed the priority species list which currently stands at 481 species, an increase of 271 from the previous count in 2002 which contributed to the then, NI Biodiversity Strategy. Out of the 481 NIPS, 93 are considered as ‘marine’. These include species of algae, bees, beetles, birds, fish, butterflies, fungi and mammals. The full list can be viewed in Appendix 3.
- 2.29** In the Belfast City Council area, there are 200 recorded NIPS, of which 8 are considered fully marine or have marine features.

### **The Wildlife and Natural Environment (NI) Act 2011**

- 2.30** Also known as the WANE Act it introduced a duty on public authorities to exercise its functions to conserve biodiversity. The DoE maintain a list of priority species which require conservation action, see Appendix 3 for the Belfast Priority Species List. Under the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) and the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 (as amended) carry special conservation measures for many priority species. Alongside this, some priority species are also protected under the Conservation (Natural Habitats etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended) and the Wildlife Order 1985 (as amended). The Habitats Directive also required continuous monitoring of the population certain species with the aim of achieving Favourable Conservation Status (FCS).

### **Climate Change**

- 2.31** Northern Ireland has a remarkable diversity of species and habitats. However, some are already in decline, with almost 500 species currently on Northern Ireland’s Priority Species List, Appendix 3 shows the Belfast Priority Species List 2015. Climate change may increase the vulnerability of terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine environments, presenting risks to species, habitats and services that natural ecosystems provide (e.g. purification and crop pollination). A number of species such as skylark and song thrush are projected to experience significant losses in their ‘climate space’ (areas where the climate is suited to them), although others such as the marsh fritillary butterfly may enjoy significant gains.

**2.32** Reduced summer river flows and higher water temperatures are projected to adversely affect the freshwater environments including increasing the risk of water pollution. In coastal and marine environments, tidal flooding and coastal erosion could potentially endanger intertidal habitats and grazing marshes, impacting coastal species and migrating patterns.<sup>2</sup>

## Northern Ireland Biodiversity Action Plan

**2.33** In 2015, the Department of the Environment published Northern Ireland's second Biodiversity Strategy. The Strategy sets out how Northern Ireland plans to meet its international obligations and local targets to protect biodiversity and ensure that the environment can continue to support our people and economy. It builds upon the first Biodiversity Strategy published in 2002 but adopts the modern and internationally agreed approach that emphasises the management of biological systems to deliver the materials and services upon which people depend – the ecosystem services approach.

**2.34** While protection of individual species and habitats is essential, the thrust of the Strategy is to manage natural and man-modified systems to deliver a multitude of outputs which support society and the economy. Protection of individual species and habitats is both a tool for delivery and approach. However, recognition of interconnectedness and complexity of biological systems enables a more coherent approach, producing an intelligible and evocative Strategy that makes it clear that biodiversity protection is absolutely fundamental to society and the economy.

**2.35** The Biodiversity Strategy States that at "... international, EU, UK and Northern Ireland levels we now need to consider how best to meet the challenge of halting biodiversity loss". The purpose of the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy is: *"to make progress towards halting overall biodiversity loss, establish an ecosystem approach and help business and society in general have a greater understanding of the benefits that nature can bring to everyday life in Northern Ireland."* The Strategy then lists a number of high-level regional challenges which will require particular attention:

- valuing the environment in the broadest context;
- reducing the impact of climate change;
- obtaining adequate resources for biodiversity projects from a wide range of sources;
- encouraging ecosystem scale protection measures;
- enhancing data gathering and management;
- tackling invasive species; and
- engaging society more fully to halt biodiversity loss.

**2.36** NIBAP refers to the goals of the SPPS, "working towards halting the loss of biodiversity" and its recognition of supporting and conserving green and blue infrastructure. NIBAP encourages new and innovative ways of tackling the decline of biodiversity through 'biodiversity offsets' which are "conservation activities designed to deliver biodiversity benefits in compensation for losses incurred during development and there is increasing interest in this as a mechanism for ameliorating to some extent the negative impacts of development on biodiversity. However, recreating entire habitats is extremely costly and time consuming and can rarely replicate the complexity of natural systems."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Three ways to Improve Understanding of Flood Risk. Intermap.com

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.doeni.gov.uk/publications/biodiversity-strategy-northern-ireland-2020-0>

## **Belfast City Council Local Biodiversity Action Plan**

**2.37** In addition to NIBAP, recognition of the Belfast City Council's 'Local Biodiversity Action Plan' (2007) explains the Council's plan for delivering action for biodiversity locally. The objectives of the plan include:

- conserve national and local priority species and habitats in Belfast,
- raise awareness of biodiversity
- get people involved with biodiversity
- develop biodiversity partnerships.

**2.38** The plan is currently under review and will be revised with an updated action plan and will draw parallels with the new NI Biodiversity Strategy 2015, 'Valuing Nature: A Biodiversity Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020'.

### **2.39 The Biodiversity Duty**

The Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (the WANE Act) places a statutory duty on public bodies to conserve biodiversity. This guidance is designed to assist public bodies in fulfilling their biodiversity duty. It places a duty upon all Government departments and public bodies, including non-departmental public bodies and local authorities, to further the conservation of biological diversity when carrying out their functions.

### **2.40 UK National Ecosystem Assessment Northern Ireland Summary 2011**

Ecosystem services are the benefits provided by ecosystems that contribute to making human life both possible and worth living. The report provides an analysis of Northern Ireland's environment and the ecosystem services it provides, looks at the changes over time, examines the factors driving current changes and provides recommendations on how Northern Ireland's land and sea can be managed to ensure delivery of a wide range of benefits to enhance well-being by forming the basis of future management systems. The key recommendations included:

- The Northern Ireland National Ecosystem Assessment (NEA) should inform policy and decision-making
- A fully integrated cross-departmental and intersectoral approach is needed
- Greater understanding is required at public and political levels of ecosystem services
- Further research, especially around establishing financial values for service delivery, is required
- Effective delivery of ecosystem services requires informed and integrated management across a range of habitats that supports high levels of biodiversity and ensures long-term resilience to changing circumstances
- The role of ecosystem services in mitigating the effects of human impacts, including climate change and biodiversity loss, should be considered in all decisions about the use of land and sea
- Carbon management needs to be seen as an important part of management for multiple service delivery
- The full value of sequestration in existing habitats must be factored into carbon and greenhouse gas budgets and targets and given weight when making decisions on land management regimes.
- Planning and management policies need to be aligned with natural processes to maintain the capacity for multiple service delivery.
- A network of ecologically coherent sites should form a core for integrated management within the wider environment, delivering ecosystem services and minimising environmental degradation.
- The island of Ireland should be considered as a whole for ecosystem management.

## Regional Policy

**2.41** The Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035 sets out the policy context for Northern Ireland Regional Policy which aims to protect and enhance the environment.

### Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035

**2.42** The Regional Development Strategy 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. The RDS was revised in 2010 to reflect the changing development of Northern Ireland and continues to set 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 (SFG) which is additional regional guidance which is shaped specifically to address the 5 elements of the Spatial Framework<sup>4</sup>.

**2.43** As a whole, Northern Ireland's natural environment is unique with its diverse biodiversity, its landscape and its waterways. Everyone should have the right to a well-appointed environment for good quality of life. It is our responsibility to protect the environment as a sustainable asset for future generations. In this way, RG11 advises the policy objectives the natural environment are to 'Conserve, protect and, where possible, enhance our built heritage and our natural environment'.

**2.44** RG11 outlines 10 strategic goals:

- **Sustain and enhance biodiversity** in line with the objective of the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy to halt the loss of indigenous species and habitats
- **Identify, establish, protect and manage ecological networks.** Ecological networks, including the protection of priority species, are needed to maintain environmental process and help to conserve and enhance biodiversity
- **Protect and encourage green and blue infrastructure within urban areas.** Green infrastructure is defined by the European Commission as "the use of ecosystems, green spaces and water in strategic land use planning to deliver environmental and quality life benefits"<sup>5</sup>. Blue infrastructure refers to ponds, streams and lakes<sup>6</sup>
- **Protect and manage important geological and geomorphological features.** Northern Ireland hosts a variety of rock types, formations and geomorphological features. Whilst many of these sites need specific scientific protection for their value particularly for education and research purposes, the RDS 2035 states, "if sensibly managed, [geological and geomorphological features] can play an active role in economic development" (pp.51)
- **Protect, enhance and manage the coast.** From preserving coastal waters to protecting coastal areas from coastal squeeze, it is imperative to protect, enhance and conserve

<sup>4</sup> <sup>4</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.

<sup>5</sup> DOE (2015) A Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS) Planning for Sustainable Development (P.10)

<sup>6</sup> DRD (2010) Regional Development Strategy (RDS 2035) Building a Better Future.



distinctive biodiversity and habitats and to help adaptation to Climate Change. The RDS suggests, “The Marine Policy Statement (March 2011) and subsequent Marine Plan(s) will provide spatial guidance and detailed policy where appropriate for the terrestrial/marine interface and the marine environment. This will be complemented by the work to advance integrated coastal zone management.” (pp.52)

- **Protect, enhance and restore the quality of inland water bodies.** Watercourses including rivers and lakes, support a plethora of national and international species of importance. The quality and the ecological status of the water environment should be monitored and fulfilled through the relevant statutory obligations. The Executive produced its second cycle plans in December 2015, which is a key element in implementing the Water Framework Directive (WFD) which takes “an integrated approach to the protection, improvement and sustainable use of the water environment. It applied to groundwater and to all surface water bodies including rivers, lakes transitional (estuarine) and coastal waters out to one nautical mile.”<sup>7</sup>
- **Recognise and promote the conservation of local identity and distinctive landscape character** - Landscape character is what makes an area unique. The RDS defined it as “a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements, be it natural (soil, landform) and/or human (for example settlement and development) in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse”. We can only make informed and responsible decisions on the management and planning of sustainable future landscapes if we pay proper regard to their existing character. By understanding how places differ we can also ensure that future development is well situated, sensitive to its location, and contributes to environmental, social and economic objectives. The Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessments provide valuable guidance on local landscape character and scenic quality.
- **Conserve, protect and where possible enhance areas recognised for their landscape quality** - protected landscapes should continue to be managed through a partnership approach involving central and local government and the local communities.
- **Protect designated areas of countryside from inappropriate development (either directly or indirectly)** - designating special areas for protection is an effective way of ensuring our wildlife and natural landscapes retain their individual characteristics. Some areas are deemed of such importance that they are formally designated under various pieces of national and international legislation.
- **Continue to assess areas for designation; and consider the establishment of one or more National Parks** - This would conserve and enhance the natural, built and cultural heritage of areas of outstanding landscape value while promoting the social and economic development of the communities they support.

**2.45** Specifically to Belfast Metropolitan area, ‘SFG5: Protect and enhance the quality of the setting of the BMUA and its environmental assets’, contains the following three actions necessary to implement the strategic policy:

- **Protect areas of high scenic value, undeveloped coast line, Belfast Lough, the Lagan Valley Regional Park and the hills around the BMUA from development.** The attractive natural setting of the BMUA reinforces its uniqueness and brings benefits to the economy and society. These areas should be safeguarded, but opportunities should be sought where appropriate, to increase access to them for residents and tourists, consistent with protecting their integrity and value.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.doeni.gov.uk/topics/water/river-basin-management>

- **Protect and enhance the network of open spaces in the BMUA.** The network consists of country parks, landscape wedges, parks and forests and community greenways. They are important recreational facilities which help to define a sense of place and character for urban communities. Opportunities should be taken for connections to an enhanced network of pedestrian paths, cycle-ways and ecological corridors. These have the potential to support biodiversity by linking existing ecological areas creating a network of green spaces throughout 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.** Increasing access to the scenic and natural sites around the city could result in disturbance effects. It is important to ensure that visitor pressure and increased access does not further damage any important wildlife sites.

### **Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) ‘Planning Sustainable Development’**

- 2.46** The Department of the Environment’s Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) sets out strategic subject planning policy for a wide range of planning matters. It also provides the core planning principles to underpin delivery of the two-tier planning system with the aim of furthering sustainable development. It sets the strategic direction for the new councils to bring forward detailed operational policies within future local development plans.
- 2.47** The SPPS contains five core planning principles, the most relevant of which is ‘*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. This requires an integrated approach to the management of the natural and cultural aspects of the landscape with the preparation of Local Development Plans (LDPs) providing the ideal platform to set the strategic objectives and site-specific policies necessary to frame these goals. The Strategic Planning Policy Statement requires Local Development Plans to adopt a strategic approach to identify and promote the design of ecological networks to help reduce the fragmentation and isolation of natural habitats within the city. In addition the Plan should seek to identify and promote green and blue infrastructure where this will add value to the provision, enhancement and connection of open space and habitats in and around the City.
- 2.48** The SPPS explains that Local Development Plans and the policies they contain should be rigorously assessed for their environmental impacts and against the requirements of European and domestic legislation. These include Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Sustainable Environmental Assessment (SEA) for plans, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for projects, and Habitats Regulations Assessment for plans and projects affecting Natura 2000 sites.

### **Planning Policy Statement 2: Natural Heritage**

- 2.49** The RDS is complemented by the Department of Environment’s suite of Planning Policy Statements (PPS), in particular PPS2 “Natural Heritage” which has been retained under SPPS. The Policy objectives of PPS2 are:
- to seek to further the conservation, enhancement and restoration of the abundance, quality, diversity and distinctiveness of the region’s natural heritage
  - to further sustainable development by ensuring that biological and geological diversity are conserved and enhanced as an integrated part of social, economic and environmental development

- to assist in meeting international (including European), national and local responsibilities and obligations in the protection and enhancement of the natural heritage
- to contribute to rural renewal and urban regeneration by ensuring developments take account of the role and value of biodiversity in supporting economic diversification and contributing to a high quality environment
- To protect and enhance biodiversity, geodiversity and the environment
- To take actions to reduce our carbon footprint and facilitate adaption to climate change.<sup>8</sup>

**2.50** PPS 6 'Planning, Archaeology and Built Heritage' advises on the policy objective to:

- secure the protection, conservation and, where possible, the enhancement of our built and archaeological heritage;
- promote sustainable development and environmental stewardship with regard to our built and archaeological heritage; and
- encourage the link between conservation and economic prosperity.

**2.51** The paper on archaeology and built heritage will further explore these issues further.

### **Local Context – Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP)**

**3.0** The BMAP includes proposals for a number of community greenways, which would connect existing open spaces in the City, and green wedges. These would provide access from the City Centre to the Countryside. The Bmap also protects existing open spaces and natural heritage that could form the basis of a green infrastructure network. The main aim of the Green Infrastructure Network is to provide a refuge for wildlife and to connect wildlife areas with the surrounding countryside. In addition, it is recognised that the Network had the potential to provide pedestrian and cycle routes into and out of the city.

**3.1**

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<sup>8</sup> DOE (2013) Planning Policy Statement 2: Natural Heritage

## **4.0 Profile of Natural Heritage Designations In Belfast City Council Area**

### **International**

#### **Habitats and Birds Directive (92/43/EEC)**

- 4.1** Intensive agricultural practices and development pressures are threatening our natural habitats. In 1992, the European Commission adopted legislation to protect natural habitats called the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora Council Directive (92/43/EEC). The Habitats and Birds Directive aims to maintain biodiversity of a range of “rare, threatened or endemic animal and plant species” whilst taking cognisance of the economic, social, cultural and regional requirements. Alongside the Birds Directive, the Habitats Directive sets out the European natural heritage conservation policy and established ‘Natura 2000’ which is a network of nature protection sites.
- 4.2** The LDP will have regard to the regulations and the conservation objectives governing these sites to ensure no direct or indirect adverse impacts will be caused as a result of planned development. Development proposals will be subject to a Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) Screening Report to ensure due consideration is given to the aforementioned sites. If the report highlights the potential for significant effects cannot be avoided at an early stage, an Appropriate Assessment will be undertaken to consider the potential impact on the structure and function as well as the conservation objectives of the Natura 2000 sites. An assessment of potential mitigation measures will be presented to reduce potential adverse impacts alongside an additional assessment of ‘Alternative Solutions’ will be undertaken.
- 4.3** The Shared Environmental Services (SES) team that has been set up in Mid and East Antrim Council provides support to Council on a range of specialist functions including the HRA on planning applications and during the preparation of the LDP to assess and advise on the impacts of European Sites. This function will support the Council to ensure the legal requirements of these habitats/sites are fully met in accordance to the Habitats Directive and other Environmental Legislation and to reduce the risk of challenge to planning decisions, development plans and policies.

#### **Natura 2000 – Special Protection Areas (SPA), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Ramsar sites**

- 4.4** Natura 2000 includes sites of Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Ramsar Sites. These sites can be influenced by implementation of land use zonings and policy. Each identified site is managed through a set of conservation objectives which should be taken into account when developing the LDP.
- 4.5** SPAs are sites established under the European Commission Directive of Wild Birds (2009/147/EC), commonly known as the ‘Birds Directive’. SPAs are important areas for breeding, over-wintering and migrating birds. Currently Belfast has 2 SPA’s, Belfast Lough SPA and Belfast Lough Open Water SPA.
- 4.6** Belfast Lough is a large intertidal sea Lough situated at the mouth of the River Lagan. The inner part of the Lough comprises a series of mudflats and lagoons; the outer Lough is restricted to mainly rocky shores and small sandy bays on the southern shore with more extensive mixed sediment intertidal areas on the northern side.

- 4.7** Belfast Lough SPA is 428.64 ha in area and qualifies under Article 4.1 of the 79/409/EEC on the Conservation of Wild Birds Directive by supporting Bar-tailed Godwit and migratory species of Redshank and Turnstone over winter. The area also qualifies under Article 4.2 of the Directive (79/409/EEC) by regularly supporting at least 20,000 waterfowl. Over winter, the area regularly supports individual waterfowl including Goldeneye, Redshank, Turnstone, Great Crested Grebe, Cormorant, Shelduck, Mallard, Bar-tailed Godwit, Black-tailed Godwit, Eider, Curlew, Red-breasted Merganser, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Lapwing, Knot, Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwit, Scaup.
- 4.8** The Special Protection Area boundary is entirely coincident with that of the Belfast Lough Ramsar Site.
- 4.9** Belfast Lough SPA also qualifies under Article 4.2 of the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) by regularly supporting internationally important populations of Redshank and Black-tailed Godwit. Additionally, the site qualifies under the Birds Directive 2009/147/EC under Article 4.1 by supporting Common Tern, Arctic Tern and Bar-Tailed Godwit.
- 4.10** Numbers of wintering Redshank have been declining since the SPA designation. This is concurrent with UK and indeed International trends. As a result, the status of Belfast Lough is considered 'unfavourable'.
- 4.11** The Belfast Lough Open Water SPA covers 5,591.73 ha in area and comprises of the marine area below the mean low water mark. Seawards it extends to a notional boundary between the eastern limits on the north and south shores of the Outer Belfast Lough Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) at Kilroot and Horse Rock respectively. The boundary towards the head of the Lough is a notional line between Greencastle on northern shore and Holywood Bank on the southern shore. The site qualifies under Article 4.2 of the 79/409/EEC Directive by supporting Great Crested Grebe, an internationally important species.
- 4.12** The current status of the SPA features of the Belfast Lough Open Water is of 'favourable' status. However, the population of Great Crested Grebe is being closely monitored following a recorded decline in 2010/11 which was potentially due to weather conditions. Although populations have been steadily recovering, the feature is being closely monitored.
- 4.13** In January 2016, NIEA proposed an agglomeration of a number of existing designated sites into one SPA - the East Coast (Northern Ireland) Marine SPA. The proposed SPA includes coastal and near shore waters from Ringford near Carnlough in the north, the marine area of Larne Lough, the marine area of Belfast Lough, waters around the Copeland Islands and off shore of the Ards Peninsula to Cloghan Head, near Ardglass in the south. The site would also subsume the existing Belfast Lough SPA and Belfast Lough Open Water SPA. The site covers a diverse range of seabed habitats, from extensive coastal fringing reefs of various lithologies to the fine silt of inner Belfast Lough. The purpose of adjoining the above SPA's is to support internationally important populations of Great Crested Grebe, Red-throated Diver, Sandwich Tern, Common Tern, Arctic Tern, Manx Shearwater, and Eider Duck.
- 4.14** SACs are sites that have been given protected under the European Legislation of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). The designated sites are for other species other than birds such as special habitats, species, grasslands and wetlands of biodiversity importance on an international scale.

- 4.15** There are no SAC's directly located within Belfast. There is one proposed site for Harbour Porpoise where the boundary of the designation is likely to run across the mouth of the Belfast Lough and therefore not in the plan area<sup>9</sup>.

### Ramsar Sites

- 4.16** The Ramsar Convention 1971 is an international treaty that provides a framework for sensitive use of wetlands. Wetlands are productive ecosystems and provide us with fresh water but have been subject to human interventions and converted to other uses. The convention includes "all lakes and rivers, underground aquifers, swamps and marshes, wet grasslands, peatlands, oases, estuaries, deltas and tidal flats, mangroves and other coastal areas, coral reefs, and all human-made sites such as fish ponds, rice paddies, reservoirs and salt pans."<sup>10</sup> Wetlands as ecosystems are extremely important for biodiversity conservation which is recognised for the wellbeing of society. The management of our wetlands is important and are sensitive to trans-boundary water and air pollutants.
- 4.17** UK Government applies the procedures for Ramsar sites under the Habitats Regulations. There are 20 Ramsar sites designated, with a further 3 sites proposed, in Northern Ireland of which 1 site is located in Belfast, Belfast Lough. The Ramsar site at Belfast Lough covers 433ha and qualifies under Criterion 3 of the Ramsar Convention which supports populations of Common Redshank in Winter.
- 4.18** DAERA is responsible for implementing and complying with the requirements of the Habitats Directive through the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended) which transposes the Habitats Directive.

### OSPAR Marine Protection Area

- 4.19** The OSPAR convention was agreed in Paris and came into effect in 1998. The OSPAR convention replaced both the Convention for the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping from Ships and Aircraft (the Oslo Convention) (adopted in 1972) and the Convention for the Prevention of Marine Pollution from Land-Based Sources (the Paris Convention) (adopted in 1974) with the intention of addressing the pollution affecting the North East Atlantic area. A key part of the OSPAR biodiversity strategy is the develop a network of MPA's to ensure the biodiversity, environmental and ecological quality of the maritime ecosystems are conserved, protected and managed sustainably. OSPAR is guided by the ecosystems approach which is an interaction of the impacts of human activity and the physical environment of plants, animals and microbes. In Belfast two areas have been identified in the OSPAR biodiversity strategy; Belfast Lough Open Water SPA and Belfast Lough SPA.

### Water Framework Directive (WFD)

- 4.20** The WFD is transposed into law through the Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 (Statutory Rule 2003 No. 544). WFD aims to achieve 'Good Ecological Status' or better, for the quality of all water bodies. This means ensuring healthy aquatic ecosystems whilst balancing water/nature protection and the sustainable use of natural resources.

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<sup>9</sup> JNCC 2016 Harbour Porpoise Possible Special Area of Conservation of Conservation Consultation. [http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/NorthChannel\\_SiteSummaryLeaflet.pdf](http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/NorthChannel_SiteSummaryLeaflet.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.ramsar.org/about/the-ramsar-convention-and-its-mission>

- 4.21** A key feature of the WFD is the development of River Basin Management Plans which takes an integrated approach to the protection, improvement and sustainable use of water environment. Belfast falls within the North Eastern River Basin District.
- 4.22** NIEA have formed a NI Water Management Unit River Basin District Group to deliver a series of catchment projects in partnership with government agencies and stakeholders. An example of these catchment programmes includes, the 'Living with Water Programme' is a strategic drainage infrastructure programme that aims to improve water quality within the Belfast Lough Catchment. This programme will seek to protect against flood risk by determining the level and types of capital infrastructural investment that is necessary to alleviate the problem which will in turn have a multiplier effect for economic and environmental benefit.

### **Marine Strategy Framework Directive through the Marine Policy Statement (MPS)**

- 4.23** The Marine Strategy Framework Directive was formally adopted by the European Union in July 2008. It provides the legislative framework for an ecosystem approach to the sustainable management of the marine environment. The Marine Policy Statement (MPS) was published in 2011 and was prepared and adopted under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. The MPS provides the policy framework for the marine planning system and aids decision making on plans affecting the marine environment.

### **World Heritage Sites (WHS)**

- 4.24** A WHS is a designation adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) for sites which possess 'outstanding universal value' in terms of its natural and cultural properties. The Giants Causeway and the Causeway Coast is the only WHS designation in Northern Ireland.
- 4.25** Appendix 4: 'Natural Heritage Designations Map' shows the location of the above designations.

### **National and Local**

- 4.26** Cognisance of our natural heritage during the formulation of a Local Development Plan is key to balancing development pressures along with the restoration and conservation of our natural heritage and environment.

### **Priority Habitats**

- 4.27** Although a significant portion of the Plan Area is heavily urbanised, it is rich in natural heritage resources and contains important wildlife habitats. Northern Ireland contains 51 priority habitats of which 17 are located in the Belfast City Council area. The sites may vary in size but all of the habitats are of major importance based on individual habitat and species diversity and rarity. These habitats are as follows but note this may not be an exhaustive list:
- Parkland
  - Upland mixed Ashwoods;
  - Wet woodland;
  - Upland Oakwood;
  - Lowland meadows;
  - Upland Heathland;
  - Eutrophic standing waters;
  - Intertidal Mudflats;
  - Rivers;
  - Coastal saltmarsh;
  - Lowland raised bog;
  - Reedbeds;



- Lowland Fens;
- Maritime cliff and slopes;
- Open Mosaic Habitats in Previously Developed Land;
- Hedgerows and;
- Ponds.

## Main Habitat Types

- 4.28** The Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy identifies a range of habitats across Northern Ireland. Those represented in the Plan Area considered in the Environmental Assets Appraisal include:
- wetlands including rivers, streams, lakes, swamp, fen and carr woodland;
  - peatlands including heathland and bogs;
  - woodlands including plantations and semi natural woodlands and boundary features such as hedgerows
  - grasslands including arable or cultivated land
  - Open Mosaic Habitats in Previous Development Land
- 4.29** Most of the following section is derived from Countryside Assessment, BMAP 2015 and adjusted to reflect the Belfast City Council Plan area, unless otherwise referenced.
- 4.30 Wetlands**  
The Belfast City Council Area contains several important wetland areas. The Belfast Harbour Estate wetlands are important sites for birds including barn owl, curlew, golden plover, linnet, reed bunting, roseate tern, skylark, song thrush and spotted flycatcher. Bog meadows is the last large area of the Blackstaff floodplain that has not been developed. The site has a variety of habitats extending from higher ground in the west with rough grazing and grading into fen and swamp. Within the area, reed bunting, corncrake and skylark have previously been recorded.
- 4.31 Rivers and Lakes**  
The River Lagan is the largest river in the Plan Area. Many stretches of the River Lagan contain important habitats for wildlife including otter, nesting birds, coarse fish and Spuce's bristle moss. Aeration equipment has been installed below Stranmillis in an attempt to improve the water quality and Laganside wildlife groups are working towards the creation of wildlife and conservation areas as part of Laganside regeneration. Collin River contains salmon and brown trout and is an important tributary feeding the Lagan.
- The Plan Area contains a number of Mesotrophic Lakes and Eutrophic Standing Waters. Galwally Lake is the only Mesotrophic Lake is within the area.
- 4.32 Coastal and Marine**  
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.
- 4.33** The coast, and the seas around it, includes highly productive and biologically diverse ecosystems, with features which serve as critical natural defences against storms, floods and erosion. A number of species and habitats are recognised as internationally important and the majority of the coastline is protected for its special interest. A wide variety of coastal habitats can be found including mudflats, sea-grass beds, coastal saltmarsh, sandy beaches, boulder and rocky shore. Stretches of these areas are internationally and

nationally important for birdlife including roseate tern, golden plover, curlew and seabirds such as cormorants and shags. Wall brown butterfly has also been recorded in saltmarsh within the area.

#### **4.34 Peatlands**

Areas of shrub heath (upland heathland) are found around the summits and slopes of Black Mountain, Divis, Wolf Hill, Squires Hill and McIlwhans. The majority of the lowland bog patches, which once existed, have been drained for agriculture, colonised by trees, or used as refuse tips.

#### **4.35 Woodlands**

Northern Ireland is currently one of the least wooded countries in Europe and many of the woodlands are in poor condition both in terms of age structure and the presence of wildlife. There is greater awareness of the benefits of woodland as a viable educational source, outdoor recreation provision and the wider contribution they make to quality of life. Their value to the environment is vital for fostering biodiversity, providing habitats but also help to ameliorate pollution and stabilise soil.

**4.36** Many of the woodland and treed areas in the Belfast City Council Area have their origin in former demesnes and estates. Within these woodlands a mixture of mature broad leaves 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 of demesne and estate woodlands occur at Malone House and at Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park. Several of these woodland areas are examples of Lowland Woodland Pasture and parkland.

**4.37** 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. Examples of these woodlands can be found in Cavehill Country Park. Ash dominated woodlands also exist in small patches at Longhurst and Lagan Meadows. Wet Woodlands dominated by willow and alder can be found at Edenderry, Campbells Hill and River Lagan. Small areas of oak dominated woodland can also be found at Rathmore Grammar School, Malone Golf Course, Barnett's Demesne and Edenderry.

**4.38** Other notable wooded areas include areas along various rivers and glens including Connor Burn, Belmont Glen, Cregagh Glen, Edith of Lornes Glen and Golden Glen and hazel dominated woodland at Hulls Glen and Cavehill. Elsewhere patches of woodland are found around old quarries, as planting within parklands or around farmsteads. Coniferous Plantations are often small in extent within the BMA and are located at Belvoir Forest Park, Barnett's Demesne and Mary Peters Track.

**4.39** Many organisations such as the Woodland Trust, National Trust, RSPB, Ulster Wildlife Trust and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), own and manage land for nature conservation interests. This has led to increased planting of native trees such as hazel, oak, ash, rowan and cherry.

**4.40** Under the Forest Service, DAERA sustainably manage existing woodlands. Belvoir Park Forest is the only forest recreation area DAERA manage. Covering 94 hectares along the south bank of the River Lagan, it is situated in the boundary of Lagan Valley Regional Park. Alongside its value as a unique natural heritage asset, the Park contains archaeological sites. Whilst commercial forestry is the main role of these areas and have an open public access policy on all woods, hence they never close to the public and provide an accessible recreation and amenity resource.

#### 4.41 **Community Woodlands**

The Woodland Trust is a charity dedicated to the protection of native woodland heritage. They protect ancient woodland, acquire woodland and sites for planting, creating valuable urban green space, enhancing biodiversity by expanding woodland cover for the benefit of public enjoyment. The Woodland Trust manage the following sites:

- Woodland Walkway, Knockmount Gardens
- Ligoniel Wood, Mill Avenue
- Old Throne Wood, Antrim Road
- Mill Dam Wood, Ballygomartin Road

4.42 Woodlands within the Belfast City Council Area support a number of priority species including red squirrel, Irish hare, pipstrelle bats, skylarks, golden plover, barn owl, yellowhammer, tree sparrow, bullfinch, song thrush, wall brown butterfly, moschatel, small white orchid and pink meadow cap fungi.

#### 4.43 **Hedgerows**

Hedgerows are important for biodiversity with over 50 Northern Ireland priority species associated with hedges. As well as biodiversity hedgerows are important for not just biodiversity but are listed as a key characteristic of numerous Landscape Character Areas. Hedgerows are listed as a natural influence within the Belfast and Lagan Valley Area of Landscape Character.

#### 4.44 **Grasslands**

There are several notable grassland areas within the Plan Area. For example, Lagan Meadows is a grazed grassland which features wild flowers, marshy grassland, open water and swamp, with clumps of tussock sedge scrub and woodland. This is an important area for red squirrel, otters, bullfinch, song thrush, skylark, reed bunting and linnets. There are areas within the Belfast Hills that contain wet and dry semi-natural grassland and acidic mat grass and purple moor grass. Grasslands within the Belfast Hills areas support red grouse, marsh fritillary butterfly, juniper, moschatel, pink meadow cap, smooth cat's ear and Irish lady's tresses.

4.45 Improved grassland is the dominant land use outside the urban environment in the Belfast City Council Area. Rough grassland is scattered throughout the area and is often found in damp inter-drumlin areas, valley bottoms, higher ground, thin soils, and on exposed sites with steep slopes. Examples of rough grassland are located near Black Mountain, Divis, Cave Hill, Balmoral Industrial Estate and Belfast Harbour. Rough grassland areas in the Plan Area can support Irish hare, curlew, reed bunting, skylark, song thrush, linnets, spotted flycatcher and chough. Biodiversity in areas of improved pastures and arable land is often concentrated in hedgerows. Hedgerows in the area are predominantly hawthorn, with occasional beech and ash.

#### 4.46 **Open Mosaic Habitats in Previously Developed Land**

Belfast has a good proportion of this type of site including parts of Belfast Harbour Estate, quarry sites in the hills surrounding Belfast and cleared industrial sites.

#### 4.47 **Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs)**

In the Plan Area these include Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) and National Nature Reserves, declared under the provisions of the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (NI) Order 1985. They also include Areas of Scientific Interest declared under the Amenity Lands (NI) Act 1965

- 4.48** Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) are protected sites which are of special interest by reason of their flora, fauna, geological and/or physiological features designated under the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 (as amended). Sites are protected to conserve biodiversity and geodiversity. There are four ASSI's in Belfast:
- Inner Belfast Lough also contains a number of Earth Science Conservation Review (ESCR) sites exhibiting a range of Ordovician, Carboniferous and Permian features of national geological interest.
  - Craigantlet Woods represents a large block of semi-natural woodland. Due to the inaccessibility of the woods, it has been relatively undisturbed maintaining a high degree of naturalness. The site was recorded as having 'unfavourable' status in 2009 due to the spread of non-native invasive species, principally Sycamore.
  - Belvoir ASSI within the former Belvoir Estate with the exception of Moreland's Meadow. It is designated for its parkland and wood pasture habitat and associated species .
  - Bellevue is important because of its geology. It is one of a series of sites that describes the Clay-with-Flints (CwF), a unique deposit whose exposure is mostly confined to the Antrim Plateau.

### Areas of Scientific Interest (ASI)

- 4.49** Declared under the Amenity and Lands Act (Northern Ireland) 1985 where consideration must be given to maintaining the feature of scientific interest but development may proceed subject to appropriate restrictions. ASI's in many respects are treated similarly to ASSIs but there is less control over land use. Many ASIs have been pre-designated to ASSI, SPA or SAC to preserve the feature of scientific interest. At present, Hazelwood ASI is the only such designation with the administrative boundary of Belfast which contains a diverse ground flora carpet of woodland herbs and provides a suitable home to multi stemmed hazel.
- 4.50** Under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, 3 other statutory designations were identified:
- **Nature Reserves and National Nature Reserves** are areas designated for their rich flora, fauna or features of geological or other special interest qualities. The sites are managed by DoE or by agreement with another body such as a public department, district Council or voluntary conservation body. There are no Nature Reserves or National Nature Reserves in Belfast City Council area.
  - **Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ)**
    - A Marine Protected Area (MPA) is defined as 'any area of intertidal or subtidal terrain, together with its overlying water and associated flora, fauna, historical and cultural features which has been reserved by law or other effective means to protect part or all of the enclosed environment.'<sup>11</sup> In Northern Ireland there are 5 types of MPA's designations, SAC, SPA, ASSI, Ramsar Sites, Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ) and OSPAR MPAs.
    - The Marine (Northern Ireland) Act 2013 allows for the creation of MCZ's to protect and conserve important species of marine wildlife, habitats, geology and geomorphology. Currently the DoE is consulting on proposals for MCZ's in the Northern Ireland inshore region (out to 12 nautical miles). The closest pMCZ to Belfast is the Outer Belfast Lough.
  - **Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)** is a designation in recognition of areas of national importance as their landscapes possess a distinctive character and landscape

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.doeni.gov.uk/articles/marine-protected-areas>

features of high scenic value. The purpose of this designation is to protect and enhance the qualities of these areas for environmental fulfilment, outdoor recreation and public enjoyment. Management of these areas falls upon landowners, public bodies and voluntary bodies. Appendix 5: Landscape Designations Map shows the location of the Lagan Valley AONB.

- 4.51 The Lagan Valley AONB** was designated in 1965 and most of which falls within the Lagan Valley Regional Park. It is the only AONB in the Belfast City Council Area. The Lagan Valley (LVRP) AONB is designated under the Amenity Lands Act (NI) 1965. The legislation under which the LVRP AONB was designated has since been superseded by the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (NI) Order 1985 (as amended), however Lagan Valley AONB is yet to be reviewed or designated under this legislation.
- 4.52** The Lagan Valley Regional Park is a valuable asset for the people of Belfast. It has an integral position adjacent to Belfast and is a huge recreational resource covering 2116 hectares and stretching for 13 miles along the River Lagan from Belfast City to Lisburn City. Its location is situated partly within the Belfast and Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council areas.
- 4.53** The characteristic features of the Lagan Valley AONB include riverbank scenery, diverse biodiversity, meadows, woodland and amenity parklands. Alongside the natural environmental assets of this area, it is also rich in diverse heritage including its contribution to the development of Belfast through its cultural and industrial heritage through linen production. Containing impressive monuments of local importance including the Giant's Ring, a designated state care monument and an ASAI. The area became an attractive location for the early industrialists of Belfast whose successors built large houses and create the distinctive planted demesnes.
- 4.54** Over recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the conservation, recreation and tourism potential of the river, towpath and canal. There have been improvements in the water quality of the River Lagan over the years and water activities, such as angling, canoeing, rowing and motor boating are becoming a regular feature of the river.
- 4.55** In April 2015, under the provisions of Local Government Reform, Belfast City Council assumed responsibilities for the management and maintenance of the River Lagan from Lagan Weir to its new administrative boundary at Edenderry. The Council developed 'Back to the River' strategy to set out its management and development of this riverine corridor as an environmental and community resource that can help to drive economic and social regeneration of the city and its rural hinterland.
- 4.56** It sets out the vision for the area:
- (for the inner city part of the corridor) the waterfront will become a fully integrated part of an expanded city centre
  - development on the east bank from Albert Bridge to Odyssey that will create a vibrant waterfront on both sides of the river and will enhance linkage from the city centre to Titanic Quarter and to inner East Belfast
  - a vibrant waterfront as further residential, leisure, hotel and restaurant uses bring more activity to the area
  - enhanced linkage across the river through the provision of pedestrian bridges
  - greater recreational use of the river itself especially in the area from Abercorn Basin to the Lagan Gateway as port activities move downstream
  - the reopening of the Lagan for navigation upstream of the Stranmillis Weir
  - One of the catalyst projects identified in the Back to the River Study is the Lagan Gateway at Stranmillis.

- 4.57** Linked to the Lagan Valley ANOB, the **Lagan Valley Regional Park Strategy** seeks to protect and, where possible, enhance the natural and man-made heritage of the Park and the conservation of its essential character and for that part within Belfast City Council area the planning actions are:
- specific additional policy for the control of development (Policy COU 12: Part 4) within the urban parts of the park to balance the presumption to approve, associated with urban development, with the need to protect and enhance the Park's character in an environmentally selective manner, and to resist pressure from inappropriate development;
  - specific additional policy for the control of development (Policy COU 10: Part 4) outside the urban parts of the Park particularly to ensure the conservation of its high quality landscapes;
  - designation of six nodes and a specific policy (Policy COU 11: Coast Section Part 4) for control of development within these, to focus the opportunity for sympathetic recreational, tourist related and educational related facilities in appropriate locations within the Park, based on existing activities;
  - additional protection of natural environment and heritage features by designation of two Local Landscape Policy areas and designation of seven Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance, to conserve and enhance the ecological richness of the Park (see section on Outer Belfast City); and
  - additional protection of build environment features by designation of one Area of Townscape Character and two Historic Parks, Gardens and Demesnes to conserve the Park's man-made heritage and promote its wider public appreciation (see section on Outer Belfast City).

## **Earth Science Interests and Assets**

- 4.58** Includes geology and geomorphology and is defined by BMAP as “the rocks and landforms of Northern Ireland from the surface on which life has developed, they have a major influence in determining the biodiversity of regions and, more directly, the physical character of the landscape.”<sup>12</sup>
- 4.59** BMAP identifies the following areas which are of Earth Science Interest and assets:
- Bellevue
  - Carr's Glen
  - Crow Glen
  - Ballygomartin Sill
  - Collin Glen
  - Ballymiscaw

## **Public access to the countryside**

- 4.60** Public bodies own the vast majority or manage significant land holdings in the Belfast area. BMAP outlined two types of public access:
- Accesses associated with site based facilities such as forest parks and lakes that are general owned and managed by public bodies; and
  - Accesses intended to provide opportunities to explore wider areas of the open countryside

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<sup>12</sup> Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015 Countryside Assessment Vol 1

## Site based facilities - Lagan Valley Regional Park

- 4.61** Belvoir Park Forest covers 94 hectares along the south bank of the River Lagan and is situated in the boundary of Lagan Valley Regional Park. Alongside its value as a unique natural heritage asset, the Park contains archaeological sites. Currently, Department of Rural Development (DAERA) manage the site.
- 4.62** Cavehill Country Park is managed by Belfast City Council and encompasses the heath and moorland above Cavehill, the meadows and the Milewater streams at Carr's Glen linear park, the woodlands at Hazelwood and the Belfast Castle Estate. Rich in biodiversity, the Park also offers panoramic views as well as archaeological sites of interest include the remnants of an old mill at the Milewater Stream.
- 4.63** Colin Glen Forest Park is managed on behalf of DoE by the Colin Glen Trust. Colin Glen Forest Park offers a 'countryside experience' close to the city limits. Describes as 'Belfast's Green Lung', the Park was awarded a Green Flag Award – a national benchmark for quality parks and green spaces.
- 4.64** The Park offers a range of outdoor activities including golfing, archery, gymnasium, a high ropes course (funded by BCC), are just a few to mention. BCC has committed £2.5 million towards the Parks ambitious £6million masterplan which will see the creation of a new visitors' and outdoor pursuits centre, camp sites and mountain bike trails with a view to achieve self-sufficiency as well as protect the forest.
- 4.65** Belfast Lough – the RSBP manages some parks of the Belfast Lough within the Belfast Harbour Estate including some mudflats, grasslands, lagoon and viewpoints as well as some land close to Belfast City Airport.

## Access to the open countryside

- 4.66** **Public Rights of Way (PROW)** is adequately defined where:
- The route has been used 'as of right' by the general public. Use of the route by expressed or implied permission of the owner e.g. employees, social visitors or tradesperson does not create a public right of way
  - The public's use of the route was open, so that the landowners knew or should have reasonable known about it and did nothing to stop it.
  - Use continued, without interruption, for a sufficient person to imply that the landowners intended to dedicate it as a public right of way
  - The route connects two public places or places to which the public regularly and legitimately resort e.g. public roads, other public rights of way, a church, the seashore etc."<sup>13</sup>
- 4.67** PROWs are created through the 'Access to the Countryside (Northern Ireland) Order 1983. Under this order, Councils have a duty "to assert, protect and keep open and free from obstruction or encroachment any public right of way, and compile and preserve maps and other records of public rights of way in their district". In cases where public rights of way are disputed, Council have a duty to investigate the claims and gather evidence to reach an informed decision over the existence of the disputed public right of way. In Belfast, the following areas are asserted as PROWs:
- Chichester Park South – Salisbury Avenue

<sup>13</sup> Extract from "Rights of Way, A Guide to the Status Investigate Procedure". Environment and Heritage Service. Following the Access to the Countryside (NI) Order 1983.



- 22-24 Hillside Drive & Stranmillis Road
- Giants Ring
- Castledona Gardens to Church Road
- Castledone Rise/Gardens to Leadhill Park
- Castlemore Park to Castlemore Avenue
- Milltown Road to Lock Keepers Cottage
- APROW from Upper Knockbreda Road to Castledona Rise
- Upper Knockbreda Road to Castledona Park
- Gilnahirk Road (Between Property No. 83/85) – Mill Gate

**4.68** The **Ulster Way**, Northern Ireland’s only long distance walking route passes through the urban fringes of Belfast and onto the open moorland of the Antrim Plateau.

**4.69** The **National Cycle Network** was established to encourage cycling and bike touring throughout the UK. The NCN, a millennium project, provides a comprehensive network of safe and attractive cycling routes developed by the charity Sustrans. There are 10 UK National Routes, Route 9 is the Belfast to Newry route with the goal of extending this route to Dublin. There are over 1000 miles of the national cycle network across Northern Ireland, of which \*\*\* miles are located in Belfast. There are 3 types of cycle networks available in Belfast:

**4.70** National Routes

- Route 99: Comber Greenway provides an 8 mile traffic free walking and cycling route connecting East Belfast, Dundonald and Comber
- Route 9 & 93: The Lagan and Lough Cycle Way is a 21 mile which is mostly traffic free and walking route linking Lisburn, Belfast and Newtownabbey.

**4.71** Urban Maps

- Belfast by Bike: a route map of cycling around the city

**4.72** Long Distance Route Maps

- Belfast to Ballyshannon encompasses National Routes 9, 91, 92 and 95 is a 242mile routes from Belfast Lough to Donegal Coast which takes in the Sperrins, Fermanagh Lakes, parts of Leitrim to the picturesque coast of Donegal.

## **Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015**

**4.73** The **Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015** contained a Countryside and Coast Strategy, which aims “to conserve or enhance the rural landscape, ensure the protection of the metropolitan setting; and protect the Coastal Area”. Within the BMA, landscapes which are particularly sensitive because of their quality, or which need particular protection because of their location and the pressures for development on them, are afforded special protection by additional policies and designations in the Plan. These designations within BMAP 2015 include the following:

- Rural Landscape Wedges
- BMA Coastal Area
- Areas of High Scenic Value
- Belfast Hills Access Points
- Lagan Valley Regional Park

**4.74** In addition to these rural landscape designations and policies within BMAP 2015 there are also Urban Landscape Wedges and Local Landscape Policy Areas (LLPAs). Appendix 5: Landscape Designations Map visually shows the location of these designations.

### **Rural Landscape Wedges**

**4.75** 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.

**4.76** Appendix 5: Landscape Designations Map shows the four 'Rural Landscape Wedges' within the Belfast City Council area:

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

**4.77** 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.

**4.78** 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**

**4.79** 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.

**4.80** Policy COU 3 - *BMA Coastal Area* 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

- 4.81** Areas of High Scenic Value (AOHSV) 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 Areas of High Scenic Value.
- 4.82** Any assessment of quality and character in the Area of High Scenic Value 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.
- 4.83** There are portions of three AOHSV in Belfast which can be viewed in Appendix 5: Landscape Designations Map:
- 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%))
- 4.84** A Landscape Analysis must accompany development proposals in these areas to indicate the likely effects of the proposal on the landscape.

## Belfast Hills

- 4.85** The Belfast Hills area takes in Carnmoney Hill and Cave Hill to the north and Colin Glen, Divis and Black Mountain and Slievenacloy to the west. The operational boundary encompasses approximately 4,400 hectares (11,000 acres)<sup>14</sup>.
- 4.86** National Trust acquired and have managed approximately 600 hectares<sup>15</sup> of land including Divis Mountain, Black Mountain and Altigarron since 2004 and opened the area to the public after 50 years of closure. The area was owned by the Ministry of Defence from 1954 who built a communication centre at the top of the mountain which was used during the Cold War and the Troubles.
- 4.87** The Belfast Hills frame the Cities of Belfast and Lisburn to the north and west. The area that relates to the Belfast Hills is identified in Appendix 2 Landscape Designations. This represents the area identified by the Belfast Hills Feasibility and Options Study (1998). A broad representative forum of interests and stakeholders work within a framework for the sustainable development of the Hills. Staff have been appointed to work towards conserving, protecting and enhancing the natural and built heritage providing opportunities for responsible countryside enjoyment, and to contribute to the quality of life for the residents and adjoining communities.
- 4.88** The Hills are important for their landscape, natural and man-made heritage, visual amenity and as a resource for recreation, education and tourism. They are regarded as one of Northern Ireland’s finest natural assets, characterised by an abundance of wildlife and

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<sup>14</sup> <http://belfasthills.org/about-us/operational-area/>

<sup>15</sup> <http://biodiversityni.com/divis-mountain>

significant archaeological features, it is vital that this backdrop is protected from inappropriate development.

- 4.89** The Belfast Hills contain five main types of landscape, providing a variety of scenery and vegetation. The plateau/hill top has large areas of semi-natural grassland and moorland. The escarpment contains steep slopes and cliffs overlooking Belfast and the Lagan Valley. The lower escarpment has medium slopes and is characterised by small fields and mature hedgerows. The western slopes are gentler and here there are farms of medium-size, with fields surrounded by strong hedgerows. The fifth landscape consists of the river valleys on the eastern side of the hills forming corridors between the plateau and the lower end of the urban area.
- 4.90** This rich historic landscape, its natural diversity and its scenic attractions, makes the Belfast Hills a valuable resource for recreation and an area worth conserving. The Belfast Hills have suffered a substantial degree of degradation over the years. There are obvious signs of neglect and loss of field boundaries giving the area an untidy character. There is evidence of fly tipping along some of the local roads and in some derelict quarries.
- 4.91** The three main issues affecting the Belfast Hills are land use, conservation and recreation. Agriculture is the major land use within the Belfast Hills. Some of the land is used for hill farming and is of marginal economic value, with evidence of neglect such as the abandonment of farmhouses and buildings and the degradation of field boundaries. The western portion of the hills contains land of much higher agricultural potential.
- 4.92** For over a century the Belfast Hills have been a source of materials for the growth and development of Belfast. Since the 1960's the increased scale and intensity of quarrying operations and the diversity of their product has caused significant environmental impacts and public concern.
- 4.93** The hills have attracted a considerable amount of landfill activity as a result of the proximity of numerous inactive quarries and a continuous supply of waste materials from the city. Planning permission has been granted for some of this disposal, however recently there has been a significant increase in the incidence of unauthorised disposal in old quarries, by the roadside and on agricultural land. This can cause a threat to surface and ground water.
- 4.94** A very small proportion of the land in the Belfast Hills is wooded. This is mainly accounted for by the elevation and exposure of the main plateau and by man's utilisation of the hills. The Belfast Hills have an important concentration of unimproved grassland, with one area having been designated an Area of Special Scientific Interest because of the richness of the bio-diversity. The historic landscape of the hills contains many distinctive heritage features, which show how it has been settled and used in the past and these elements must be protected.
- 4.95** The Belfast Hills provide a great resource for outdoor recreational activities within easy reach of a large urban population. Walking to appreciate the countryside and the views is particularly popular and the hills provide opportunities for many types of informal recreation. Formal attractions include Colin Glen, Cave Hill Country Park, the Belfast Castle Estate and Belfast Zoo, and there may be future opportunities to provide additional sensitive access to the hills.
- 4.96** **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”.

- 4.97** 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 on the quality or character of the landscape.
- 4.98** There are sixteen access points to the Belfast Hills which are shown on Appendix 5: Landscape Designations Map. BMAP 2015 Countryside Assessment provided a description of the Belfast Hills Access points:

**Colin Glen, Glen Road (Map No.17 - Ref. CA 04/01)**

The access point to Colin Glen Linear Park and Belfast Hills is a well-established and popular access point, taking the form of a path. Signage, seating, litterbins, lighting and environmental improvement works would be appropriate.

**Upper Springfield Road (Map No.17 - Ref. CA 04/02)**

The access point is located adjacent to the St. Mary’s Christian Brothers’ Grammar School access road on the Upper Springfield Road. Signage, seating, litterbins, lighting and environmental improvement works would be appropriate.

**Whiterock Road (Map No.17 - Ref. CA 04/03)**

The access point is located adjacent to the housing at Dermot Hill Parade on the Whiterock Road. Signage, litterbins, lighting, small-scale car parking and environmental improvement works would be appropriate.

**Ballygomartin Road (Map No.17 - Ref. CA 04/04)**

The access point is located adjacent to the Ballygomartin Reservoir, which is owned by the Water Service. Signage, litterbins, seating and small-scale car parking would be appropriate.

**Lyndhurst View Park (Map No.17 -Ref. CA 04/05)**

The access point is located on the periphery of the Lyndhurst housing development. Access to the hills is via a gate to an overgrown path, which passes through a field. Signage, seating, litterbins, lighting and small-scale car parking would be appropriate.

**Glencairn Road (Map No.17 - Ref. CA 04/06)**

The access point is already established, with easy access for pedestrians. Signage, seating, litterbins, lighting and environmental improvement works would be appropriate.

**Mill Avenue (Map No.17 - Ref. CA 04/07)**

The access point is located at an established laneway adjacent to existing and new housing, and provides access directly into the Belfast Hills. Signage, seating, litterbins, lighting and environmental improvement works would be appropriate, while car parking is possible along Mill Avenue.

**Horseshoe Bend, Crumlin Road (Map No.17 - Ref. CA 04/08)**

This access point is adjacent to the entrance to a reservoir and is an established but little known access point into the Belfast Hills. Seating, litterbins, lighting and environmental improvement works would be appropriate.

**Carr’s Glen, Ballysillan Road (Map No.17 - Ref. CA 04/09)**

This access point is already a well-established entrance point to the Belfast Hills, and is adjacent to the Belfast Boys’ Model School on the Ballysillan Road. This access point is

already frequently used and signage is in place. Litter bins and toilet facilities would be appropriate.

**Upper Cavehill Road (Map No.17 - Ref. CA 04/10)**

This access point is already a well-established entrance to the Cavehill Country Park that forms part of the Belfast Hills. The access point is well maintained with good signage and numerous pathways. Car parking is available on the Upper Cavehill Road.

**Downview Park West (Map No.17 -Ref. CA 04/11)**

This access point is the main entrance into Belfast Castle and its grounds, which form a section of the Belfast Hills. There are established walkways and trails, with parking and signage provided.

**Antrim Road (Map No.17 - Ref. CA 04/12)**

This access point is a well-established entry point for the Cavehill Country Park, with easy access for pedestrians and good signage.

**Belfast Zoo, Antrim Road (Map No.17 - Ref. CA 04/13)**

This access point is adjacent to the entrance to Belfast Zoo and is an established access point to the Cavehill Country Park. Signage, walkways and parking facilities are already provided.

**Lagmore Dam (Map No.17 - Ref. LN 04/01)**

This proposed access point is adjacent to a disused dam (which has now been filled in) and takes the form of a grassy pathway, which is easily accessed by pedestrians and provides direct access into the Belfast Hills. Signage, seating, litterbins, lighting and small-scale car parking would be appropriate.

**Lagmore Road (Map No.17 - Ref. LN 04/02)**

This access point consists of a path providing a gateway into the Belfast Hills. The path is fairly flat but gets steeper towards the Colinglen Road. Signage, seating, litterbins, lighting and environmental improvement works would be appropriate.

**Colinwell Road (Map No.17 - Ref. LN 04/03)**

This access point is located adjacent to the Colinwell Road and the area is characterised by dense tree and shrub coverage. Signage, litterbins, lighting and environmental improvement works would be appropriate.

- 4.99** There are sixteen access points to the Belfast Hills which are shown on Appendix 5: Landscape Designations Map. The locations of the Belfast Hills access points are shown in Appendix 6.

**Lagan Valley Regional Park**

- 4.100** The Lagan Valley Regional Park is the only Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (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 Parks amenity landscapes are within the Historic Park, 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. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that the landscape of the Park and the character of its constituent areas are not damaged by inappropriate development.

- 4.101** 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.

### **Urban Landscape Wedges**

- 4.102** Urban Landscape Wedges are open areas that are designated to separate localities within the Metropolitan Urban Area. They have a significant role in helping to define and retain the identities and character of the component parts of the urban area and preventing the merging of different city communities. Their open character can break up the visual impact of the housing mass in the area and offer additional benefits to local residents by enhancing amenity and by providing opportunities for informal and formal recreational use and provision of linkages to walking and cycling networks.
- 4.103** These designations should be protected from built development to fulfil their amenity, recreational and bio-diversity functions. Where an outdoor recreation proposal is considered appropriate within an Urban Wedge, it shall respect the open nature of the landscape and preserve and enhance amenity and bio-diversity value, with any buildings ancillary to the open space and recreation use. Any buildings must be suitably integrated, small in scale, have due regard to both long and short range views into the site and have no detrimental impact on the integrity of the wedge.
- 4.104** The designated Urban Landscape Wedges can be viewed in Appendix 5: Landscape Designation Map:
- Bellevue/Fortwilliam - between North Belfast and the Glengormley area in Newtownabbey
  - Milltown - between Whiterock, St.James area and Lower Andersonstown, West Belfast
  - Colin Glen - between Suffolk, West Belfast and Dunmurry/Colin area, Lisburn
  - Lagmore Glen - between Belfast and Metropolitan Lisburn
  - Dundonald (Castlereagh) between Dundonald and the boundary of Knock, East Belfast. A portion of this Urban Landscape Wedge at Knock Golf Course and Dundonald Cemetery lies within Belfast City Council area (0.61 of 28.85ha (2.1%)).

### **Local Landscape Policy Areas (LLPAs)**

- 4.105** LLPAs are designated to help protect those areas within and/or adjoining settlements which are considered to be of greatest amenity value, landscape quality or local significance and are therefore worthy of protection from undesirable or damaging development. They include:
- Archaeological sites and monuments and their surroundings;
  - Listed and other locally important buildings and their surroundings;
  - River banks and shore lines and associated public access;
  - Attractive vistas, localised hills and other areas of local amenity importance; and
  - Areas of local nature conservation importance, including areas of woodland and important tree groups.
- 4.106** There are 86 LLPAs designated in the Belfast Council area which are listed Appendix 7 and shown on Appendix 5: 'Landscape Designations Map'.

**4.107** LLPA's will be revisited and updated during the course of the plan process.

### **Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) and Wildlife Refuges**

**4.108** LNRs can be provided by Councils under the powers conferred to them under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985. They can provide a platform for education and research as well as for public information services and recreational uses.

**4.109** The DoE can provide a Wildlife Refuge under the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 (as amended) which prohibits the intentional and reckless killing, taking, injuring or disturbance of all wild birds and of certain animals and any person who knowingly causes harm. It also includes the intentional reckless destruction, uprooting or picking of certain wild plants.

**4.110** BMAP has outlined 3 LNR's within the Belfast City Council area which can be viewed in Appendix 4: Natural Heritage Designations Map:

- **Ballyaghagan** comprises of species rich hay meadows and an area of upland blanket bog. Some of the fields have rock outcrops with local calcareous species present, acid flushes and more neutral taller grassland swards. Plants found within the acid areas include Common Butterwort and Bogbean.
- **Hazelwood** - Hazel woodland and scrub with good examples of multi stemmed hazel. The woodland contains a diverse ground flora carpet of woodland herbs.
- **Bog Meadows.** The 19 ha (47 acre) Bog Meadows nature reserve, managed by the Ulster Wildlife Trust, lies close to the heart of Belfast City adjacent to the M1, Milltown Cemetery and St. Louise's College. It consists of a variety of habitats including areas of open water, swamp, marshland and wet grassland.

Bog Meadows is also an important site for both breeding and overwintering birds including Reed bunting, Sedge warbler, Skylark, Grasshopper warbler, Lapwing and Snipe. The open water and ditches are ideal habitat for plants such as branched bur-reed, common and ivy-leaved duckweed, water starwort, watercress, fool's watercress and brooklime. Horsetail, reedmace, reed canary-grass, floating sweet-grass, soft rush, sharp-flowered rush, brown sedge, marsh marigold, wild angelica, lesser spearwort, water mint, tufted hair-grass, marsh willowherb, marsh bedstraw, marsh ragwort and celery-leaved buttercup are found in the marshy areas. In the drier grassland cuckoo flower, star, glaucous and hairy sedges, knap weed, common spotted orchid, meadowsweet, cat's-ear, autumn hawkbit, meadow vetchling, bird's-foot trefoil, ragged robin, meadow buttercup, common sorrel and ragwort can be found.<sup>16</sup>

- **Lagan Meadows** is 49 hectares in size and historically was the source of Belfast's first piped water supply over 200 years ago. The spring at Lester's Dam, which provided the water, still runs and gives rise to the wetlands and marsh for which Lagan Meadows is best known. But this attractive 49 hectare site also contains grazed pasture, meadow and woodland. Separated from the main park by the former Lagan canal is Moreland's Meadow, where mature veteran oaks and cedars dominate the grazed pasture. The following species can be viewed:
  - Wetland birds, including snipe, woodcock, grasshopper warbler, sedge warbler and reed bunting.
  - Woodland birds, including song thrush, dunnock, wren and tree creeper.

<sup>16</sup> BMAP 2015



- Amphibians, frogs spawning in early spring. Insects including banded demoiselle, blue-tailed and azure damselfly, orange-tip, ringlet and cryptic wood white butterfly.
- Trees including oak, ash, willow, alder and hawthorn.
- Wildflowers, including common spotted orchid, lady's smock, yellow flag, ragged robin and devil's bit scabious.<sup>17</sup>

**4.111** On 7th June 2016, the Lagan Meadows was proposed as a Candidate Quiet Area to the Council's People and Communities Committee. The proposal is currently under consideration by DAERA. This designation was based upon the following qualifying criteria; publicly available park and open space within an agglomeration; a noise level less than or equal to 55 dB Lden; and a minimum area of 5 hectares. The council has indicated however, that it will engage with DAERA in order to develop more appropriate Quiet Area screening criteria and supporting guidance to be employed in the subsequent identification, designation and management of Quiet Areas. The next round of Quiet Area designations by DAERA is due to commence in summer 2017.

### **Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance (SLNCIs)**

**4.112** Alongside the international, national and local designations for natural heritage assets, the identification of local designations is identified as part of the Countryside Assessment of the development plan process. SLNCIs are established under the Wildlife (NI) Order 1995 and Local Nature Reserves that may be established by local Councils under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (NI) Order 1985. SLNCIs are managed by public agencies or voluntary bodies and are identified by their local nature importance on the basis of their flora, fauna or scientific interest.

**4.113** In the Belfast City Council area, there are 60 SLNCIs (7 of which are identified as Geodiversity importance) designated in accordance with PPS 2: Natural Heritage and are listed in Appendix 8. Appendix 9 maps the location of the SLNCI's including Geodiversity SLNCIs.

**4.114** Note that SLNCI's will be revisited as part of the plan process.

### **Trees and Woodland**

**4.115** Urban trees are an essential multifaceted resource, providing a vast array of benefits for people, local communities and the cityscape. Trees have a high amenity value and make a positive contribution to the social, cultural and physical environment. Trees can help to define an area and create a sense of place such as Cyprus Avenue and contribute to the 13 conservation areas in Belfast. Trees harbour wildlife habitats and contribute to the health and wellbeing of people.

**4.116** Trees absorb gases associated with air pollution such as carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) which is known to cause respiratory problems. Also, providing a natural flood defence, trees can help to conserve ground water as well as create a noise buffer.

**4.117** Accepting the maxim, that people feel better in green, leafy surroundings, there is a growing evidence to show that people find well-appointed green environments more relaxing thus reducing stress levels, improving mental wellbeing and contributing to a better quality of life. The Department of Regional Development over recent years have carried out a tree planting scheme across some of the most multiply deprived arterial routes in the city.

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<sup>17</sup> Text taken from [www.biodiversityni.com/lagan-meadows-local-nature-reserve](http://www.biodiversityni.com/lagan-meadows-local-nature-reserve)

**4.118** There are three ways in which the Planning system can safeguard the conservation of trees:

- **Tree Preservation Orders:** The Council has a duty to protect trees under Section 122 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) are designated to trees (either singularly or in a group) which are of high amenity or historic value or, for its rarity. There are over 160 TPOs in Belfast. Appendix 10 shows the location of TPOs in Belfast.
- **Trees in Conservation Areas:** Trees make an important contribution to the appearance and character of a conservation area. Trees situated in conservation areas are treated with the same status of singular trees subject to a TPO.
- **Trees protected by a retention condition** is a stipulation applied to planning permission. The purpose of a retention condition for trees is to ensure trees are protected and not damaged during construction; and/or trees that offer a high amenity impact are retained to embed the new construction into the natural environment.

**4.119** Appendix 10 shows the location of TPO's in Belfast including the location of Conservation Areas

## 5.0 Key Assessments for a Local Development Plan

**5.1** As part of the LDP preparation, the Council is also required to carry out a number of assessments on the emerging development plan document proposals. These include:

- **Sustainability Appraisal (SA)** – The Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, requires Council, under statutory duty, to undertake a SA. SA is a tool for appraising policies to ensure they reflect sustainable development objectives (that is social, environmental and economic factors). This is required in relation to both development plan documents and will involve consultation on the scope of the appraisal alongside the Preferred Options Papers (POP) consultation.
- **Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)** – The European Directive 2001/42/EC for SEA is transposed into Northern Ireland law by the 'Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (NI) 2004 (EAPP (NI) 2004). The SEA is a procedure that contributes to the integration of environmental considerations in the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes. It will be undertaken in relation to both development plan documents as an integral part of the SA process above. Prior to completing an SEA, an initial screening exercise will be undertaken at the POP stage to determine if the LDP requires a full SEA. The SEA integrates environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans with the aim of protecting the environment and promoting sustainable development.
- **Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA)** The EU Habitats Directive (93/43/EEC) requires a competent authority (Council) to undertake a Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) to consider the potential impact of the LDP policies and proposals on European nature conservation sites. The HRA process consists of 4 stages:
  - Stage 1- Screening/Test of likely significance: which identifies likely impacts on Natura 2000 sites of a plan or project
  - Stage 2- Appropriate Assessment: considers the potential impacts on the structure and function as well as the conservation objectives of the Natura 2000 sites. An assessment of potential mitigation measures will be presented to reduce potential adverse impacts
  - Stage 3- Assessment of Alternative Solutions
  - Stage 4- Imperative reasons of overwhelming public interest

- 5.2** Prior to completing an HRA, an initial screening exercise will be undertaken at the POP stage to determine if the LDP requires a full HRA.
- 5.3** The **Shared Environmental Services (SES)** team that has been set up in Mid and East Antrim Council which provides support to Council on a range of specialist functions including the HRA on planning applications and during the preparation of the LDP to assess and advise on the impacts of European Sites. This function will support Council to ensure the legal requirements of these habitats/sites are fully met in accordance to the Habitats Directive and other Environmental Legislation and to reduce the risk of challenge to planning decisions, development plans and policies.

## **6.0 Development Management Obligations**

### **Environmental Liability Directive and Regulations<sup>18</sup>**

- 6.1** Establishes a framework for environmental liability based on the “polluter pays” principle, with a view to preventing and remedying environmental damage.<sup>19</sup>

### **Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)**

- 6.2** Under the Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (NI) 2012, an assessment of environmental considerations is obligatory for projects/plans. Once information is gathered on the potential environment effects, it is assessed by Council and is taken into account when reaching the final decision on the planning outcome.

## **7.0 Issues and Approaches**

- 7.1** The natural heritage contributes significantly to the quality of life and economy of Belfast. It makes the city an attractive place to live and visit. The natural heritage is one of the City’s most valuable assets. All reasonable steps should be taken to ensure that development conserves and enhances the quality of the natural heritage, which must be balanced against the need to facilitate sustainable economic growth. In this context ‘conserve and enhance’ will allow for appropriate development in line with the principles of sustainability, which are to balance environmental, economic and social needs. Appropriate development will need to minimise impacts, conserve and enhance valued landscapes, and significant biodiversity sites. To mitigate the potential impact of new developments there should be a requirement to provide where possible net gains in biodiversity whilst protecting or enhancing green and blue infrastructure provision in recognition of its wide ranging benefits.
- 7.2** Belfast Lough is an internationally protected RAMSAR site of the highest quality. It is part of a network of important European sites designated under the European Union Habitats and Birds Directives. The Lough is a designated Special Protection Area (SPA), a proposed Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and is an Area of Special Scientific Interest.
- 7.3** The city has four Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) which form a network of sites that provide protection for their remarkable bio-diversity and geo-diversity; these are the Inner Belfast Lough, Craigtantlet Woods, Belvoir Estate, and Bellevue.
- 7.4** The Lagan Valley, focussed on the course of the River Lagan and the abandoned Lagan Canal, is a significant natural heritage area and valuable recreational asset that attracts over a 1 million visitors a year for the City. It is a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

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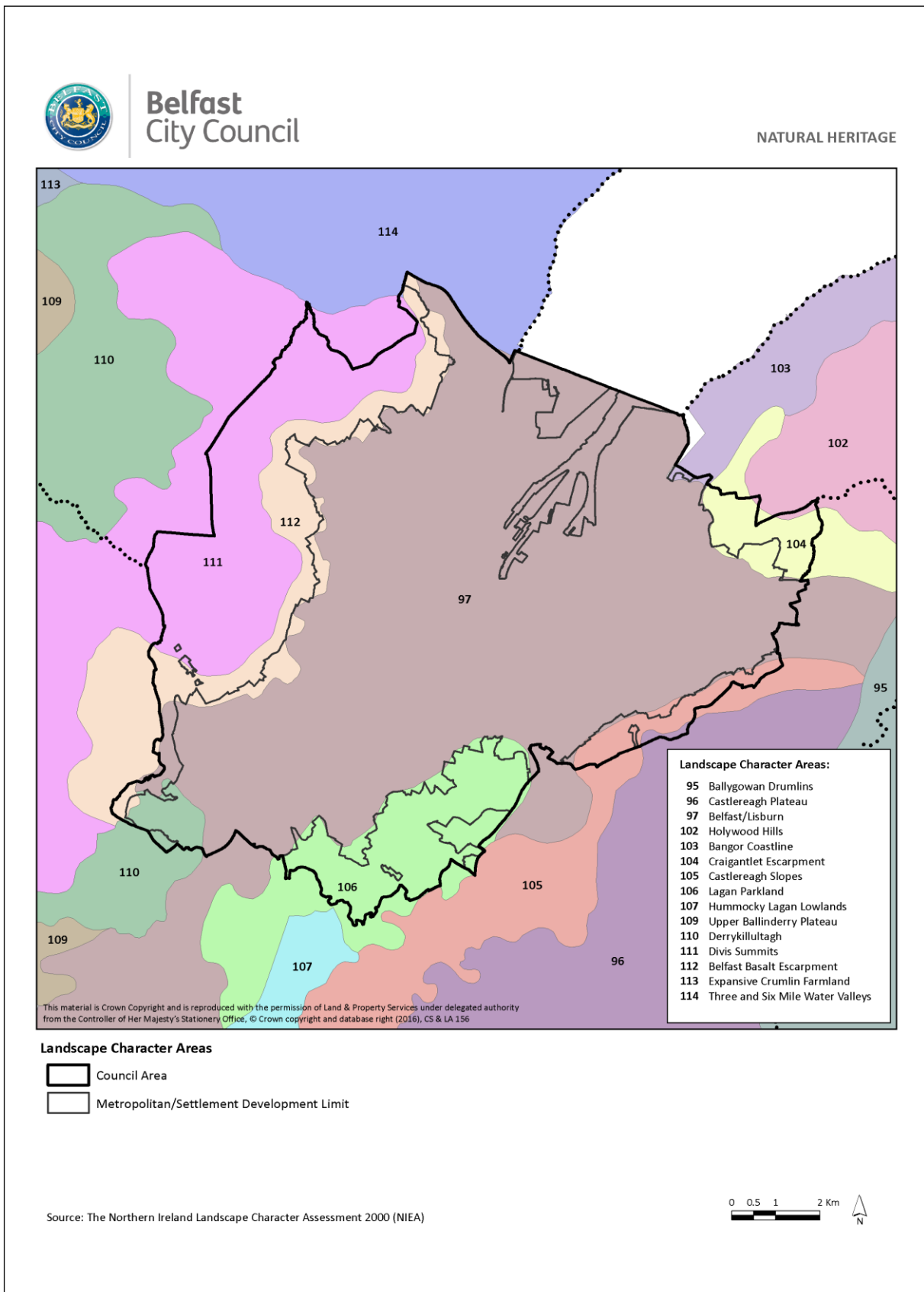
<sup>18</sup> The Environmental Liability (Prevention and Remediation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009

<sup>19</sup> Planning Policy Statement 2: Natural Heritage July 2013

- 7.5** The quality of these highly valuable environmental resources will be safeguarded as part of the LDP. This will be achieved primarily by maintaining the water quality in the Estuaries, as required under the Water Framework Directive, which will in turn safeguard the important habitats and species which make up the European sites.
- 7.6** Current approach to support biodiversity has been to designate sites to protect habitats and species. This has provided refuges where threatened species can survive, but this will not by itself stop biodiversity loss. Designated sites are often highly vulnerable and populations within them are often too small to be viable. An integrated approach is required to create ecological networks such as a green and blue infrastructure system, which can help to sustain ecosystems that will be resilient to change.
- 7.7** In order to avoid adverse effects on the integrity of the Natural Heritage sites, development at certain locations may need to provide adequate mitigation measures in order to avoid, cancel or reduce the effects on: the natural/semi natural environment, aquatic environment; the marine environment; the coast; and/or mobile species. Similar measures may also need to be provided to mitigate the effects upon these sites from disturbance from air pollution, noise and lighting.
- 7.8 Issues**
- Northern Ireland has a unique natural resource with its diverse ecosystems and biodiversity assets propound the need to retain its sensitive landscape character
  - Ecological networks, including the protection of priority species, are needed to maintain environmental process and help to conserve and enhance biodiversity
  - Establish any changes to the existing environmental assets outlined and seek advice if any new or additional sites/assets should be added and how they can be managed/monitored such as international, national and local
  - Establish where there have been changes to the NIPS list, identify their locations and seek recommendations if any new additional species should be added
  - When developing the LDP, the natural heritage assets should be taken into account, including the cumulative effects of development is considered so to reduce harmful and adverse impacts and seek opportunities for enhancements of the features
  - Through the formulation of the LDP Council is responsible for the protection of the wider environment as a sustainable asset for all future generations
  - The precautionary principle is vital in plan making in particular when outlining proposed land use zonings, locations for development and settlement limits where it must take full account for implications on natural heritage features and landscape character. Through effective planning practices, the potential for adverse environmental impact can be minimised and enhancement features secured
  - Proactive habitat management and conservation management plans can ensure important features of the site are maintained or enhanced
  - The importance to protect and integrate natural heritage features when zoning sites is imperative for development through key sites requirements
  - Promotion of additional green and blue infrastructure will add value to the provision and enhancement of the City as well as its connection to open space and habitats in and around settlements
  - Greater emphasis on the protection of our trees and woodlands and their positive contribution to the social, cultural and physical environment benefits i.e. habitats, flood protection and amenity value
  - Development proposals should be sited and designed to include provision for the retention and integration of priority habitats to prevent their fragmentation and isolation

This information contained within this topic paper has been used to inform the next stage of the LDP process, the Preferred Options Paper.

# APPENDIX 1: MAP OF LOCAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENTS



## APPENDIX 2: LOCAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENTS – KEY CHARACTERISTICS

The Landscape Character Areas were prepared by Environmental Resources Management, commissioned by DoE and supported by Planning Service. Whilst the following LDA descriptions have been extracted from BMAP's Countryside Assessment, they do not represent formal policy of the DoE. This section contains a description of the LCAs that affect the Plan area and are taken directly from BMAP's Countryside Assessment:

### **Belfast/Lisburn (No. 97)**

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

Belfast's formal parks, such as Ormeau Park, the Botanic Gardens and Victoria Park and Lisburn's Wallace Park, provide welcome breathing space for the city centre but are relatively small in relation to the city as a whole. The Lagan Valley Regional Park is on a completely different scale. This and the other smaller river corridor parks, such as the Connswater, Lagmore and Collin Glen linear parks, have a more natural character and provide a valuable link between the urban areas and their wider landscape setting. The Laganside walkways now extend the footpath links along the Lagan right through to the city centre.

### **Craigtlet Escarpment (No. 104)**

The Craigtlet 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 visible.

### **Castlereagh Slopes (No 105)**

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 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 landscape.

### **Lagan Parkland (No. 106)**

An amenity parkland landscape set within the historic, designed landscapes of a series of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> 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 towpath. The Giant's Ring is a dramatic Neolithic site of national significance. It consists of a high circular earth bank enclosing a megalithic tomb on a flat site beside the River Lagan. The Park also contains a number of raths and two defensive mottes on the riverbank at Belvoir and Edenderry.

### **Derrykillultagh (no. 110)**

Rolling, relatively elevated farmland landscapes on the margins of the Antrim basalt plateau. 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. A network of straight roads follow the ridges and connect linear villages; most junctions are staggered cross-roads.

### **Divis Summits (No. 111)**

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 (No. 112)**

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 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 Belfast.



**APPENDIX 3: BELFAST PRIORITY SPECIES LIST 2015**

**Source:** <https://data.nbn.org.uk/Organisations/20>; National Museums Belfast

<b>Group</b>	<b>Latin Name</b>	<b>Taxon Common Name</b>
Bees	<i>Andrena coitana</i>	Bee
Bees	<i>Andrena denticulata</i>	Bee
Bees	<i>Andrena nigroaenea</i>	Bee
Bees	<i>Bombus campestris</i>	Field Cuckoo Bee
Beetles	<i>Carabus clatratus</i>	a ground beetle
Beetles	<i>Cneorhinus plumbeus</i>	a weevil
Beetles	<i>Haliphus apicalis</i>	saltmarsh crawler water beetle
Beetles	<i>Hydraena nigrita</i>	black moss beetle
Beetles	<i>Hydrocyphon deflexicollis</i>	rockhopper beetle
Beetles	<i>Hydroporus morio</i>	quicksilver diver
Beetles	<i>Oreodytes davisii</i>	davis's river diver
Beetles	<i>Ptinus subpilosus</i>	a spider beetle
Birds	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	Arctic Skua
Birds	<i>Motacilla flava cinereocapilla</i>	Ashy-Headed Wagtail
Birds	<i>Tyto alba</i>	Barn Owl
Birds	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	Black-headed Gull
Birds	<i>Limosa</i>	Black-Tailed Godwit
Birds	<i>Gavia arctica</i>	Black-Throated Diver
Birds	<i>Pyrrhula</i>	Bullfinch
Birds	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>	Common Scoter
Birds	<i>Crex</i>	Corncrake
Birds	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	Cuckoo
Birds	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	Curlew
Birds	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	Dunlin
Birds	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	Fieldfare
Birds	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	Golden Eagle
Birds	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	Golden Plover
Birds	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	Goldeneye
Birds	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	Goshawk
Birds	<i>Locustella naevia</i>	Grasshopper Warbler
Birds	<i>Anser albifrons flavirostris</i>	Greenland White-fronted Goose
Birds	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	Hen Harrier
Birds	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	Herring Gull
Birds	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	House Sparrow
Birds	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	Knot
Birds	<i>Vanellus</i>	Lapwing
Birds	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	Linnet
Birds	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>	Little Tern
Birds	<i>Branta bernicla hrota</i>	Pale-Bellied Brent Goose
Birds	<i>Anas acuta</i>	Pintail
Birds	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	Pochard

Birds	<i>Lagopus</i>	Red Grouse
Birds	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Redshank
Birds	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	Redwing
Birds	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	Reed Bunting
Birds	<i>Turdus torquatus</i>	Ring Ouzel
Birds	<i>Sterna dougallii</i>	Roseate Tern
Birds	<i>Aythya marila</i>	Scaup
Birds	<i>Asio flammeus</i>	Short-Eared Owl
Birds	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	Shoveler
Birds	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	Skylark
Birds	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Song Thrush
Birds	<i>Puffinus griseus</i>	Sooty Shearwater
Birds	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	Spotted Flycatcher
Birds	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Starling
Birds	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	Tree Pipit
Birds	<i>Passer montanus</i>	Tree Sparrow
Birds	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	Tufted Duck
Birds	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	Turtle Dove
Birds	<i>Carduelis flavirostris</i>	Twite
Birds	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	Whimbrel
Birds	<i>Cygnus</i>	Whooper Swan
Birds	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>	Wood Warbler
Birds	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	Yellow Wagtail
Birds	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	Yellowhammer
Birds	<i>Motacilla flava flava</i>	Blue-Headed Wagtail
Birds	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Song Thrush
Birds	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	Dunnock
Birds	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	Snipe
Birds	<i>Sturnus vulgaris subsp. vulgaris</i>	Common Starling
Birds	<i>Apus apus</i>	Swift
Birds	<i>Lagopus lagopus</i>	Willow Ptarmigan
Birds	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	Herring Gull
Butterflies	<i>Hipparchia semele</i>	Grayling
Butterflies	<i>Eurodryas aurinia</i>	Marsh Fritillary
Butterflies	<i>Leptidea reali</i>	Real's Wood White
Butterflies	<i>Cupido minimus</i>	Small Blue
Butterflies	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>	Small Heath
Butterflies	<i>Leptidea juvernica</i>	Cryptic Wood White
Butterflies	<i>Argynnis aglaja</i>	Dark Green Fritillary
Butterflies	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>	Wall Brown
Butterflies	<i>Leptidea sinapis</i>	Wood White
Fish	<i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i>	River Lamprey
Fungi	<i>Trichoglossum walteri</i>	a fungus
Fungi	<i>Clavaria zollingeri</i>	Violet Coral
Fungi	<i>Hygrocybe lacmus</i>	Grey Waxcap
Fungi	<i>Entoloma bloxamii</i>	Big Blue Pinkgill

Fungi	<i>Microglossum olivaceum</i>	Olive Earthtongue
Lichens	<i>Collema dichotomum</i>	River Jelly Lichen
Liverworts	<i>Metzgeria pubescens</i>	Downy Veilwort
Liverworts	<i>Marsupella funckii</i>	Funck's Rustwort
Liverworts	<i>Cladopodiella francisci</i>	Holt Notchwort
Liverworts	<i>Cephaloziella rubella</i>	Red Threadwort
Mammals	<i>Lepus timidus hibernicus</i>	Irish Hare
Mammals	<i>Lutra lutra</i>	Otter
Mammals	<i>Martes martes</i>	Pine Marten
Mammals	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>	Red Squirrel
Mammals	<i>Erinaceus europaeus</i>	West European Hedgehog
Molluscs	<i>Limax cinereoniger</i>	Ash-Grey Slug
Molluscs	<i>Zenobiella subrufescens</i>	Brown Snail
Molluscs	<i>Arianta arbustorum</i>	Copse Snail
Molluscs	<i>Radix auricularia</i>	Ear Pond Snail
Molluscs	<i>Leiostryla anglica</i>	English Chrysalis Snail
Molluscs	<i>Zonitoides excavatus</i>	Hollowed Glass Snail
Molluscs	<i>Merdigera obscura</i>	Lesser Bulin
Molluscs	<i>Vertigo antivertigo</i>	Marsh Whorl Snail
Molluscs	<i>Aplexa hypnorum</i>	Moss Bladder Snail
Molluscs	<i>Acicula fusca</i>	Point Snail
Molluscs	<i>Anisus vorticulus</i>	Little Whirlpool Ram shorn
Molluscs	<i>Spermodea lamellata</i>	Plaited Snail
Molluscs	<i>Musculium lacustre</i>	Lake Orb Mussel
Mosses	<i>Campylopus subulatus</i>	Awl-leaved Swan-neck Moss
Mosses	<i>Brachydontium trichodes</i>	Bristle-leaf
Mosses	<i>Aulacomnium androgynum</i>	Bud-headed Groove-moss
Mosses	<i>Seligeria calcarea</i>	Chalk Rock-bristle
Mosses	<i>Rhabdoweisia fugax</i>	Dwarf Streak-moss
Mosses	<i>Bryum intermedium</i>	Many-seasoned Thread-moss
Mosses	<i>Orthotrichum sprucei</i>	Spruce's Bristle-moss
Mosses	<i>Bartramia ithyphylla</i>	Straight-leaved Apple-moss
Mosses	<i>Hamatocaulis vernicosus</i>	Varnished Hook-moss
Mosses	<i>Drepanocladus (Hamatocaulis) vernicosus</i>	Slender Green Feather-Moss
Moths	<i>Stilbia anomala</i>	Anomalous
Moths	<i>Ennomos quercinaria</i>	August Thorn
Moths	<i>Eugnorisma glareosa</i>	Autumnal Rustic
Moths	<i>Dasypolia templi</i>	Brindled Ochre
Moths	<i>Melanchra pisi</i>	Broom Moth
Moths	<i>Spilosoma luteum</i>	Buff Ermine
Moths	<i>Atethmia centrigo</i>	Centre-Barred Sallow
Moths	<i>Tyria jacobaeae</i>	Cinnabar
Moths	<i>Celaena leucostigma</i>	Crescent
Moths	<i>Blepharita adusta</i>	Dark Brocade
Moths	<i>Xanthorhoe ferrugata</i>	Dark-Barred Twin-Spot Carpet
Moths	<i>Graphiphora augur</i>	Double Dart

Moths	<i>Tholera decimalis</i>	Feathered Gothic
Moths	<i>Apamea remissa</i>	Dusky Brocade
Moths	<i>Agrochola helvola</i>	Flounced Chestnut
Moths	<i>Adscita statices</i>	Forester
Moths	<i>Epirrhoe galiata</i>	Galium Carpet
Moths	<i>Euxoa nigricans</i>	Garden Dart
Moths	<i>Arctia caja</i>	Garden Tiger
Moths	<i>Hepialus humuli</i>	Ghost Moth
Moths	<i>Perizoma albulata</i>	Grass Rivulet
Moths	<i>Allophyes oxyacanthae</i>	Green-Brindled Crescent
Moths	<i>Acronicta psi</i>	Grey Dagger
Moths	<i>Celaena haworthii</i>	Haworth's Minor
Moths	<i>Xestia agathina</i>	Heath Rustic
Moths	<i>Tholera cespitis</i>	Hedge Rustic
Moths	<i>Acronicta rumicis</i>	Knot Grass
Moths	<i>Chiasmia clathrata</i>	Latticed Heath
Moths	<i>Caradrina morpheus</i>	Mottled Rustic
Moths	<i>Amphipyra tragopoginis</i>	Mouse Moth
Moths	<i>Hemaris tityus</i>	Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth
Moths	<i>Orthonama vittata</i>	Oblique Carpet
Moths	<i>Orthosia gracilis</i>	Powdered Quaker
Moths	<i>Xanthorhoe decoloraria</i>	Red Carpet
Moths	<i>Mesoligia literosa</i>	Rosy Minor
Moths	<i>Hydraecia micacea</i>	Rosy Rustic
Moths	<i>Hoplodrina blanda</i>	Rustic
Moths	<i>Xanthia icteritia</i>	Sallow
Moths	<i>Scotopteryx chenopodiata</i>	Shaded Broad-Bar
Moths	<i>Mythimna comma</i>	Shoulder-Striped Wainscot
Moths	<i>Ecliptopera silaceata</i>	Small Phoenix
Moths	<i>Diarsia rubi</i>	Small Square-Spot
Moths	<i>Chesias legatella</i>	Streak
Moths	<i>Spilosoma lubricipeda</i>	White Ermine
Moths	<i>Parasemia plantaginis</i>	Wood Tiger
Moths	<i>Entephria caesiata</i>	Grey Mountain Carpet Moth
Reptile	<i>Zootoca vivipara</i>	Viviparous Lizard
Vascular Plants	<i>Frangula alnus</i>	Alder Buckthorn
Vascular Plants	<i>Scleranthus annuus</i>	Annual Knawel
Vascular Plants	<i>Picris echioides</i>	Bristly Oxtongue
Vascular Plants	<i>Anagallis minima</i>	Chaffweed
Vascular Plants	<i>Gentianella campestris</i>	Field Gentian
Vascular Plants	<i>Coeloglossum viride</i>	Frog Orchid
Vascular Plants	<i>Gnaphalium sylvaticum</i>	Heath Cudweed
Vascular Plants	<i>Pyrola media</i>	Intermediate Wintergreen
Vascular Plants	<i>Juniperus communis</i>	Juniper
Vascular Plants	<i>Platanthera bifolia</i>	Lesser Butterfly-Orchid
Vascular Plants	<i>Geranium pratense</i>	Meadow Crane's-Bill
Vascular Plants	<i>Adoxa moschatellina</i>	Moschatel

Vascular Plants	<i>Cryptogramma crispa</i>	Parsley Fern
Vascular Plants	<i>Fumaria purpurea</i>	Purple Ramping-Fumitory
Vascular Plants	<i>Teesdalia nudicaulis</i>	Shepherd's Cress
Vascular Plants	<i>Melampyrum sylvaticum</i>	Small Cow-Wheat
Vascular Plants	<i>Pseudorchis albida</i>	Small-White Orchid
Vascular Plants	<i>Hottonia palustris</i>	Water-Violet
Vascular Plants	<i>Monotropa hypopitys</i>	Yellow Bird's-Nest
Vascular Plants	<i>Euphrasia anglica</i>	Glandular Eyebright
Vascular Plants	<i>Ruppia maritima</i>	Beaked Tasselweed
Vascular Plants	<i>Salix myrsinifolia</i>	Dark-Leaved Willow
Vascular Plants	<i>Sorbus rupicola</i>	Rock Whitebeam

### Marine List

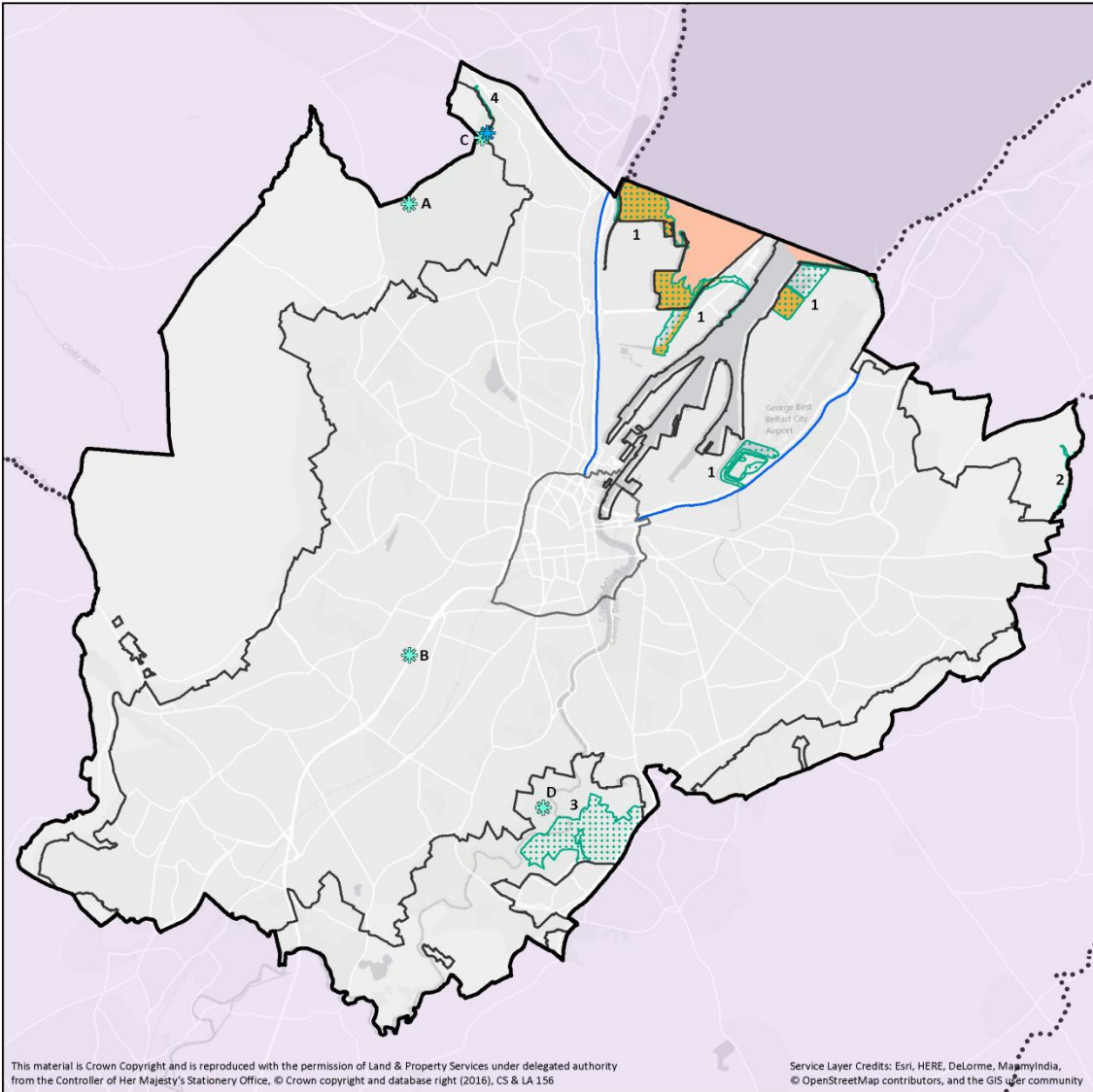
Mammals	<i>Halichoerus</i>	Grey Seal
Mammals	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>	Harbour Porpoise
Mammals	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>	Bottle-Nose Dolphin
Mammals	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	Common Seal
Fish	<i>Salmo trutta</i>	Brown Trout
Fish	<i>Anguilla anguilla</i>	European Eel
Fish	<i>Salmo salar</i>	Atlantic Salmon
Fish	<i>Scyliorhinus canicula</i>	Lesser Spotted Dogfish

APPENDIX 4: NATURAL HERITAGE DESIGNATIONS MAP



**Belfast City Council**

NATURAL HERITAGE



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**Natural Heritage Designations**

- Belfast Lough Ramsar site and Special Protection Area (SPA)
- Belfast Lough Open Water SPA/Proposed East Coast (NI) Marine SPA
- Area of Special Scientific Interest:
  - 1 Inner Belfast Lough (Part of)
  - 2 Craigantlet Woods (Part of)
  - 3 Belvoir
  - 4 Bellevue
- Hazelwood Area of Scientific Interest

- Local Nature Reserve:
  - A Ballyaghagan
  - B Bog Meadows
  - C Hazelwood
  - D Lagan Meadows
- Council Area
- Metropolitan/Settlement Development Limit
- Belfast City Centre
- Belfast Harbour Area

Source: Department of the Environment, Natural Heritage Datasets (Downloaded 12/02/16)



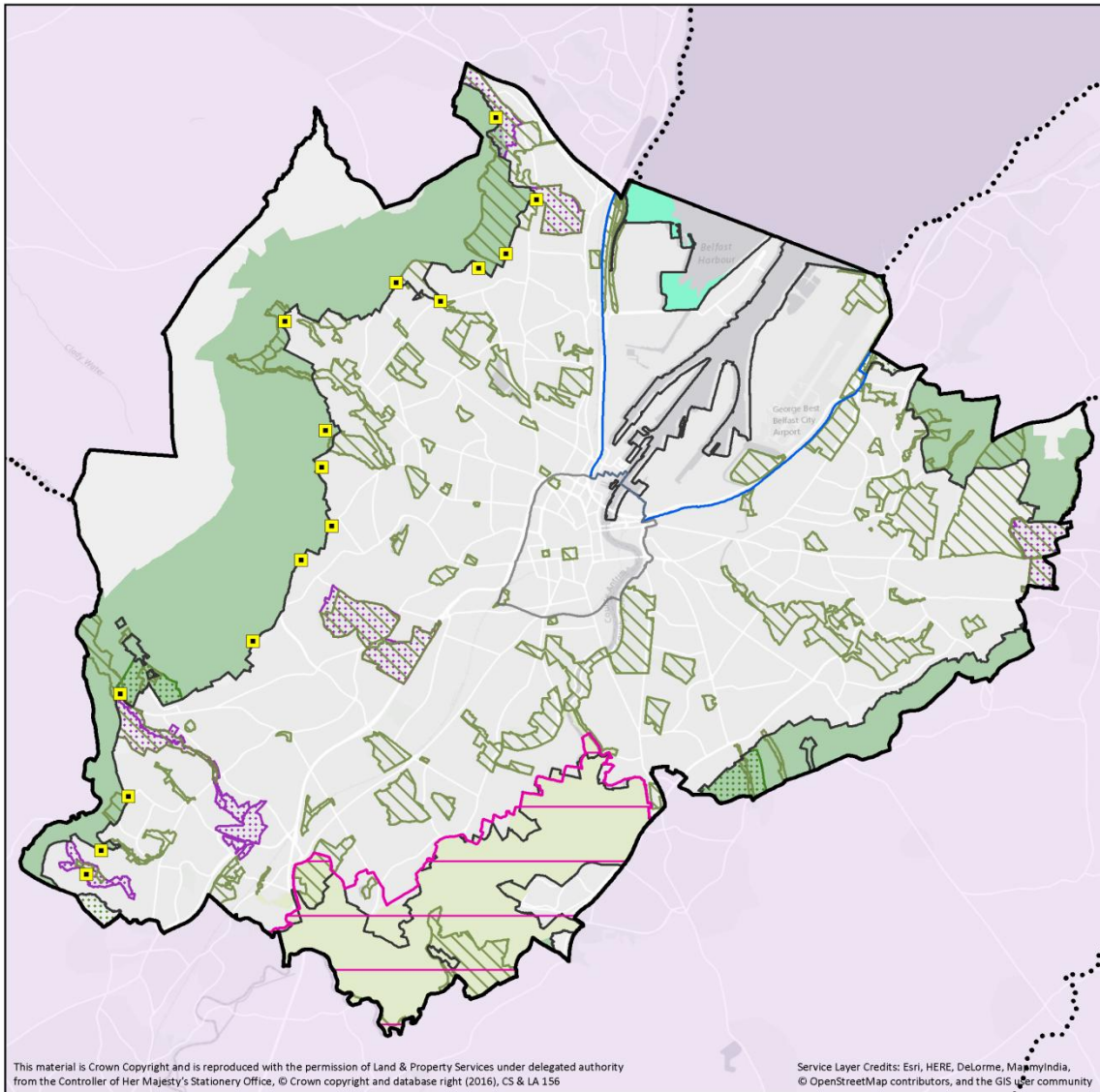


## APPENDIX 5: LANDSCAPE DESIGNATIONS MAP



**Belfast**  
City Council

NATURAL HERITAGE



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### Landscape Designations

- |                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Urban Landscape Wedge       | Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty        |
| Rural Landscape Wedge       | Council Area                              |
| Local Landscape Policy Area | Metropolitan/Settlement Development Limit |
| BMA Coastal Area            | Belfast City Centre                       |
| Area of High Scenic Value   | Belfast Harbour Area                      |
| Belfast Hills Access Point  |   |
| Lagan Valley Regional Park  |   |

Source: Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (Adopted September 2014)



**APPENDIX 6: BELFAST HILLS ACCESS POINTS**

TYPE_NAME	REFERENCE	LOCATION	ADDRESS
ACCESS POINT	CA 03/01	BELFAST CITY	COLIN GLEN (EXISTING)
ACCESS POINT	CA 03/02	BELFAST CITY	UPPER SPRINGFIELD ROAD (PROPOSED)
ACCESS POINT	CA 03/03	BELFAST CITY	WHITEROCK ROAD (EXISTING)
ACCESS POINT	CA 03/04	BELFAST COUNTRYSIDE	BALLYGOMARTIN ROAD (PROPOSED)
ACCESS POINT	CA 03/05	BELFAST CITY	LYNDHURST VIEW PARK (PROPOSED)
ACCESS POINT	CA 03/06	BELFAST COUNTRYSIDE	GLENCAIRN ROAD, FORTHRIVER (EXISTING)
ACCESS POINT	CA 03/08	BELFAST COUNTRYSIDE	HORSESHOE BEND, CRUMLIN ROAD (EXISTING)
ACCESS POINT	CA 03/09	BELFAST COUNTRYSIDE	CARR'S GLEN, BALLYSILLAN ROAD (EXISTING)
ACCESS POINT	CA 03/10	BELFAST CITY	UPPER CAVEHILL ROAD (EXISTING)
ACCESS POINT	CA 03/11	BELFAST COUNTRYSIDE	DOWNVIEW PARK WEST (EXISTING)
ACCESS POINT	CA 03/12	BELFAST CITY	ANTRIM ROAD (EXISTING)
ACCESS POINT	CA 03/13	BELFAST CITY	BELFAST ZOO, ANTRIM ROAD (EXISTING)
ACCESS POINT	LN 03/01	METROPOLITAN LISBURN	LAGMORE DAM (PROPOSED)
ACCESS POINT	LN 03/02	METROPOLITAN LISBURN	LAGMORE ROAD (EXISTING)
ACCESS POINT	LN 03/03	METROPOLITAN LISBURN	COLINWELL ROAD (PROPOSED)



## APPENDIX 7: LOCAL LANDSCAPE POLICY AREAS (LLPA's)

<b>Plan Proposal</b>	<b>BMAP Reference</b>	<b>Designation</b>	
Hannahstown	Designation HN 02	Local Landscape Policy Area	
Hannahstown	Designation HN 03	Local Landscape Policy Area	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 085	Local Landscape Policy Area: Alexandra	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 086	Local Landscape Policy Area: Ardmore	
Outer Belfast City	Designation ML 12	Local Landscape Policy Area: Areema	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 087	Local Landscape Policy Area: Avoniel	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 088	Local Landscape Policy Area: Ballysillan	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 089	Local Landscape Policy Area: Balmoral Golf Course	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 090	Local Landscape Policy Area: Belfast Castle / Fortwillam	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 091	Local Landscape Policy Area: Belfast Royal Academy (BRA)	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 092	Local Landscape Policy Area: Belmont Glen	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 093	Local Landscape Policy Area: Belmont Park	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 094	Local Landscape Policy Area: Benview	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 095	Local Landscape Policy Area: Blanchflower / Patton	
Belfast City Centre	Designation CC 028	Local Landscape Policy Area: Blythefield	
Outer Belfast City	Designation ML 13	Local Landscape Policy Area: Bogstown Glen, Metropolitan Lisburn	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 096	Local Landscape Policy Area: Campbell / Ormiston	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 097	Local Landscape Policy Area: Carr's Glen	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 098	Local Landscape Policy Area: Cherryvale	

Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 099	Local Landscape Policy Area: Cherryvalley	
Belfast City Centre	Designation CC 029	Local Landscape Policy Area: City Hall	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 100	Local Landscape Policy Area: Clarawood	
Belfast City Centre	Designation CC 030	Local Landscape Policy Area: Clifton 1	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 101	Local Landscape Policy Area: Clifton 2	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 102	Local Landscape Policy Area: Colin Glen Part of (73.58 of 76.66 ha (96.0%))	
Outer Belfast City	Designation ML 14	Local Landscape Policy Area: Colin Road, Metropolitan Lisburn	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 103	Local Landscape Policy Area: Cranmore / Bladon	
Outer Belfast City	Designation MCH 32	Local Landscape Policy Area: Cregagh Glen	
Outer Belfast City	Designation MCH 31	Local Landscape Policy Area: Cregagh Glen, Metropolitan Castlereagh	
Outer Belfast City	Designation ML 15	Local Landscape Policy Area: Derriaghy River, Metropolitan Lisburn	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 104	Local Landscape Policy Area: Dundonald Wedge	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 105	Local Landscape Policy Area: Dunville	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 106	Local Landscape Policy Area: Falls	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 107	Local Landscape Policy Area: Forth River / Wolf Hill / Ligoniel	
Outer Belfast City	Designation ML 16	Local Landscape Policy Area: Glenburn, Metropolitan Lisburn	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 108	Local Landscape Policy Area: Glencairn	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 109	Local Landscape Policy Area: Glenmachan / Garnerville	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 110	Local Landscape Policy Area: Grove	

Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 111	Local Landscape Policy Area: Half Moon Lake	
Outer Belfast City	Designation MCH 36	Local Landscape Policy Area: Hillfoot, Metropolitan Castlereagh	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 112	Local Landscape Policy Area: Holy Cross	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 113	Local Landscape Policy Area: Hunterhouse / Wedderburn /Rathmore	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 115	Local Landscape Policy Area: Knock Golf Course / Hospital Glen	
Outer Belfast City	Designation MCH 37	Local Landscape Policy Area: Knockbreda, Metropolitan Castlereagh	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 114	Local Landscape Policy Area: Knocknagoney	
Outer Belfast City	Designation ML 17	Local Landscape Policy Area: Lagmore, Metropolitan Lisburn	
Outer Belfast City	Designation ML 18	Local Landscape Policy Area: Laurel Glen, Metropolitan Lisburn	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 116	Local Landscape Policy Area: Ligoniel Park	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 117	Local Landscape Policy Area: Loughview	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 118	Local Landscape Policy Area: Lower Crescent	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 119	Local Landscape Policy Area: Malone Church	
Outer Belfast City	Designation HD/15	Local Landscape Policy Area: Maryfield	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 120	Local Landscape Policy Area: Milltown / Bog Meadows	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 121	Local Landscape Policy Area: Mountain Hill	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 122	Local Landscape Policy Area: Musgrave	
Belfast Harbour Area	Designation BHA 10	Local Landscape Policy Area: North Foreshore	
Outer Belfast City	Designation ML 19	Local Landscape Policy Area: Old Colin Wood, Metropolitan Lisburn	

Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 123	Local Landscape Policy Area: Oldpark	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 124	Local Landscape Policy Area: Orangefield / Dixon	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 125	Local Landscape Policy Area: Ormeau Park	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 126	Local Landscape Policy Area: Pirrie Park	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 127	Local Landscape Policy Area: River Lagan / Botanic	
Belfast City Centre	Designation CC 031	Local Landscape Policy Area: Royal Belfast Academical Institution (RBAI)	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 129	Local Landscape Policy Area: Seaview	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 130	Local Landscape Policy Area: Shandon / Gilnahirk	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 131	Local Landscape Policy Area: Shankill	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 132	Local Landscape Policy Area: Somerton	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 133	Local Landscape Policy Area: Somme	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 134	Local Landscape Policy Area: Springfield Park and Dam	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 128	Local Landscape Policy Area: St. Mary's	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 135	Local Landscape Policy Area: Stormont	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 136	Local Landscape Policy Area: Strandtown	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 137	Local Landscape Policy Area: Strangford	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 138	Local Landscape Policy Area: Stranmillis	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 139	Local Landscape Policy Area: Strathearn	
Belfast Harbour Area	Designation BHA 11	Local Landscape Policy Area: Tillysburn	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 140	Local Landscape Policy Area: Trench	

Outer Belfast City	Designation MCH 40	Local Landscape Policy Area: Tullycarnet, Metropolitan Castlereagh	
Belfast Harbour Area	Designation BHA 12	Local Landscape Policy Area: Victoria / King George	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 141	Local landscape Policy Area: Wandsworth Road	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 142	Local Landscape Policy Area: Waterworks	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 143	Local Landscape Policy Area: West Kirk / Shankill Memorial Park	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 144	Local Landscape Policy Area: Willis's Lake	
Outer Belfast City	Designation BT 145	Local Landscape Policy Area: Woodvale Park	
Small Settlement: Natural Environment	Designation BLN 02	Local Landscape Policy Areas Ballylesson/ Edenderry,	

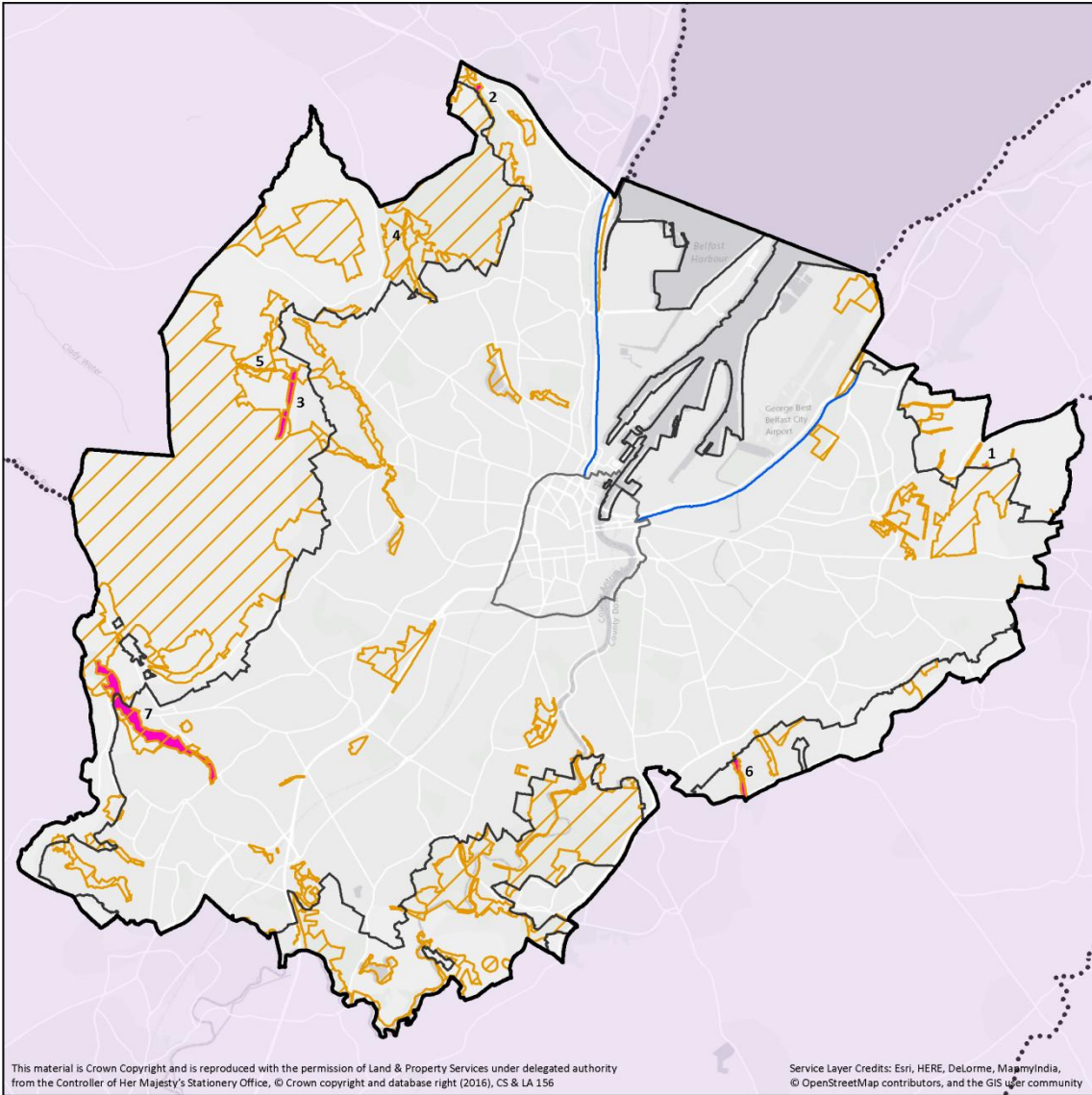
**APPENDIX 8: LIST OF SITES OF LOCAL NATURE CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE (SLNCIs) AND GEODIVERSITY SITES**

<b>List of Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance (SLNCIs)</b>	
<b>BMAP Ref</b>	<b>Site</b>
BT 084/01	Alexandra Park
MCH 28/01	Ardnally Scout Centre
	Ballydrain Lake
BT 084/02	Ballygomartin River, Glencairn
CA 01/02	Ballygomartin Sill Geodiversity
BT 084/03	Ballymiscaw (Geodiversity)
BT 084/04	Barnett's Demesne
BHA 09/01	Belfast Harbour Estate
HS 10/02	Belfast Harbour Estate (North Down) Part of 4.40 of 25.41ha (17.3%)
BT 084/05	Belfast Hills – Divis / Ligoniel
CA 01/03	Belfast Hills - Squire's Hill
BT 084/07	Bellevue (Geodiversity)
BT 084/06	Bellevue Bridge
BT 084/08	Belmont Glen
MCH 28/03	Belvoir (Part of 185.44 of 185.62 ha (99.9%))
BHA 09/02	Between M5 and Railway
BT 084/09	Bladon Park
BT 084/10	Bog Meadows, M1 / Falls Road
BT 084/11	Campbell College and Ormiston
CA 01/04	Carr's Glen Geodiversity
BT 084/12	Cave Hill / Collinward
BT 084/13	Clement Wilson Park
ML 11/01	Colin Glen (Geodiversity)
ML 11/02	Colin Glen / Hammils Bottom Part of (101.1 of 180.76 ha (55.9%)) 55.99
ML 11/03	Colin House
MCH 28/06	Cregagh Glen (Geodiversity)
MCH 28/07	Cregagh Glen and Lisnabreeny Part of (4.25 of 6.65 ha (63.9%))
CA 01/05	Crow Glen Geodiversity
BT 084/14	Crumlin Road / Upper Hightown Road
MCH 28/08	Dundonald Old Railway Line Part of (0.60 of 9.15 ha (6.6%))
BT 084/15	Dunmurry Schools
EY 02	Edenderry to Giants Ring
CA 01/06	Floodplain around Eel Weir
BT 084/16	Galwally
ML 11/05	Glen River at Dunmurry
LN 01/34	Glenburn
BT 084/17	Grounds at Stranmillis and Riddel Hall
MCH 28/10	Hillfoot Glen

MCH 28/11	Hillfoot Scrub
BT 084/18	Inverary
BT 084/19	Ladybrook
BT 084/20	Lagan Meadows
ML 11/06	Lagmore
BT 084/21	Lenadoon Dam
BT 084/22	Ligoniel Village
CR 02/06	Lower Braniel Road
BT 084/23	Lower Carr's Glen
BT 084/24	Milltown Cemetery
MCH 28/12	Minnowburn Part of (28.91 of 44.97 ha (64.3%))
HS 10/05	Redburn Part of (0.01 of 67.56ha (0.01%))
ML 11/07	Seymour Hill part of (1.65 ha of 51.34ha (3.2%))
CA 01/07	Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park
BT 084/25	South of M1 Roundabout, Junction 1
BT 084/26	Springfield Pond / Highfield Glen
BT 084/27	Stormont
BT 084/28	Throne Woodland
BHA 09/03	Tillysburn
BT 084/29	Upper Forth River
BT 084/30	Waterworks Park
BT 084/31	Woods at Glenmachan

**APPENDIX 9:** MAP 4: LOCTION OF SITES OF LOCAL NATURE CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE (SLNCI) INCLUDING GEODIVERSITY SLNCI





**Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance**

Site of Local Nature Conservation Importance (SLNCI)

Geodiversity SLNCI

- 1 Ballymiscaw
- 2 Bellevue
- 3 Ballygomartin Sill
- 4 Carr's Glen
- 5 Crow Glen
- 6 Cregagh Glen
- 7 Colin Glen

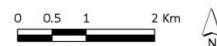
Council Area

Metropolitan/Settlement Development Limit

Belfast City Centre

Belfast Harbour Area

Source: Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (Adopted September 2014)

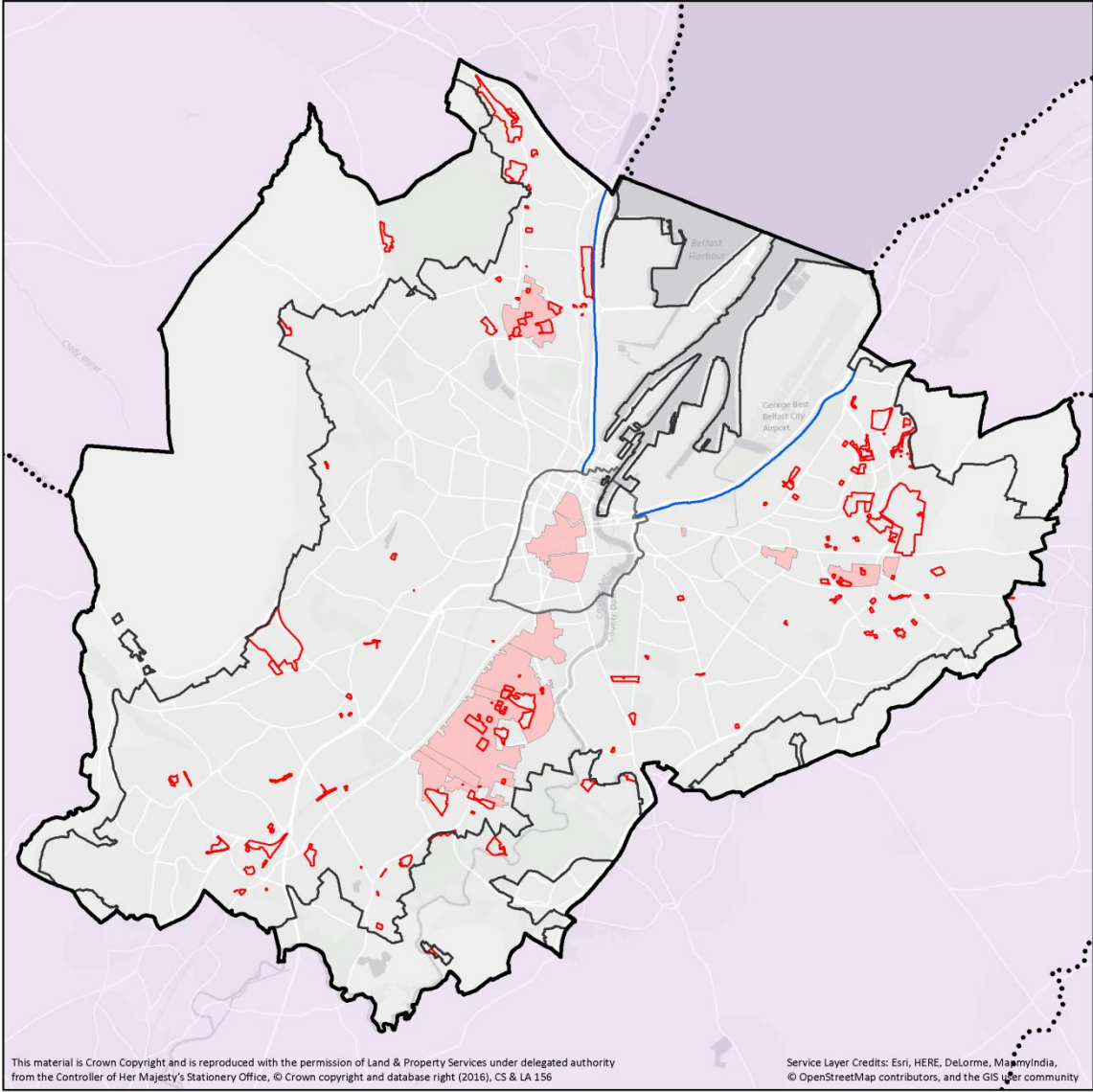


**APPENDIX 10: TREE PRESERVATION ORDERS (TPOs) IN BELFAST**



**Belfast**  
City Council

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**Tree Preservation Orders**

- Tree Preservation Order
- Conservation Area

- Council Area
- Metropolitan/Settlement Development Limit
- Belfast City Centre
- Belfast Harbour Area

Source: Belfast Planning Service

