



# Belfast Local Development Plan

**Draft Habitats Regulations Assessment Report for  
the Draft Plan Strategy, August 2018**

# Belfast Local Development Plan 2035

## Draft Plan Strategy

### Draft Habitats Regulations Assessment Report

August 2018

This draft Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Report on the Belfast Local Development Plan 2035 Draft Plan Strategy has been prepared by Shared Environmental Service on behalf of and in conjunction with Belfast City Council. The Draft HRA has been prepared in tandem with the preparation of the Draft Plan Strategy to assess potential impacts on European designated sites in accordance with legislative requirements.

# Belfast City Council

Local Development Plan 2035

Draft Habitats Regulations Assessment Report

For

The Draft Plan Strategy

In accordance with The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations  
(Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended)

August 2018

This draft Habitats Regulations Assessment Report has been prepared by Shared Environmental Service in conjunction with Belfast City Council.

#### How to comment

The HRA is available for consultation alongside the Draft Plan Strategy and supporting documents, including the SA Report, Scoping Report and EQIA, for a statutory consultation period of **eight weeks**, from **20 September** to **15 November 2018**. Prior to this it will also be available for review for a **four week** period; from **23 August** to **20 September 2018**.

Representations can be submitted by e-mail to [localdevelopmentplan@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:localdevelopmentplan@belfastcity.gov.uk), and written submissions should be sent to:

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# Non-technical Summary

## Habitats Regulations Assessment

Regulation 43 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended), requires an appropriate assessment to be undertaken of plans and projects which are likely to have a significant effect on a European site in Northern Ireland, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. This is known as Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and provides for assessment of the implications of a land use plan for European sites in view of their conservation objectives.

This draft HRA Report is prepared in support of the draft Plan Strategy for Belfast City Council Local Development Plan (LDP). It documents the assessment of the draft Plan Strategy proposals and its potential impacts on European designated sites which include Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA). Ramsar sites are also considered in HRA as a matter of policy.

## Overview of Plan Strategy

The LDP will outline the council's local policies and site specific proposals for new development and use of land in Belfast. The Plan Strategy is the first of two formal documents that make up the LDP. The draft Plan Strategy sets out a strategic policy framework for the plan area as a whole across a range of topics, and will be published for public consultation and independent examination before it is adopted. Following its adoption, we will prepare, publish and adopt the Local Policies Plan using the same process.

The nature of the draft Plan Strategy is that it has potential to have a significant effect on some European sites therefore we are undertaking a HRA in our role as a competent authority. Shared Environmental Service (SES) in Mid and East Antrim Borough Council provides support to Belfast City Council on HRAs for plans and projects. SES has therefore, in conjunction with the council, prepared this draft HRA for the draft Plan Strategy to ensure the legal requirements of the Regulations are fully met.

## European Sites Considered

A total of 22 sites that have the potential to be connected to the plan area were reviewed. These included sites immediately adjacent to Belfast, the most obvious being Belfast Lough SPA and Ramsar site, as well as sites with an ecological connection, for example The Maidens SAC which is connected through marine waters. On a precautionary basis, all sites within 15km of the plan area were considered. Sites beyond 15km but connected by infrastructure, for example Eastern Mourne SAC which includes Ben Crom and Silent Valley reservoirs which supply water to Belfast, were also recorded.

## Assessment of the Plan

All of the Plan Strategy proposals were reviewed from the vision, aims and objectives through to the strategic and topic-based policies. This found that some proposals, for example the vision and aims, were policy statements that are too general to assess. Some policies are such that they could not have an effect on European sites, for example those relating to design principles or specifying travel requirements. Many proposals and policies are too general to assess at this strategic stage, but were identified as having potential for either minor or significant effects on European sites.

On a precautionary basis all the potential effects of these proposals were considered. It was found that the plan could have the potential to affect European sites through the following impacts:

- Habitat Loss
- Disturbance: Direct
- Disturbance: Indirect
- Aerial Emissions
- Water Pollution

#### Screening sites for likely significant effects

On review of the draft Plan Strategy, it was found that eight of the 22 sites identified in the baseline report could be eliminated. One was beyond the distance where aerial emissions could have an effect and two sites were beyond the range of Common Seal. There is evidence that water supply will be sufficient for the life of the plan therefore those sites which are related to water supply could be eliminated on the basis that there can be no conceivable impact on them as a result of the draft Plan Strategy. Lough Neagh and Lough Beg SPA and Ramsar were also ruled out of being vulnerable to impacts through water pollution.

The screening of all of these sites found that significant effects could not be entirely ruled out for the remaining 14 sites, therefore all were subject to appropriate assessment. Eleven sites have bird features that use Belfast Lough for feeding, loafing or rafting. The features of these sites will therefore be subject to the same threats, for example relating to water pollution or disturbance. A combined appropriate assessment was carried out for these sites.

Of the six sites designated, or proposed, to protect marine mammals which may range over a wide area, four were found to require appropriate assessment. There are two European sites for protection of Harbour Porpoise, Skerries and Causeway SAC and North Channel proposed SAC, and these were assessed together. Two sites have Grey Seal as a selection feature, The Maidens SAC and Strangford Lough Ramsar, and these were also assessed jointly. It was not however necessary to assess other features in these marine mammal sites as there could not be an effect on them due to the distance from Belfast.

#### Outcome of Appropriate Assessment

The appropriate assessments for sites designated to protect marine mammals found that limited distribution data makes it difficult to rule out an adverse effect on the integrity of those sites from the draft Plan Strategy. It is therefore recommended that a precautionary approach is taken to minimize impacts that the draft Plan Strategy may have on marine mammals through disturbance or water pollution and therefore mitigation is recommended.

Effects on other European sites for which Belfast Lough provides habitat for bird features during part of their life cycle could not be excluded at this stage. As four sites are immediately adjacent to or overlap the plan area, there is potential for loss of feeding or roosting habitat. The sources of impacts most likely to cause an effect on birds include water pollution, with impacts on species through contaminated feeding areas or through deteriorating water quality. Disturbance may have a direct effect during construction or operation of new developments close to European sites or an indirect effect from increased shipping or water sports. The impact of aerial pollution was considered but ruled out on the basis that it was not identified as a threat to the features that were assessed.

### Next Steps

The HRA will be finalised following public consultation and independent examination of the draft Plan Strategy, then published alongside the adopted Plan Strategy. Regulation 43 (4) of the Habitats Regulations allows for the competent authority to obtain the opinion of the general public on the HRA if it considers it appropriate and therefore comments are also invited on the HRA.

### How to comment

The HRA is available for consultation alongside the Draft Plan Strategy and supporting documents, including the SA Report, Scoping Report and EQIA, for a statutory consultation period of **eight weeks**, from **20 September** to **15 November 2018**. Prior to this it will also be available for review for a **four week** period; from **23 August** to **20 September 2018**.

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# 1. The Belfast Plan Strategy

## Belfast City Council Local Development Plan

The Local Development Plan (LDP) will outline the council's local policies and site specific proposals for new development and use of land in Belfast. The Plan Strategy will provide the strategic policy framework for the plan area as a whole across a range of topics. It will set out an ambitious but realistic vision for Belfast as well as the objectives and strategic policies required to deliver that vision. Establishing this strategic direction early in the plan process will provide a level of certainty on which to base key development decisions in the area as well as the necessary framework for the preparation of the Local Policies Plan.

The Local Policies Plan will set out the council's local policies and site specific proposals in relation to the development and use of land in Belfast. It will contain the local policies, including site specific proposals, designations and land use zonings required to deliver the council's vision, objectives and strategic policies, as set out in the Plan Strategy.

In summary, the Belfast City LDP 2035 will:

- Provide a 15 year plan framework to support economic and social needs in the city, in line with regional strategies and policies, while providing the delivery of sustainable development;
- Facilitate growth by coordinating public and private investment to encourage development where it can be of most benefit to the wellbeing of the community;
- Allocate sufficient land to meet the needs of the city; and
- Provide an opportunity for all stakeholders, including the public, to have a say about where and how development within the local area should take place.

Once adopted, the LDP will replace the Belfast Urban Area Plan, the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015, insofar as it relates to Belfast city, and the Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) Subject Plan for the Belfast City Council Area 2015 (the 'HMOs Subject Plan').

The settlement boundaries, land use zonings and key site requirements contained in the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015, insofar as it relates to the Belfast City Plan Area, and the HMOs Subject Plan will be retained and will continue to form the basis of decision making until the LDP is adopted in its entirety. It is the council's intention to review the existing settlement boundaries and land use zonings contained in the draft BMAP as part of the preparation of the draft Local Policies Plan. Those existing settlement boundaries and land use zonings, which are required to be protected, shall be incorporated into the Local Policies Plan to support the delivery of the LDP's and the Belfast Agenda's aims and objectives.

## Preparation - the process, timetable and progress

The preparation process for the LDP began in June 2016 when the council published its Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) and the LDP timetable. The council undertook a series of councillor workshops on various topics and themes, and prepared a series of topic papers to describe the current social, economic and environmental characteristics of Belfast. This led to the publication of the Preferred Options Paper (POP) in January 2017 for public consultation.

## Overview of Belfast City Council Area

Belfast is our capital city and lies at the heart of a wider urban metropolitan area that dominates the east of the region. At 340,220 in 2017 Belfast City Council has the largest population of the 11 new

local government districts that were formed in April 2015. The Belfast district covers a total area of 137.7 square kilometres, of which 30 percent is outside the settlement development limits and defined as 'rural'. It contains Belfast City and the three small settlements of Edenderry, Hannahstown and Loughview.

## Local Development Plan - The Stages

### Preferred Options Paper

The Preferred Options Paper published in January 2017 was intended to promote focused debate on strategic issues to be addressed when preparing the draft Plan Strategy. It indicated our preferred options for growth and development in the council area and provided the basis for consulting with the public and stakeholders. The POP was accompanied by a Sustainability Appraisal Interim Report which included HRA baseline information.

### Plan Strategy

The draft Plan Strategy has taken account of representations on the POP, further evidence gathering and discussions with stakeholders and Elected Members. This draft HRA has been prepared to assess the potential impacts of the Plan Strategy on European sites.

### Local Policies Plan

The Local Policies Plan will be prepared following adoption of the Plan Strategy. It will define settlement limits, land use zonings, local environmental designations, and introduce bespoke local policies as appropriate to individual places. Another draft HRA will be prepared to assess the potential impacts of the Plan Strategy on European sites.

### Integrated Sustainability Appraisal

Local Development Plans must also be subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment and to Sustainability Appraisal during their preparation with reports required at defined stages. The Sustainability Appraisal process both informed, and was informed by, the HRA process.

Map 1: Belfast City Council Area and District Settlements



## 2. Habitats Regulations Assessment: The Approach

### Introduction

This chapter describes the overall approach taken to carry out Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) for plans in general and how that approach has been applied to the draft Plan Strategy. The tools for this assessment were developed in accordance with the Directives and Habitats Regulations described below and informed by the Habitats Regulations Handbook and further reference material (Appendix 1).

Regulation 43 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended), requires an appropriate assessment to be undertaken of plans and projects which are likely to have a significant effect on a European site in Northern Ireland, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. This is known as HRA and provides for assessment of the implications of a land use plan for European sites in view of their conservation objectives. European sites are defined in the Habitats Regulations as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs). Ramsar sites are also considered as a matter of policy and included in the term 'European sites' for this report.

The nature of the draft Plan Strategy is that it has potential to have a significant effect on some European sites therefore we are undertaking a HRA in our role as a competent authority. Shared Environmental Service (SES) in Mid and East Antrim Borough Council provides support to Belfast City Council on HRAs for plans and projects. SES has therefore, in conjunction with the council, prepared this draft HRA for the draft Plan Strategy to ensure the legal requirements of the Regulations are fully met.

The HRA will be finalised following public consultation and independent examination of the draft Plan Strategy and published alongside the adopted Plan Strategy. Regulation 43 (4) of the Habitats Regulations allows for the competent authority to obtain the opinion of the general public on the HRA if it considers it appropriate and therefore comments are also invited on the HRA.

### The Directives

These are Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora and Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds (codified version). These Directives are referred to as the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive respectively and together are called the Directives for the purposes of this report.

The overall aim of the Directives is to maintain or restore the favourable conservation status of habitats and species of community interest. Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas are designated to afford protection to habitats and species listed in the Habitats and Birds Directives. These designations form a suite of sites that are collectively known as the Natura 2000 network.

### HRA – The Stages and Steps

HRA is normally described in four stages

- Stage 1: Screening for likely significant effects
- Stage 2: Appropriate Assessment and the Integrity Test
- Stage 3: Alternative Solutions
- Stage 4: Imperative reasons of overriding public interest and compensatory measures

The stages and steps for each are detailed in Appendix 3.

Stage 1 involves firstly deciding whether a plan or project should be subject to HRA (Step 1). If through the review there is found to be a requirement for HRA, those proposals with potential likely significant effects are identified along with the types of impact that they may have. Steps 2, identifying European sites, and 3, gathering information about those sites, help to identify the European sites which the plan may affect and compile information about those sites.

Analysis of the information collated in steps 1 to 3 enables steps 4, discretionary discussion with the statutory nature conservation body, and 5, screening for likely significant effects on the selection features of European sites, to be carried out.

### Integrating HRA with Plan Preparation

HRA is an iterative process carried out in parallel with plan preparation which will be updated in line with knowledge of plan effects and any changes or further information relating to European sites and their features. SES provided a HRA Baseline Report during preparation of the Preferred Options Paper (POP) and initial HRA information was included in the Sustainability Appraisal Interim Report in support of the POP.

The updated Baseline Report, Appendix 5, was prepared with a precautionary approach. It provides a long list of sites that should be considered in the context of potential effects of the draft Plan Strategy on its own, and in combination with other plans and projects. The policies and spatial zones proposed within the plan will be assessed to determine whether any of the potential impacts could materialise as a result of the plan. Where possible the likely significant effect on site selection features will be assessed in the context of any avoidance and mitigation measures identified in the course of assessment and plan preparation.

This draft HRA will be published for consultation with the draft Plan Strategy. A draft HRA will also be published for consultation with the draft Local Policies Plan. A final HRA will be published when each of these are adopted.

### Assessment Assumptions and Limitations

#### *Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) for Northern Ireland*

The Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS), published in September 2015, sets out regional planning policies for securing the orderly and consistent development of land in Northern Ireland under the reformed two-tier planning system. The provisions of the SPPS must be taken into account in the preparation of LDPs and are material to all decisions on individual planning applications and appeals. Furthering sustainable development underpins the SPPS and the five core planning principles include 'Preserving and improving the built and natural environment.'

The SPPS includes regional strategic objectives for natural heritage that are general in nature, for example

- protect, conserve, enhance and restore the abundance, quality, diversity and distinctiveness of the region's natural heritage;
- take actions to reduce our carbon footprint and facilitate adaptation to climate change.

There are however several SPPS policies that must be taken into account in the determination of planning applications and which specifically apply to International Designations as follows:

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6.175 Development proposals are restricted where they are likely to impact upon the integrity of European or Ramsar sites as these are afforded the highest form of statutory protection. Such designations should be identified in the LDP.

6.176 Planning permission will only be granted for a development proposal that, either individually or in combination with existing and/or proposed plans or projects, is not likely to have a significant effect on:

- a European Site (Special Protection Area, proposed Special Protection Area, Special Areas of Conservation, candidate Special Areas of Conservation and Sites of Community Importance); or
- a listed or proposed Ramsar site.

6.177 Where a development proposal is likely to have a significant effect (either alone or in combination) or reasonable scientific doubt remains, the planning authority is required by law to carry out an appropriate assessment of the implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. Only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site, can the planning authority agree to the development and impose appropriate mitigation measures in the form of planning conditions.

6.178 A development proposal which could adversely affect the integrity of a European or Ramsar site may only be permitted in exceptional circumstances as laid down in the relevant statutory provisions.

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It is therefore assumed that these policies can be taken as applying to the draft Plan Strategy and LDP and that they are material to all decisions on individual planning applications.

#### *Other Regulations*

An assumption is made that existing regulations and legislation that are independent of planning are implemented and enforced by the relevant authority. These include Water Order discharge consents, abstraction licensing, Pollution Prevention Control permits and marine licensing.

#### *HRA at other Stages of Plan Making and Development Management*

The LPP will be subject to HRA at which stage settlement boundaries, land use zonings and local policies will be reviewed. The need for HRA will also be considered at the planning application stage and assessment carried out where required.

#### *Consideration of CJEU Case C323/17 (People over Wind & Sweetman)*

On 12 April 2018, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) issued a judgment, *Case C323/17 (People over Wind & Sweetman)*, which ruled that Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive must be interpreted as meaning that mitigation measures, referred to in the judgment as measures which are intended to avoid or reduce effects, should be assessed within the framework of an appropriate assessment. It is therefore no longer permissible to take account of measures intended to avoid or

reduce the harmful effects of the plan or project on a European site at the Stage 1 test of likely significance.

In light of this, a cautious approach has been taken to screening the plan for potential impacts. Stage 1 Assessment does consider essential features and characteristics of the plan; it also takes account of regional and strategic context and other regulatory controls that will apply to development under the plan. However measures envisaged to avoid or prevent what might otherwise have been significant adverse effects on the integrity of European Sites are not taken into account in Stage 1 and instead are assessed at Stage 2 appropriate assessment. Unless there is certainty that a site can be screened out at Stage 1, assessments have been progressed to Stage 2 appropriate assessment for those features for which there may be a likely significant effect. Incorporated and additional measures to avoid or reduce significant adverse effects are assessed at Stage 2 appropriate assessment.

### *Climate Change*

Northern Ireland faces changes to its climate over the next century. Indications are that we will face hotter, drier summers, warmer winters and more frequent extreme weather events. The Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme was published in January 2014. This contains the Northern Ireland Executive's response to the risks and opportunities identified in the Climate Change Risk Assessment for Northern Ireland (published January 2012) as part of the overall UK Climate Change Risk Assessment. The Adaptation Programme provides the strategic objectives in relation to adaptation to climate change, the proposals and policies by which each department will meet these objectives and the timescales associated with the proposals and policies identified in the period up to 2019.

It is acknowledged that increased levels of development that will arise from the plan have the potential to add to anthropogenic drivers of climate change. However the causes of climate change are global and it is not within the scope of the LDP to bring about levels of change such that they will have an evident impact on climate change as it affects European sites. Climate change is therefore not assessed as an impact that the draft Plan Strategy directly contributes to. The draft Plan Strategy has however identified measures to mitigate climate change. For example, Section 5.6 and SP6 – Environmental resilience seek to support reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, promote renewable energy, enable urban living and promote active travel and a move away from reliance on cars.

### *Strategic Nature of draft Plan Strategy*

Many of the proposals affect multiple locations and locations for which boundaries have not been defined. This makes it hard to determine at this stage the significance of overall effects. Some approaches represent a continuation of a previous policy however each proposal was considered on its own merits in the assessment. This meant that while many proposals were found to be too general to assess, potential minor or significant effects cannot be ruled out for some proposals at this stage.

The assessment of strategic plans can present a challenge in terms of deciding what effects may come about as a result of the plan and which cannot occur due to other strategic and regulatory requirements to which the LDP and development management decisions must comply. The HRA will be reviewed before finalisation to ensure that it is proportionate while also fully meeting the requirements of the Habitats Regulations, Directives and related case law.

### *Considerations of in-combination and cumulative effects*

Consideration must be given to any cumulative effects of proposals during plan preparation. These include potential cumulative effects within the plan and in combination with other relevant plans and strategies. Local Development Plans are in preparation by neighbouring councils, however none have progressed beyond the Preferred Options Paper stage. These may need to be reviewed when the HRA is reviewed and finalised together with other plans that may impact on European sites.

### *Brexit*

The Northern Ireland Assembly produced a paper on ‘Northern Ireland’s environment – Background and Potential ‘Brexit’ Considerations’ (September 2016) which states, *“A complete departure from the EU may give the UK Government more scope and control over environmental objectives. Whether this would involve a relaxation, tightening, or continuation of environmental standards remains to be seen depending on requirements to be retained by international/global agreements and priorities and negotiations between the EU and UK”*<sup>1</sup>.

As the Habitats and Birds Directives requirements have been incorporated in domestic regulations, it is assumed that the procedures for protection of European sites will continue to have effect for a number of years. It is not clear what the influence of future European case law on interpretation of the Habitats Regulations will be following Brexit.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/committees/agriculture-environment-and-rural-affairs/research-papers-2016/northern-irelands-environment---background-and-potential-brexit-considerations/>



### 3. Stage 1 Screening for likely significant effects

#### *Step 1: Deciding whether a plan should be subject to HRA*

The EC Guidance (reference in Appendix 1) does not specify the scope of a plan which should be subject to the Directive and related transposing legislation but it does state that the key consideration is whether it is likely to have a significant effect. Guidance on application of HRA (referenced in Appendix 1) recommends reviewing proposals against a number of criteria. These may lead to plans being exempted, eliminated or excluded from the need for HRA. The criteria are explained in more detail in Appendix 3.

The draft Plan Strategy does not directly relate to the management of any European site therefore it cannot be exempted from the requirement of the Habitats Regulations. The draft Plan Strategy is part of the Local Development Plan and clearly represents a strategic and local development plan therefore HRA is required on this account. It is to be supported by supplementary guidance in the future which should also be considered in relation to the Habitats Regulations.

The outcome of this step is that the draft Plan Strategy requires HRA as a strategic and local development plan.

#### *Step 2: Identifying the European sites that should be considered in the Appraisal*

Baseline information on European sites that are connected with the Belfast City Council Area is provided in Appendix 5. This includes sites within or adjacent to the Council area, with an ecological connection such as a hydrological link, those within 15km as a precautionary approach and those that are connected by infrastructure, in particular water supply and wastewater treatment (Table A5.1). This provides a 'long list' of sites to be considered as follows:

- Antrim Hills SPA
- Aughnadarragh Lough SAC
- Belfast Lough Open Water SPA
- Belfast Lough Ramsar
- Belfast Lough SPA
- Copeland Islands SPA
- East Coast (NI) Marine pSPA
- Eastern Mourne SAC
- Larne Lough SPA
- Larne Lough Ramsar
- Lough Neagh and Lough Beg Ramsar
- Lough Neagh and Lough Beg SPA
- Murlough SAC
- North Channel cSAC
- Outer Ards Ramsar
- Outer Ards SPA
- Rea's Wood and Farr's Bay SAC
- Strangford Lough Ramsar
- Strangford Lough SAC
- Strangford Lough SPA
- The Maidens SAC
- Skerries and Causeway SAC

#### *Step 3: Gathering information about the European sites*

Information for each site on the long list identified at Step 2 was compiled in the Baseline report, Appendix 5, to summarise location relative to the plan area, designation status, qualifying interests, conservation objectives and potential threats. More detailed information is incorporated in the appropriate assessments in Chapter 4.

#### *Step 4: Discretionary discussions on the method and scope of the appraisal*

The Statutory Nature Conservation Body is represented by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) of the Department of Agriculture, the Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). NIEA has already provided input in relation to the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the draft Plan Strategy and conservation objectives are published on its website therefore it was not considered

necessary to formally consult NIEA further at this stage. SES did however meet NIEA staff to seek feedback on its approach to HRA for the draft Plan Strategy and to identify further information that NIEA may hold which is not in the public domain. As a result of this NIEA gave advice on the SES approach and HRA Baseline Report. NIEA also provided a spreadsheet on Condition of Features in Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) and Natura 2000 sites (N2Ks) 2017 and a number of site and species specific condition assessment reports. Before we finalise the HRA NIEA asked for any more up to date information on European sites or feature species.

Although there is not a statutory requirement to consult NIEA on a draft HRA, any comments that NIEA submits during the public consultation on the draft Plan Strategy and supporting documents will be taken into account and incorporated as appropriate in the final HRA. The Sustainability Appraisal responses from NIEA in its role as Consultation Body are recorded in the Sustainability Appraisal Report Appendix 9 and Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report Appendix 25. NIEA did not make any comments in relation to HRA or European sites in these responses.

#### *Step 5: Screening the draft / proposed plan for likely significant effects*

All of the draft Plan Strategy proposals, from the vision, aims and objectives through to the strategic and topic-based policies, were reviewed against the following screening categories and the findings are recorded in Appendix 4. In some cases more than one category was thought to apply.

1. General Policy Statement
2. Plans or projects referred to but not proposed
3. No likely significant effect
4. Proposals too general to assess
5. Potential minor effects
6. Potential significant effects

This identified that the potential for likely significant effects of some proposals on the selection features of European sites cannot be excluded. Many of the proposals are category 1 general policy statements for which impacts cannot be assessed. These included the vision, aims and many of the objectives. In a few cases, for example the objectives to grow the population of Belfast and support healthy lifestyles, the potential for impacts on European sites cannot be excluded.

The draft Plan Strategy does not refer to other plans or projects therefore no proposals were in category 2. The plan does identify that Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPGs) are to be developed in support of the strategic and topic-based policies. These SPGs and other plans such as masterplans will need to be reviewed for the need to carry out HRA and where necessary HRA carried out.

The nature of many proposals (70) was found to be such that they could have no significant effect. Examples include objectives relating to community safety or supporting recycling. Some objectives relating to protecting the natural environment and ecosystems services have an underlying protective principle. Many of the topic-based policies cannot have an effect, examples being housing policies relating to social considerations or policies relating to design, as in themselves they are not likely to have a significant effect on European sites. For some proposals the location or scale of any effect is such that there cannot be any significant effect for example LC3 Belfast Hills and RD2 Residential extensions and alterations.

Category 4 included those proposals (52) which are too general to assess therefore they were screened in for further consideration. They include some proposals such as ITU4, and M1 which include explicit protective measures for European sites including European sites. As this could be

regarded as mitigation, these were screened in so that any mitigation could be considered in Stage 2 appropriate assessment. Many of the proposals in category 4 may have no or uncertain effects therefore they were not listed as category 5 or 6.

The only proposal to date that was listed in category 5, potential minor effects, and category 6, potential significant effects is SP1 – Growth Strategy as it will lead to a concentration of development around Inner Belfast Lough with scope for direct and indirect effects on European sites. Other proposals in category 4 do have potential for impacts on European sites and the next stage is to determine what these could be.

Potential development impacts that could arise as a result of any plan or project which may need to be assessed in relation to European sites and their features are listed in Table 1. This is based on a the list of potential impacts in Table A5.2 of the Baseline Report, Appendix 5. These impacts were reviewed to determine which could arise from the draft Plan Strategy. Impacts that could be a consequence of the draft Plan Strategy are highlighted in bold on Table 1.

To assist appropriate assessments the findings of Table 1 were grouped into five main categories of impacts as follows, and as indicated in the table.

- Habitat Loss (HL): Direct habitat loss in European site or loss of supporting habitat e.g. roost sites.
- Disturbance: Direct (DD): This includes noise, vibration or light disturbance arising from a development site during construction or operational use of a site and the presence of people on land zoned or developed for recreational use.
- Disturbance: Indirect (DI): Disturbance beyond development sites arising from increased levels of shipping, boating or watersports.
- Aerial Emissions (AE): Aerial emissions primarily arise from industry and transport but domestic fuel and agricultural intensification are also sources.
- Water Pollution (WQ): Deterioration of or failure to improve water quality due to direct runoff of pollutants including fuel, chemicals and sediments from development during construction or operation or indirect pollution due to inadequacy of wastewater treatment infrastructure.

**Table 1: Potential development impacts to be assessed in relation to European sites**

Potential Impacts	Activities arising from the draft Plan Strategy
<b>Loss, fragmentation, damage of habitats and / or species</b>	
Construction activities associated with the LDP could lead to the loss, fragmentation (or obstruction of movement) or damage of habitats and / or species through:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Direct land take and / or land clearance and the use of machinery/materials. (HL)</b></li> </ul>	There are only fringes of land currently zoned for development within European sites although there are some larger unzoned parts of sites within the development limit and urban waterfront. Care needs to be taken to avoid encroachment into these sites such that it could <b>cause an adverse effect on site integrity.</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Direct and indirect impacts resulting from the construction and operation of built development and required infrastructure. (HL)</b></li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impacts caused during repair and maintenance activities for built development and required infrastructure.</li> </ul>	Unlikely to be any effect under the control of planning. Maintenance works in the marine zone will be subject to licensing where required.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct impacts associated with mineral development in the plan area.</li> </ul>	No proposals for minerals development in or adjacent to designated areas.

Potential Impacts	Activities arising from the draft Plan Strategy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Removal, fragmentation or physical changes to important connectivity features could create barrier effects to species, alter habitat availability or ecological functioning or result in changes in breeding, roosting, commuting and foraging behaviour. (HL)</li> </ul>	Potential loss of roosting habitat for wader species.
<b>Disturbance: physical, noise, lighting</b>	
Noise or activity during construction and operational activities could have adverse impacts on sensitive species (marine mammals and birds in particular). (DD)	Potential noise or vibration disturbance to birds or marine mammals from e.g. piling. Given mixed use of many of the areas, including residential, noise is unlikely to exceed background levels to which birds are acclimatised.
Increased lighting from construction or additional built development could: create barrier effects to species; result in changes in species breeding, roosting, commuting and foraging behaviour; or increase predation. (DD)	Given mixed use of many of the areas, including residential, light is unlikely to exceed background levels to which birds are acclimatised. Small risk of disturbance at high water roost sites outside the SPA.
<b>Biological Disturbance: invasive species, human disturbance</b>	
Sensitive habitats and species may experience adverse impacts from the introduction of invasive species, non-native, competitive or predatory species through construction activities and associated machinery, movement of soils and waste or from garden escapes.	Given nature of the site, could be an issue through commercial shipping or machinery used during construction. The risk from shipping pre-exists and is not within the control of planning. Localised risks during construction can be addressed at the project level through conditioning 'clean in, clean out' procedures for machinery to be included in Construction Environmental Management Plans or Construction Method Statements.
Increased human activity (including recreation; increase in pet ownership; increased incidence in fires) close to sensitive habitats and species may cause disturbance that could impact negatively on these features and lead to displacement of sensitive species from certain locations. (DD)	Although there is limited human access to the shore of Belfast Lough due to industry, the port and airport, there are areas of mixed use, for example on the North Foreshore, with potential for disturbance. There is also potential for indirect disturbance effects if water-based recreation is facilitated.
<b>Contamination of land</b>	
Waste arising from the operation of developments associated with the LDP could cause contamination of land which could have a direct detrimental impact on sensitive habitats or species or indirect impacts if subsequent emissions to water occur.	Controls are such that it is unlikely that any new contamination of land could occur.
<b>Emissions by air</b>	
The construction and operation of developments associated with the LDP (in particular industrial developments) have the potential to generate chemical and dust emissions and could make a contribution to acid rain or nutrient deposition resulting in significant adverse impacts to animals and sensitive habitats for example they could cause localised smothering of vegetation or potential health issues in animals e.g. birds. (AE)	The harbour estate continues to be a prominent centre for manufacturing and industry, with heavy manufacturing continuing through the presence of Bombardier, and industrial uses continuing to dominate in the Duncrue Industrial Estate. It is indicated in EC1 that the priority for economic growth will be services and e.g. ICT/digital/health industries however the potential for aerial pollution cannot be excluded. Aerial emissions are subject to and will be addressed by other regulations however they are also a material consideration for development management.
Increased traffic generation could lead to increased air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions which could have localized impacts on sensitive habitats or species. (AE)	Plan includes an objective 'To ensure availability of land to facilitate sustainable patterns of development and promote travel by more sustainable modes of transport.' Economic growth is however likely to drive a net increase in traffic.
<b>Emissions by water and changes to hydrology</b>	

Potential Impacts	Activities arising from the draft Plan Strategy
There is potential for an increased transport of chemical contaminants reaching the aquatic environment during the construction and operation of development associated with the LDP. This could range from transportation of fuels to cleaning or wastewater treatment materials and associated drainage and discharges into watercourses. Changes to water quality can have harmful effects on fish, invertebrates, and vegetation, e.g. as a result of lowered oxygen levels. (WQ)	Construction activities have the potential to create pathways for pollution. The historical use of brownfield land and emphasis on redevelopment means that there is a risk of release of contaminants during construction which could cause pollution to habitats and species. There are standard approaches that can be required by planning conditions for assessing the risk of contamination and carrying out remediation. Discharges to the water environment during construction and/or operation will be subject to consent under other regulations.
Surface run off and sediment release from construction works and operational activities associated with the LDP can increase sediment deposition and turbidity within aquatic systems. This can adversely impact on associated wildlife by causing shading effects that can inhibit plant and algal growth and smother organisms thereby limiting productivity and survival. (WQ)	A major sediment release could have a conceivable impact on bird habitat in Belfast Lough although this would be likely to be a short duration event and very small in terms of extent or severity. It is however advisable to avoid significant sediment release as a result of the draft Plan Strategy.
Water abstraction from streams or lakes required for construction and operation of developments associated with the LDP could have physical impacts on water levels, fish species at intakes, affect populations of fish or alter the configuration or availability of breeding gravels.	Mains water supply will be available for most construction and operation and there is evidence that water supply will be sufficient for the life of the plan.
Construction and operation of development associated with the LDP could alter the hydrology of sensitive habitats and species by either increasing or decreasing runoff or water percolation into aquifers.	Two groundwater bodies are within the Belfast area, Belfast Hills and Belfast. Belfast Hills has a status of good while Belfast has a status of poor. While development could impact on ground waters this could not have a conceivable impact on hydrology of the European sites.
Increased demands on wastewater treatment works or for septic tanks could lead to increased nutrient enrichment of waterbodies which could change water quality and increase eutrophication. This in turn could have a harmful effect on the ecological functioning of these systems. (WQ)	There is potential for there to be insufficient infrastructure to treat wastewater from development arising under the draft Plan Strategy.

All of the proposals that were screened in, as recorded in Appendix 4, were reviewed in relation to these broad impacts. This confirmed that these five categories of impacts account for all of the effects that could arise from the draft Plan Strategy. These will therefore be used in the appropriate assessments.

### Pathways to European sites

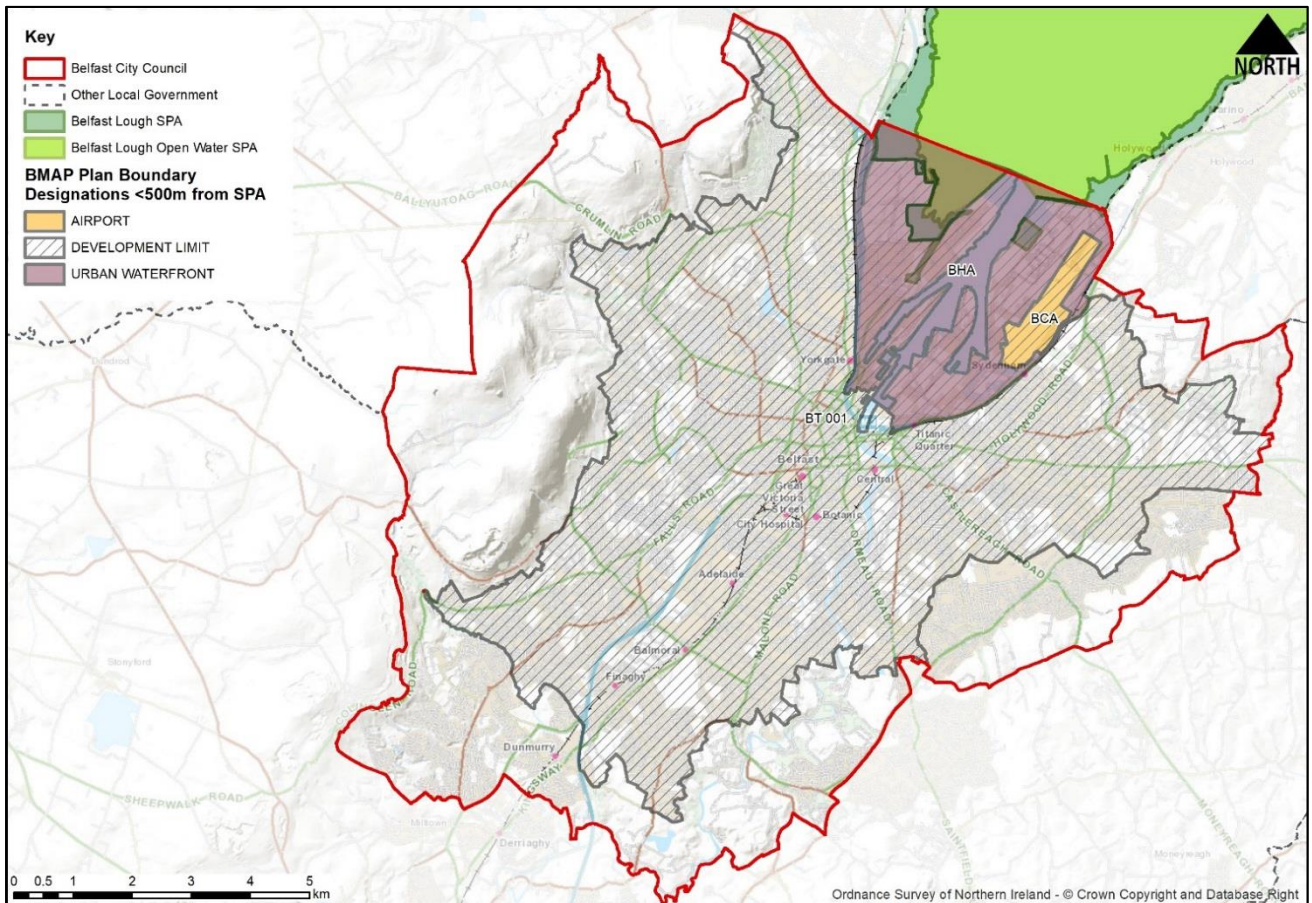
In identifying the long list of European sites to be considered, sites within or adjacent to the plan area, sites connected by ecological pathways, sites within 15km and sites connected by infrastructure were detailed (Appendix 3). This section reviews the pathways between the plan area and those European sites in more detail, taking account of the plan proposals, potential impacts identified above and site information in Appendix 5.

#### *Sites within or adjacent*

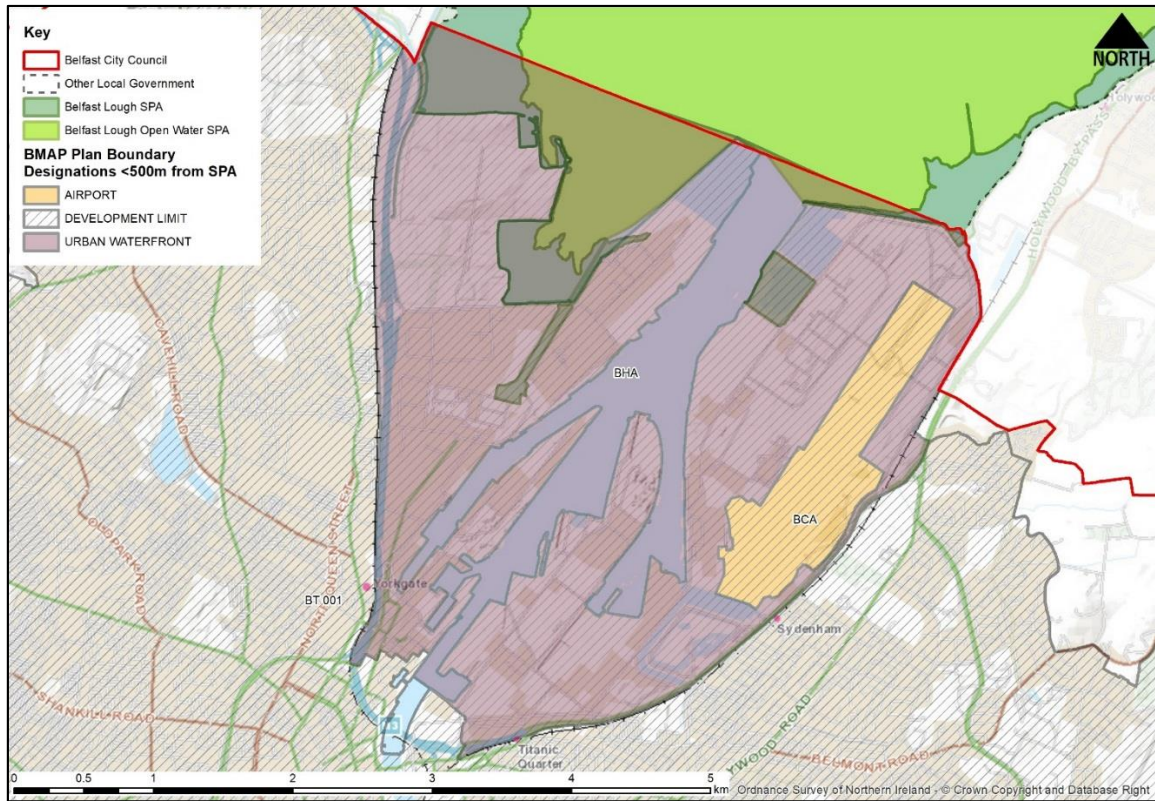
While the development limit often abuts Belfast Lough SPA and Ramsar, there are a number of locations where the development limit overlaps these European sites (Maps 2-4). In some cases, for example along Dargan Road, Edgewater Road and north of the airport, this is a very narrow fringe which may reflect differing detail in mapping respective boundaries, use of landmarks or inclusion of a buffer; there is a wider overlap at the North Foreshore.

In three locations as illustrated in Map 4 there are larger areas of overlap at D2 Lagoons Reserve, a tidal pondage area south of Dargan Road and an area on West Bank. The area at West Bank in the Belfast Harbour estate is shown as mudflats on historic maps however on recent maps and aerial photographs it appears as land with warehousing. It is assumed that the mudflats were developed as land at some time between designation of Belfast Lough SPA in 1998 and 2010. The tidal pondage and D2 Lagoons have no designated land use in draft BMAP 2015 and the latter is managed by RSPB in such a way that it supports the conservation objectives for Belfast Lough SPA. The Belfast Urban Waterfront includes parts of Belfast Lough Ramsar and SPA and Belfast Open Water SPA.

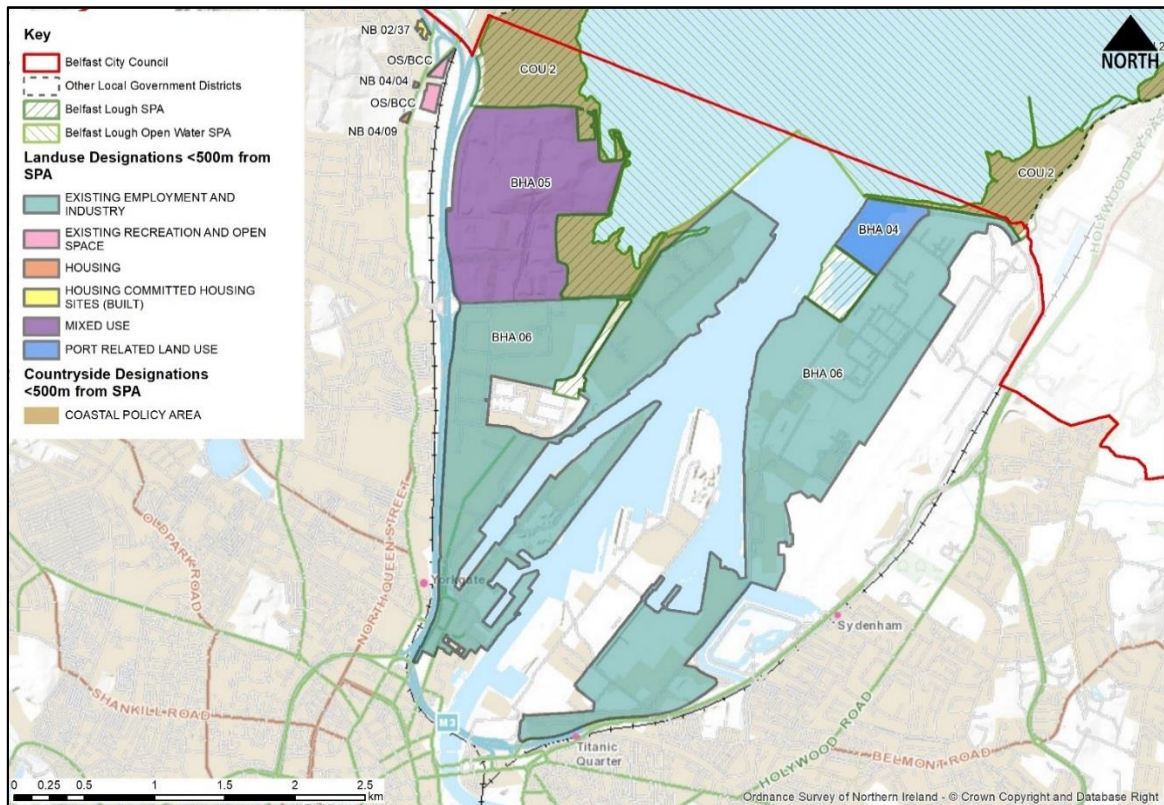
**Map 2: Draft BMAP 2015 Plan Boundary Designations in relation to Belfast Lough European Sites Overview**



**Map 3: Draft BMAP 2015 Plan Boundaries in relation to Belfast Lough European Sites - Belfast Harbour**



**Map 4: Draft BMAP Landuse Designations in relation to Belfast Lough European Sites - Belfast Harbour**

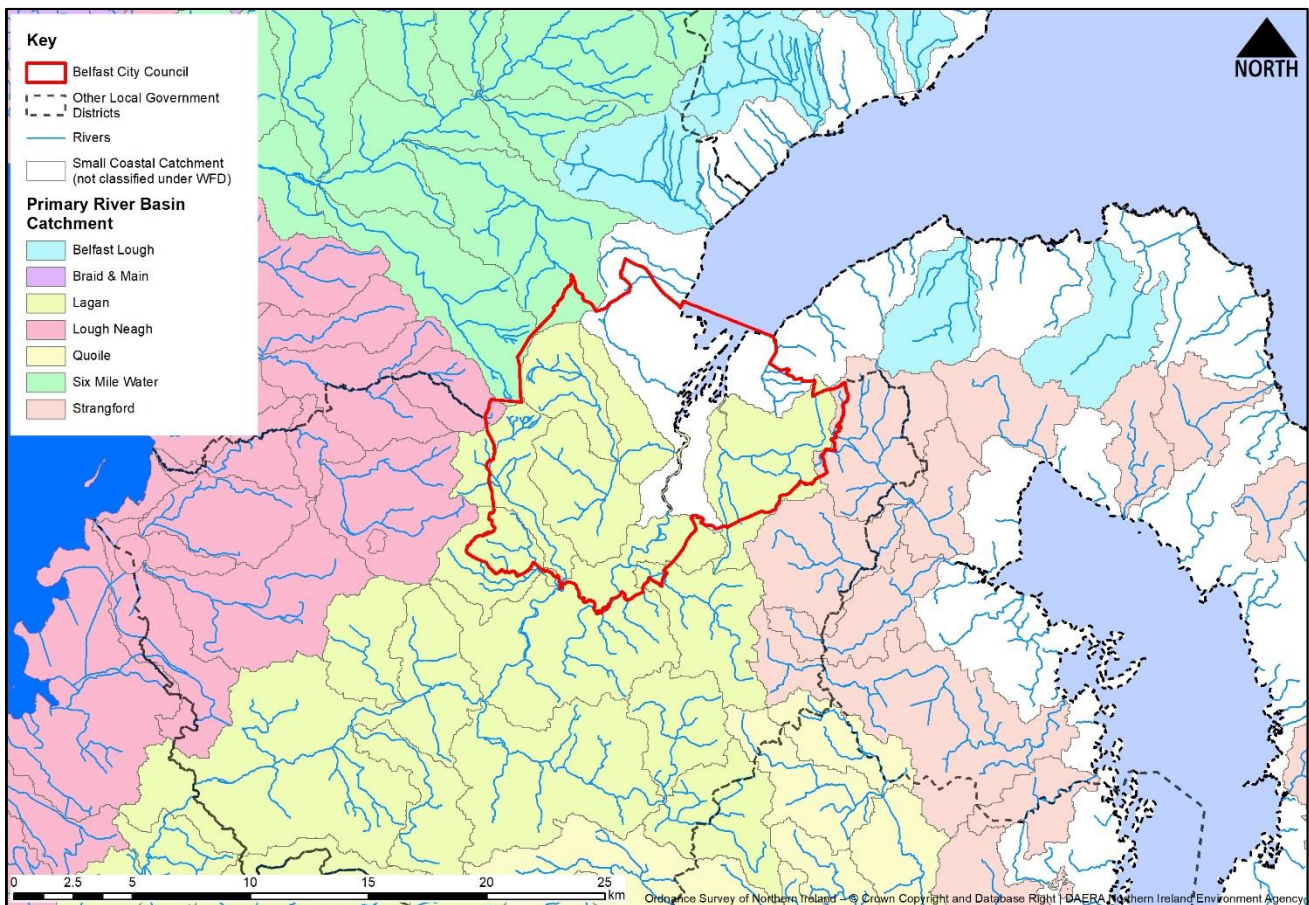


### Ecological pathways

There are small proportions of the plan area which drain west to Lough Neagh and east to Strangford Lough, Map 5. The current zonings in draft BMAP 2015 were reviewed to assess the potential risk to European sites in these catchments. There is no land zoned for development within the Lough Neagh catchment. There is a protected transport route and some protective designations including an Area of High Scenic Value (AoHSV) and Site of Local Nature Conservation Importance (SLNCI). Given that there is no zoned development land, there are some protective designations and the area is distant from and a very small part of the Lough Neagh catchment then it is not considered that there could be any hydrological impacts on Lough Neagh and Lough Beg SPA and Ramsar or Rea's Wood and Farr's Bay SAC.

The part of the plan area that drains to Strangford Lough is partly within development limits. Although there is no zoned development land it is crossed by protected routes and the Comber Greenway. The area is designated in parts as AoHSV, SLNCI, Local Landscape Policy Area and Landscape Wedge. Given that there is no zoned development land, there are some protective designations and the area is distant from and a small part of the Strangford Lough catchment then it is not considered that there could be any hydrological impacts on Strangford Lough SPA, SAC or Ramsar site.

**Map 5: Catchments within the Belfast City Council Area**



There are six sites designated, or proposed, to protect marine mammals (Maps 6 & 7). As marine mammals may range a long way from the boundaries of these sites and have been observed in Belfast Lough, these were all included in the long list of sites.



DAERA advises that plans or projects within 135km of a site designated for Grey Seal or 50km for common seal should be assessed for impacts on the species. There are two sites which include Common (also known as Harbour) Seal as a site selection feature, Strangford Lough SAC and Murlough SAC. The plan area is approximately 29 km from Murlough SAC in a direct line and 85km away via the coastline. It is approximately 8kms from Strangford Lough SAC in a direct line and 67kms via the coastline. In light of the DAERA advice these sites are eliminated from further consideration.

There are two European sites for protection of Harbour Porpoise, Skerries and Causeway SAC and North Channel cSAC. The Maidens SAC includes Grey Seal as a site selection feature and is approximately 32km north from the plan area via the coastline. Grey Seal is included in the selection criteria for Strangford Lough Ramsar and, given the DAERA advice, this Ramsar is included in the appropriate assessment for Grey Seal. It is not necessary to assess other features in these sites as they cannot be impacted due to the distance from the plan area.

#### *Within 15km*

On review of the Plan Strategy it was found that there is no development of a type that could have an adverse effect through aerial pollution beyond 10km of Belfast. This was informed by DEFRA/EPA Guidance on air emission risk assessment<sup>2</sup> in the absence of local guidance on screening distances. That guidance advises that projects should consider European sites within 15km for coal or oil fired power stations and 10km for other developments that cause potentially polluting aerial emissions. On this basis Aghnadarragh Lough SAC, which is 12.5km from the plan area, was ruled out of further consideration.

#### *Infrastructural connection*

Appendix 5 of the Sustainability Appraisal provides evidence at 10.2 that NIW has confirmed that water supply will be sufficient for the life of the plan. This therefore allowed those sites which are related to water supply to be screened out on the basis that there can be no conceivable impact on them as a result of the Plan Strategy.

#### *Outcome of Stage 1*

The outcome of Stage 1 is that likely significant effects on the sites in Table 2 can be discounted and these sites are eliminated from the need for further assessment. As there is no pathway for effects on these sites there is no need to consider in-combination effects on them from other projects or plans.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/air-emissions-risk-assessment-for-your-environmental-permit#screening-for-protected-conservation-areas>

**Table 2: European Sites Eliminated from Further Assessment**

European Site Name	Connection with Belfast City Council area				Eliminated	
	Within or Adjacent	Ecological	Within 15km	By Infrastructure	Eliminated?	Reason
Lough Neagh and Lough Beg SPA		•	•	•	Yes	Sufficient Water Supply for Plan period; de minimus impacts via hydrological pathway
Lough Neagh and Lough Beg Ramsar		•	•	•	Yes	
Aughnadarragh Lough SAC			•		Yes	More than 10km away
Eastern Mournes SAC				•	Yes	Sufficient Water Supply for Plan period
Antrim Hills SPA				•	Yes	
Rea's Wood and Farr's Bay SAC				•	Yes	
Murlough SAC		•			Yes	Beyond range for consideration of Common Seal; de minimus impacts via hydrological pathway
Strangford Lough SAC		•	•		Yes	

The draft Plan Strategy has potential to impact on some or all of the selection features of 14 European sites for which there is a pathway to the plan area, as detailed in Table 3 on the next page. This includes which of the five categories of impacts apply to the site and its features. These 14 sites will be subject to appropriate assessment in Chapter 4.

Table 3: European Sites and Features to be Further Assessed and Potential Impacts

			Potential Impacts				
European Site Name	Pathways	Features that may be affected	Habitat Loss	Disturbance: Direct	Disturbance: Indirect	Aerial Emissions	Water Pollution
Belfast Lough SPA	Direct connection, Hydrological, Disturbance, Aerial	Birds and supporting habitat	•	•	•	•	•
Belfast Lough Ramsar	Direct connection, Hydrological, Disturbance, Aerial	Birds and supporting habitat	•	•	•	•	•
Belfast Lough Open Water SPA	Direct connection, Hydrological, Disturbance	Birds	•	•	•	•	•
East Coast (Northern Ireland) Marine pSPA	Direct connection, Hydrological, Disturbance	Birds	•	•	•	•	•
Outer Ards SPA	Hydrological, Disturbance	Birds	•		•	•	•
Outer Ards Ramsar	Hydrological, Disturbance	Birds	•		•	•	•
Strangford Lough SPA	Hydrological, Disturbance	Birds	•		•	•	•
Larne Lough SPA	Hydrological, Disturbance	Birds	•		•	•	•
Larne Lough Ramsar	Hydrological, Disturbance	Birds	•		•	•	•
Copeland Islands SPA	Hydrological, Disturbance	Birds	•		•		•
The Maidens SAC	Hydrological, Disturbance	Grey Seal	•	•	•		•
Strangford Lough Ramsar	Hydrological, Disturbance	Grey Seal	•	•	•		•
Skerries and Causeway SAC	Hydrological, Disturbance	Harbour Porpoise	•	•	•		•
North Channel cSAC	Hydrological, Disturbance	Harbour Porpoise	•	•	•	•	•

## 4. Stage 2 Appropriate Assessments

### Introduction to Appropriate Assessments

#### Context for Conservation Objectives

EU Member States have responsibility under the Habitats and Birds Directives to ensure that all habitats and species of Community Interest are maintained or restored to Favourable Conservation Status (FCS). Natura 2000 sites have a role to play in achieving this overall objective as the most important core sites for these species and habitats. Each European site must therefore be managed in a way that ensures it contributes as effectively as possible to helping the species and habitats for which it has been designated reach a favourable conservation status.

To ensure that each Natura 2000 site contributes fully to reaching this overall target of FCS, it is important to set clear conservation objectives for each individual site. These define the desired state for each of the species and habitat types for which the site was designated.

Member States are required to implement, on each site, the necessary conservation measures which correspond to the ecological requirements of the protected habitat types and species of Community Interest present, according to Article 6.1 of the Habitats Directive. They must also prevent any damaging activities that could significantly disturb those species and habitats (Article 6.2) and to protect the site from new, potentially damaging plans and projects likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site (Article 6.3, 6.4).

Conservation Objectives have a role in:

- Conservation Planning and Management – guide management of sites, to maintain or restore the habitats and species in favourable condition.
- Assessing Plans and Projects, as required under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive - HRAs are required to assess proposed plans and projects in light of the site's conservation objectives.
- Monitoring and Reporting – Provide the basis for assessing the condition of a feature, the factors that affect it and the actions required.

#### Definition of Favourable Condition and Favourable Conservation Status

Favourable Condition is defined as “the target condition for an interest feature in terms of the abundance, distribution and/or quality of that feature within the site”. Favourable Conservation Status is defined in Articles 1(e) and 1(i) of the Habitats Directive:

The conservation status of a natural habitat is the sum of the influences acting on it and its typical species that may affect its long-term natural distribution, structure and functions as well as the long term survival of its typical species. The conservation status of a natural habitat will be taken as favourable when:

- Its natural range and areas it covers within that range are stable or increasing; and
- the specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future; and
- the conservation status of its typical species is favourable as defined in Article 1(i).

For species, FCS is defined in Article 1(i) as when:

- population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats, and;
- the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and;
- there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its population on a long term basis.

### Sources of information

The appropriate assessments draw on or refer to source documents as detailed below. Digital maps for all sites can be viewed on the Natural Environment Map Viewer or downloaded from the digital datasets page.

### *Special Areas of Conservation*

An overview of each Special Area of Conservation (SAC) can be found on the JNCC UK Protected Sites Page<sup>3</sup>. Under 'General Site Character' there is a link to the Natura 2000 standard data form for that SAC. Further detail is provided on the Annex I habitats and Annex II species that are a primary reason for selection of the site explaining why the site is important and providing a link to information about that habitat in the UK context. Further information for each SAC can be found through the DAERA Protected Areas page<sup>4</sup>. On the site page the link to guidance and literature allows the Reasons for designation, Conservation Objectives and site map to be accessed.

### *Special Protection Areas*

A link to the Natura 2000 standard data form for each SPA can be found on the JNCC UK Protected Sites Page<sup>5</sup>. Further information for each site can be found through the DAERA Protected Areas page<sup>6</sup>. On the site page the link to guidance and literature allows the SPA citation document and Conservation Objectives to be accessed.

### *Ramsar sites*

A link to the Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS) for each Ramsar site can be found on the JNCC UK Protected Sites Page<sup>7</sup>. Further information for each site can be found through the DAERA Protected Areas page<sup>8</sup>. On the site page the link to guidance and literature allows the Ramsar citation document and map to be accessed.

### *Condition Assessment*

NIEA has compiled and made available a spreadsheet, 'Condition of Features in ASSIs and N2Ks 2017'. This details the most recent condition assessment for features, usually with an explanation of the reason why a feature is in unfavourable condition. For some sites and features, condition assessments are available for more than one reporting period. This spreadsheet was referred to in

<sup>3</sup> <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-1458>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/landing-pages/protected-areas>

<sup>5</sup> <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-1458>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/landing-pages/protected-areas>

<sup>7</sup> <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-1458>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/landing-pages/protected-areas>

completing all appropriate assessments. NIEA also provided unpublished condition assessment reports for some individual sites and some site selection features such as seals. Where available these are cited in appropriate assessments.

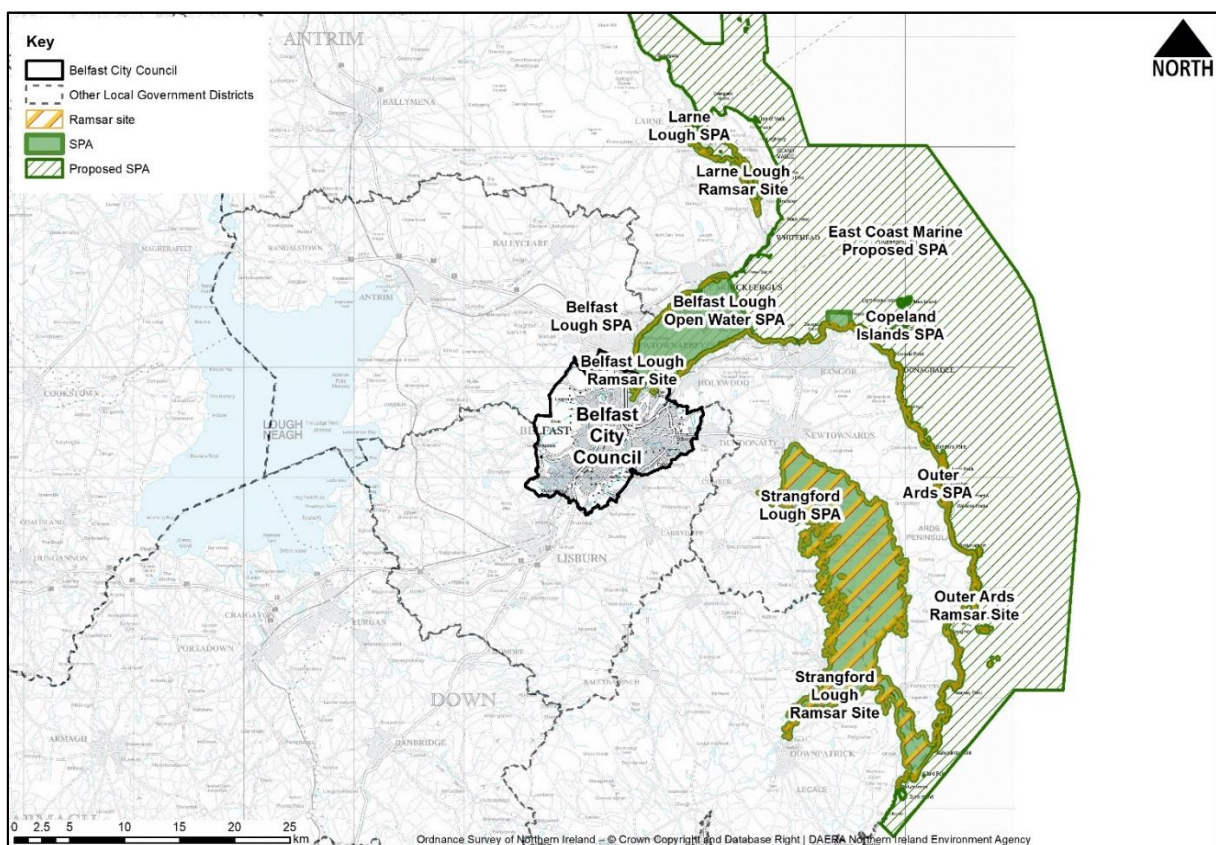
### Sites to be assessed

Of the 14 sites where there is a potential pathway for effects from the plan area, it was possible to group them for further assessment. Eleven sites have bird features that use Belfast Lough for feeding, loafing or rafting (Map 6). Therefore the features of these sites will be subject to similar threats, for example relating to water pollution or disturbance. A combined appropriate assessment was carried out for these sites.

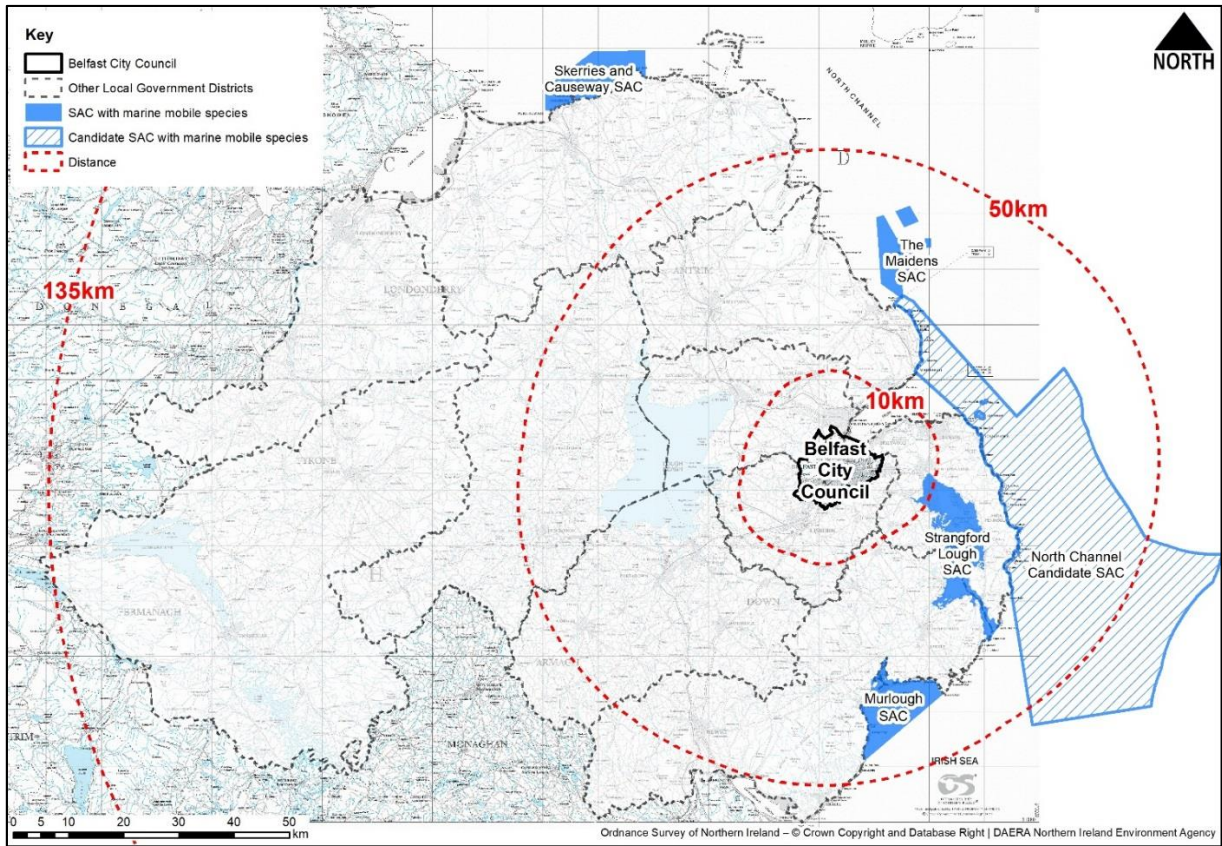
There are four sites designated, or proposed, to protect marine mammals which are to be assessed (Maps 6 & 7). Sites with common selection features were assessed together i.e. Skerries and Causeway SAC and North Channel cSAC for Harbour Porpoise, and The Maidens SAC and Strangford Lough Ramsar for Grey Seal. This resulted in three appropriate assessments to assess the impacts on 14 European site sites.

As there was a significant of information to present about sites and features, tables are in the appropriate assessments to organise information and provide consistency.

**Map 6: Sites Designated for Birds That Utilize Belfast Lough**



Map 7: Sites Designated for Marine Mammals Observed in Belfast Lough



## Appropriate Assessment for Belfast Lough and Associated Sites

### Sites Assessed

Eleven sites have bird features that use Belfast Lough for feeding, loafing or rafting (Map 6). Therefore a combined appropriate assessment was carried out for the following sites.

Site Name:	<b>Belfast Lough Open Water SPA</b>	Site Code:	UK9020290
Status:	Classified Special Protection Area	County:	Antrim & Down
Year:	2009	Area:	5592.99 ha
Site Name:	<b>Belfast Lough SPA</b>	Site Code:	UK9020290
Status:	Classified Special Protection Area	County:	Antrim & Down
Year:	1998	Area:	432.14 ha
Site Name:	<b>Belfast Lough Ramsar</b>	Site Code:	UK12002
Status:	Designated Ramsar Site	County:	Antrim & Down
Year:	1998	Area:	432.14 ha
Site Name:	<b>Copeland Islands SPA</b>	Site Code:	UK9020291
Status:	Classified Special Protection Area	County:	Down
Year:	2009	Area:	201.20 ha
Site Name:	<b>Larne Lough SPA</b>	Site Code:	UK9020042
Status:	Classified Special Protection Area	County:	Antrim
Year:	1997	Area:	398 ha
Site Name:	<b>Larne Lough Ramsar</b>	Site Code:	UK12013
Status:	Designated Ramsar Site	County:	Antrim
Year:	1997	Area:	395.94 ha
Site Name:	<b>Outer Ards SPA</b>	Site Code:	UK9020271
Status:	Classified Special Protection Area	County:	Down
Year:	2002	Area:	4753.82 ha
Site Name:	<b>Outer Ards Ramsar</b>	Site Code:	UK12018
Status:	Designated Ramsar Site	County:	Down
Year:	2005	Area:	1154.16 ha
Site Name:	<b>Strangford Lough SPA</b>	Site Code:	UK9020111
Status:	Classified Special Protection Area	County:	Down
Year:	1998	Area:	15580 ha
Site Name:	<b>Strangford Lough Ramsar</b>	Site Code:	UK12021
Status:	Designated Ramsar Site	County:	Down
Year:	1998	Area:	15581.3 ha
Site Name:	<b>East Coast (NI) Marine pSPA</b>	Site Code:	UK9020320
Status:	Proposed Marine Special Protection Area	County:	Antrim & Down
Year:	NA	Area:	96668.34 Ha



## STAGE 1: TEST OF LIKELY SIGNIFICANCE

### Summary Site Descriptions

The site location and character is described here and site selection features are presented in the table following the descriptions.

#### *Belfast Lough Open Water SPA*

The Belfast Lough open water area comprises the marine area below the mean low water mark. Seawards it extends to a boundary between the eastern limits on the north and south shores at Kilroot and Horse Rock respectively. Water depths within the site are generally between 1m and 10m. Shallow waters, less than 5m in depth, dominate the area with deeper waters confined to the central area of the lough, east of a line between Greenisland and Cultra.

#### *Belfast Lough SPA*

Belfast Lough is a large intertidal sea lough situated at the mouth of the River Lagan on the east coast of Northern Ireland. The inner part of the lough comprises a series of mudflats and lagoons. The outer lough is restricted to mainly rocky shores with some small sandy bays. Marine areas below mean low water are not included.

#### *Belfast Lough Ramsar*

The Belfast Lough Ramsar Area boundary is entirely coincident with that of the Belfast Lough SPA. All the features for which it was designated are also qualifying features for the SPA. The same site description therefore applies and it is assumed to be subject to the same threats and conservation objectives.

#### *Copeland Islands SPA*

The Copeland Islands site comprises three islands (Copeland Island, Light House Island and Mew Island), together with associated islets, off the north-east County Down coast and close to the entrance to Belfast Lough.

#### *Larne Lough SPA*

The sea lough extends from Larne town, southwards to Ballycarry bridge and beyond. The lough includes the extensive inter-tidal mudflats, together with more limited sand, gravel and boulder beaches. The tidal lagoon at Glynn is also included. Adjoining habitat within the site includes saltmarsh and transitional habitats together with limited wet grassland. Swan Island (natural) and Blue Circle Island (artificial) are important tern and gull nesting sites.

#### *Larne Lough Ramsar*

The Larne Lough Ramsar Area boundary is entirely coincident with that of the Larne Lough SPA. All the features for which it was designated are also qualifying features for the SPA. The same site description therefore applies and it is assumed to be subject to the same threats and conservation objectives.

#### *Outer Ards SPA*

The coastal site extends from near Grey Point, Belfast Lough to north of Ballyquintin Point at the southern end of the Ards Peninsula. The site is contiguous with Belfast Lough SPA and Strangford Lough SAC/SPA. It comprises a variety of shoreline types including rock platforms, off-shore islands, boulder, gravel and sand beaches. While the wintering waterfowl utilise the open shore, breeding seabirds (tern species) are present on Cockle Island, Groomsport. A marine area has been included within the SPA adjoining the Cockle Island tern nest site.

#### *Outer Ards Ramsar*

The Outer Ards Ramsar Area boundary is entirely coincident with that of the Outer Ards SPA. All the features for which it was designated are also qualifying features for the SPA. The same site description therefore applies and it is assumed to be subject to the same threats and conservation objectives.

#### *Strangford Lough SPA*

Strangford Lough is a large shallow sea lough with an indented shoreline and a wide variety of marine and intertidal habitats. The west shore has numerous islands typical of flooded drumlin topography. The Lough contains extensive areas of mudflat and also sandflats, saltmarsh and rocky coastline. This is Northern Ireland's most important coastal site for wintering waterfowl, and it is particularly important for breeding terns. Marine areas below mean low water are also included such as the Quoile Pondage nature reserve.

#### *Strangford Lough Ramsar*

The Strangford Lough Ramsar Area boundary is entirely coincident with that of the Strangford Lough SPA. All the features for which it was designated are also qualifying features for the SPA. The same site description therefore applies and it is assumed to be subject to the same threats and conservation objectives.

#### *East Coast (Northern Ireland) Marine SPA (Proposed)*

The East Coast (NI) Marine pSPA includes coastal and near shore waters from Ringfad near Carnlough, Co. Antrim in the north, the marine area of Larne Lough, the marine area of Belfast Lough, waters around the Copeland Islands and offshore of the Ards Peninsula to Cloghan Head, near Ardglass in the south. The SPA covers a diverse range of seabed habitats, from extensive coastal fringing reefs to the fine silt of inner Belfast Lough. Within Belfast Lough muds grade into muddy sands toward the outer Lough, with extensive areas of cobbles and shell debris overlying the muddy sand.

#### [Location and connectivity with the plan area](#)

Belfast Lough SPA and Ramsar sites share the same boundary and are in, or adjoin, the plan area. They include the intertidal area and the important brackish lagoon at the Harbour Estate (D2), together with the tidal channel at Dargan Road. Roost sites occurring outside the extent of natural or semi-natural habitat have not been included but are also important.

East Coast (Northern Ireland) Marine SPA (Proposed) is intended to subsume Belfast Lough Open Water SPA and will therefore be immediately adjacent to the plan area. It also adjoins all of the other SPAs and Ramsar sites above. A number of marine areas have been identified as important for a range of foraging tern species originating from adjoining tern colonies designated as part of the following existing Special Protection Areas - Larne Lough SPA, Belfast Lough SPA, Outer Ards SPA, Copeland Islands SPA, Strangford Lough SPA. All of the above marine areas overlap to a greater or lesser extent and East Coast (Northern Ireland) Marine SPA (Proposed) boundary subsumes all of these.

#### [Selection Features](#)

The following table lists the site selection features for sites connected to Belfast Lough. SPA selection features are subject to review and NIEA has advised of some updated features in 2015. These are mainly additions but Great Crested Grebe was removed from the features for Belfast Lough SPA as its range was covered in Belfast Lough Open Water.

### Site Selection Features for Sites Connected to Belfast Lough

Qualifying interests	B/W	Belfast Lough SPA	Belfast Lough Ramsar	Belfast Lough Open Water SPA	East Coast (Northern Ireland) Marine pSPA	Outer Ards SPA	Outer Ards Ramsar	Strangford Lough SPA	Strangford Lough Ramsar	Larne Lough SPA	Larne Lough Ramsar	Copeland Islands SPA
Redshank	W	Y	Y					Y	Y			
Ringed plover	W					Y	Y					
Turnstone	W					Y	Y					
Knot	W							Y	Y			
Golden plover	W					Y	Y					
Black-tailed Godwit	W	Y	Y									
Bar-tailed Godwit	W	Y						Y				
Great Crested Grebe	W			Y	Y							
Red-throated Diver	W				Y							
Eider Duck	W				Y							
Shelduck	W							Y				
Waterfowl Assemblage	W							Y	Y			
Light-bellied Brent Goose	W					Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
Common Tern	B	Y			Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	
Arctic Tern	B	Y			Y	Y		Y				Y
Sandwich tern	B				Y			Y	Y	Y		
Roseate Tern	B									Y	Y	
Mediterranean Gull	B									Y		
Manx Shearwater	B				Y							Y

**B** Breeding

**W** Wintering

#### Conservation Objectives

The conservation objectives for the SPAs and their qualifying features are presented in the following table. The feature conservation objectives are the same for the majority of sites however there are some that are specific to sites with breeding species or a waterfowl assemblage. Although habitats are not directly protected under the Birds Directive as a selection feature they are a factor in the condition of bird features therefore NIEA includes objectives relating to habitat extent.

### Conservation Objectives for Sites Connected to Belfast Lough

OBJECTIVE	Belfast Lough SPA	Belfast Lough Open Water SPA	East Coast (NI) Marine pSPA	Outer Ards SPA	Strangford Lough SPA	Larne Lough SPA	Copeland Islands SPA
Conservation Objectives Version	V3	V2	V1 (Draft)	V4	V4	V4	V2
Date	04-15	04-15	04-15	04-15	04-15	04-15	04-15
<b>SITE OBJECTIVE</b>							
To maintain each feature in favourable condition.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>SPA SELECTION FEATURE OBJECTIVES</b>							
To maintain or enhance the population of the qualifying species	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Fledging success sufficient to maintain or enhance population				Y	Y	Y	Y
To maintain or enhance the range of habitats utilised by the qualifying species	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
To ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained;	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
To ensure there is no significant disturbance of the species and	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
To ensure that the following are maintained in the long term:	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Population of the species as a viable component of the site	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Distribution of the species within site	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Distribution and extent of habitats supporting the species	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Structure, function and supporting processes of habitats supporting the species	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
No significant decrease in population against national trends (Manx Shearwater and Arctic Tern)							Y
<b>WATERFOWL ASSEMBLAGE FEATURE OBJECTIVES</b>							
No significant decrease in population against national trends					Y		
Maintain species diversity contributing to the Waterfowl Assemblage					Y		
<b>HABITAT OBJECTIVES</b>							
To maintain or enhance the area of natural and semi-natural habitats used or potentially usable by Feature bird species (X ha intertidal area), subject to natural processes	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y
Maintain the extent of main habitat components subject to natural processes	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Roost Sites: Maintain or enhance sites utilised as roosts	Y			Y	Y	Y	
Roosting/loafing sites: Maintain all locations of sites		Y	Y				

Source: DAERA Conservation Objectives

A review of the conservation objectives and pathways between the selection features reveals that of the list of 19 species, not all have a pathway to the designated area. Those that are connected are the five species now listed for Belfast Lough SPA and the additional species listed for East Coast (NI) Marine pSPA. This includes three tern species and Manx Shearwater that all breed in adjacent SPAs and feed in a wider area including East Coast (NI) Marine pSPA. Finally, wintering Eider Duck and Red-throated Diver also use the East Coast pSPA waters which include Belfast Lough.

Although Light-bellied Brent Goose is a feature of three adjacent SPAs and Ramsar sites it feeds primarily on vegetation growing on intertidal mudflats, such as eelgrass and various algae, the most important feeding area being in Strangford Lough, and is not recorded as using Belfast Lough. Ringed plover, golden plover and turnstone are waders recorded as wintering in Outer Ards SPA. Their wintering area is east of Bangor and well away from shipping lanes. Any increase in disturbance from the draft Plan Strategy will have a de minimus effect on these species. Knot and shelduck are only listed for Strangford Lough and therefore cannot be impacted. The Strangford Lough waterfowl assemblage cited components include: Coot, Cormorant, Dunlin, Gadwall, Goldeneye, Great Crested Grebe, Grey Plover, Greylag Goose, Lapwing, Little Grebe, Mallard, Oystercatcher, Pintail, Red-breasted Merganser, Ringed Plover, Shoveler, Teal, Turnstone, Wigeon. While some of these species may be found in Belfast Lough any impacts on the Strangford Lough Wildfowl Assemblage will be de minimus.

#### Pathway to Plan Area

- Redshank
- Black-tailed Godwit
- Bar-tailed Godwit
- Great Crested Grebe
- Red-throated Diver
- Eider Duck
- Common Tern
- Arctic Tern
- Sandwich tern
- Manx Shearwater
- Roseate Tern
- Mediterranean Gull

#### No Pathway to Plan Area

- Ringed plover
- Turnstone
- Knot
- Golden plover
- Shelduck
- Light-bellied Brent Goose
- Waterfowl Assemblage

## Main Threats, Pressures and Activities with Impacts on the Site

The following information is sourced from the Conservation Objectives and gives an indication of potential threats to all site selection features.

### Main Threats on the Site in Relation to draft Plan Strategy

Threat	Could Plan Add to Threat?	Feature/s which may be impacted
Adjoining habitat	Yes	All selection features Belfast Lough SPA and Ramsar
Aquaculture	No	
Bait digging – commercial or ‘recreational’ and shellfish gathering.	No	
Boating activity – commercial	Yes	All sites and selection features
Boating activity – recreational	Yes	All sites and selection features
Dredging	Yes	All sites and selection features
Fishing – commercial or recreational	No	
Habitat extent – inter-tidal	Yes	Redshank and Black-tailed Godwit Belfast Lough SPA and Ramsar
Habitat extent – open water	No	
Habitat quality – inter-tidal	Yes	Redshank and Black-tailed Godwit Belfast Lough SPA and Ramsar
Habitat quality – open water	Yes	All sites and selection features
High tide roosts	Yes	Redshank and Black-tailed Godwit Belfast Lough SPA and Ramsar
Roosting and loafing areas	Yes	Red-throated Diver, Eider Duck, Manx Shearwater
Introduced species	Yes	Redshank and Black-tailed Godwit Belfast Lough SPA and Ramsar
Recreational activities.	Yes	All sites and selection features
Research activities.	No	
System dynamics	Yes	Redshank and Black-tailed Godwit Belfast Lough SPA and Ramsar
Wildfowling	No	
Cull of fledglings/ young	No	
Enhanced bird competition	Yes	Breeding Terns, Mediterranean Gulls and Manx Shearwater
Habitat extent and quality-breeding	No	
Predation	No	
Game Bird Management	No	
Grazing regime	No	
Field boundaries on Big Copeland	No	
Alien species	No	
Power cables	No	
Beach cleaning	No	
Beach sand and gravel extraction.	No	
Coastal protection schemes	No	
Seaweed harvesting	No	
Marine renewable energy developments	No	
Sand dredging - commercial	No	

While many threats are listed for all SPAs, some are specific to one or a few sites such as game bird management and predation on Copeland Islands SPA; and coastal protection and seaweed harvesting which are issues for Strangford Lough and Outer Ards SPAs.

#### Sensitivities of Selection Features to plan

Potential impacts arising from the plan as identified in Chapter 3 are listed in the following table, which identifies which of these could affect the selection features of European sites connected with Belfast Lough.

Potential Impacts Arising From Plan	Pathway for Impact to affect this site?	If there is pathway is it identified as a threat above?	Features that may be affected
Habitat Loss	Yes	Yes	Wintering/breeding birds in Belfast Lough SPA/Ramsar.
Disturbance: Direct	Yes	Yes	
Disturbance: Indirect	Yes	Yes	Wintering/breeding bird features that feed, breed, roost, loaf or raft in or close to Belfast Lough.
Aerial Emissions	Yes	No	
Water Pollution	Yes	Yes	Wintering/breeding bird features that feed, breed, roost, loaf or raft in or close to Belfast Lough.

#### Potential for Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts will be considered in Stage Two Appropriate Assessment.

#### Screening conclusion

Under the precautionary approach it was found that all European sites connected to Belfast Lough, other than Outer Ards Ramsar site, will require appropriate assessment. Appropriate assessment is required to assess potential impacts of habitat loss, direct and indirect disturbance and water pollution on site integrity in light of the site conservation objectives and conservation objectives for the sites and species listed in the following table.

Qualifying interests	B/W	Belfast Lough SPA	Belfast Lough Ramsar	Belfast Lough Open Water SPA	East Coast (Northern Ireland) Marine pSPA	Outer Ards SPA	Strangford Lough SPA	Strangford Lough Ramsar	Larne Lough SPA	Larne Lough Ramsar	Copeland Islands SPA
Redshank	W	Y	Y								
Black-tailed Godwit	W	Y	Y								
Bar-tailed Godwit	W	Y									
Great Crested Grebe	W			Y	Y						
Red-throated Diver	W				Y						
Eider Duck	W				Y						
Manx Shearwater	B				Y						Y
Common Tern	B	Y			Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	
Arctic Tern	B	Y			Y	Y	Y				Y
Sandwich tern	B				Y		Y	Y	Y		
Roseate Tern	B								Y	Y	
Mediterranean Gull	B								Y		

**B** Breeding  
**W** Wintering

## STAGE TWO APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

### Site specific evidence sources

Conservation Objectives: DAERA 1/4/2015

Condition Assessment: DAERA SPA: Monitoring Reports 2013, Unpublished; DAERA Condition of Features in ASSIs and N2Ks 2017, Unpublished

### Elements of plan that are likely to give rise to significant effects

Location of Feature	Source of impact	Direct/Indirect	Pathway	Effect	Qualifying feature/s affected
Belfast Lough SPA and Ramsar, Belfast Lough Open Water SPA, East Coast (NI) Marine pSPA	Habitat Loss	Direct	In and adjacent to plan area.	Loss of intertidal feeding habitat, roosting or breeding habitat	Redshank Bar-tailed Godwit
	Disturbance: Direct	Direct	From construction, operation, recreation in or near the SPA/Ramsar	Temporary displacement of features, potential energy cost.	Black-tailed Godwit, Common Tern
	Disturbance: Indirect	Indirect	Shipping and recreational boating	Temporary displacement of features, potential energy cost.	All selection features
	Water Pollution	Indirect/Direct	Hydrological	Deterioration of water quality, impact on prey, potential direct impact accidental spillage	All selection features
Outer Ards SPA and Ramsar, Larne Lough SPA and Ramsar, Strangford Lough SPA, Copeland Islands SPA	Disturbance: Indirect	Indirect	Shipping and recreational boating	Temporary displacement of features, potential energy cost.	Great Crested Grebe Arctic Tern
	Water Pollution	Indirect	Hydrological	Deterioration of water quality, impact on prey, potential direct impact accidental spillage	Common Tern, Sandwich Tern, Roseate Tern, Mediterranean Gull

### Impacts that may arise as a result of the plan

The impacts are detailed above and in summary are:

- Habitat Loss
- Disturbance: Direct
- Disturbance: Indirect
- Water Pollution

### Site selection features that could be impacted

*Redshank (Tringa totanus)*

The redshank is a scarce breeding bird in Northern Ireland, but is much more common in autumn and winter when migrants arrive from further north. Numbers of breeding redshank in Northern Ireland have declined dramatically since 1987. Outside the breeding season, numbers of redshank in Britain and Ireland are swollen by immigration of birds from the large Icelandic population.



Wintering numbers vary, but in winter 2000/01 (October) a peak of over 20,000 redshank were counted in Ireland, nearly 9,000 of these in Northern Ireland. The most important Northern Ireland sites for wintering and migratory redshank are Strangford Lough and Belfast Lough which are of international importance for this species.

*Black-tailed Godwit (Limosa limosa)*

The black-tailed godwit occurs in Northern Ireland primarily on passage and during winter months, mainly frequenting estuaries and coastal habitats in winter but also inland wet grassland sites on passage. Peak numbers in Northern Ireland usually occur in September and April. The number of birds visiting Northern Ireland is increasing in line with an increase in the Icelandic breeding population. The main site in Northern Ireland is Belfast Lough, which supports internationally important numbers. Belfast Lough supports internationally important numbers in winter, with 400 to 500 birds regularly present. Passage numbers are much higher, with counts of over 1,000 birds from Belfast Lough. Black-tailed godwits are vulnerable to disturbance including from people and dogs. This species can be seen at the RSPB Window on Wildlife Reserve in Belfast Lough and is therefore is closely associated with the plan area.

*Bar-tailed godwit (Limosa lapponica)*

The bar-tailed godwit is a winter visitor, almost exclusively linked to coastal habitats when in Northern Ireland. They are largely confined to estuaries, with the largest numbers recorded on sandy estuaries and small numbers recorded using non-estuarine coastline. Lough Foyle in County Derry and Strangford Lough in County Down support highest numbers (1,500-2,500 birds) however it is now listed as a feature for Belfast Lough.

*Great Crested Grebe (Podiceps cristatus)*

Great Crested Grebe winter outside of their breeding season along the east coast of Northern Ireland. The population on Belfast Lough is thought in part, to include breeding birds from Lough Neagh. The move from inland freshwater breeding sites to coastal wintering locations is typical for this fish-eating species.

*Red-throated Diver (Gavia stellata)*

Red-throated Diver are relatively common in our coastal waters, migrating to the east coast of Northern Ireland from their breeding grounds in Iceland and other countries in northern Europe. Significant numbers have been recorded in Belfast Lough. They are particularly vulnerable to disturbance.

*Eider Duck (Somateria mollissima)*

The non-breeding population of Eider Duck in the East Coast (Northern Ireland) marine area is the largest aggregation of this species in the whole of the island of Ireland. This population includes birds which breed along the County Antrim and County Down coast, other birds from elsewhere along the Irish coast, and probably birds from Scotland as well.

*Common Tern (Sterna hirundo)*

Common Tern are migratory visitors to Northern Ireland and breed in several colonies along the east coast. They use the expanse of the East Coast (Northern Ireland) marine area as a foraging habitat during their breeding season. They fly from their adjoining breeding colonies in the designated Larne Lough, Belfast Lough, and Strangford Lough SPAs.

*Arctic Tern (Sterna paradisaea)*

Arctic Tern are migratory visitors to Northern Ireland and breed in several colonies along the east coast. They use the expanse of the East Coast (Northern Ireland) marine area as a foraging habitat during their breeding season. They fly from their adjoining breeding colonies in the designated Belfast Lough, Outer Ards, Copeland Islands, and Strangford Lough SPAs.

*Sandwich Tern (Thalasseus sandvicensis)*

Sandwich Tern are migratory visitors to Northern Ireland and breed in several colonies along the east coast. They use the expanse of the East Coast (Northern Ireland) marine area as a foraging habitat during their breeding season. They fly from their adjoining breeding colonies in the designated Larne Lough, Outer Ards, and Strangford Lough SPAs. Sandwich Tern spend our winter around the coasts of the Mediterranean, and western and southern Africa. Increasingly some remain in Northern Irish waters through our winter.

*Manx Shearwater (Puffinus puffinus)*

Manx Shearwater breed on the Copeland Islands SPA. During our winter they migrate to the south Atlantic. This species can travel substantial distances to feed. Manx Shearwater use the waters around the Copeland Islands for their 'rafting' behaviour. This usually takes place in the evenings, during which time they wait for nightfall, so that they can safely return to their nesting burrows. They are vulnerable to attacks from predators such as Great black-backed gulls.

*Roseate Tern (Sterna dougallii)*

The roseate tern is a ground nesting migratory colonial seabird. It occurs in Northern Ireland in the months May to August wintering off the coast of western Africa. The roseate tern has a highly fragmented breeding range in the north-East Atlantic. Its European stronghold is the Azores (Portugal), elsewhere the species breeds only very locally in Britain, Ireland and France. In Northern Ireland four nests were found during Seabird 2000, all in Larne Lough, Co Antrim (Mitchell et al., 2004). This is the only extant site for the species in Northern Ireland. It is one of Britain and Ireland's rarest breeding seabirds. Numbers at other colonies such as Larne Lough, continue to fluctuate, with eight nests present in 2004.

*Mediterranean Gull (Larus melanocephalus)*

The Mediterranean gull is the most recent addition to the species of seabirds breeding in the UK. Mediterranean Gulls have been breeding in Ireland since at least 1995, with the first confirmed breeding record being at Larne Lough although the number of pairs is low. Although not listed for Belfast Lough two breeding pairs have been recorded at the RSPB reserve in Belfast Harbour which had at least three young between them.

## Condition Assessment

Available information on the condition of selection features is presented in the following table.

**Condition Assessment for Site Selection Features**

Qualifying interests	B/W	Belfast Lough SPA		Belfast Lough Open Water SPA		Outer Ards SPA		Strangford SPA		Larne Lough SPA		Copeland Islands SPA		East Coast (NI) Marine pSPA	
		Condition	Year	Condition	Year	Condition	Year	Condition	Year	Condition	Year	Condition	Year	Condition	Year
Redshank	W	U	2014 <sup>A</sup>					F	2014 <sup>A</sup>						
Black-tailed Godwit	W	F	2012 <sup>B</sup>												
Bar-tailed Godwit	W	F-M	2012 <sup>B</sup>					F	2014 <sup>A</sup>						
Great Crested Grebe	W	F	2014 <sup>A</sup>	F	2014 <sup>A</sup>									F	2014 <sup>C</sup>
Red-throated Diver	W													N-A <sup>B</sup>	
Eider Duck	W													N-A <sup>B</sup>	
Manx Shearwater	B											F	2014 <sup>A</sup>	F	2014 <sup>C</sup>
Common Tern	B	N-A <sup>B</sup>						F	2014 <sup>A</sup>	F	2014 <sup>A</sup>			F	2014 <sup>C</sup>
Arctic Tern	B	N-A <sup>B</sup>				F	2014 <sup>A</sup>	F	2014 <sup>A</sup>			F	2014 <sup>A</sup>	F	2014 <sup>C</sup>
Sandwich tern	B							F	2014 <sup>A</sup>	F	2014 <sup>A</sup>			F	2014 <sup>C</sup>
Roseate Tern	B									F	2014 <sup>A</sup>				
Mediterranean Gull	B									N-A <sup>B</sup>					

**2014<sup>A</sup>** From Conservation Objectives

**N-A<sup>B</sup> or 2012<sup>B</sup>** From Condition of Features in ASSIs and N2Ks Dec 2017, NIEA Unpublished

**2014<sup>C</sup>** Derived from Condition of associated SPAs (no condition assessment for pSPA)

**B** Breeding

**W** Wintering

**F** Favourable: Unclassified

**F-M** Favourable: Maintained

**U** Unfavourable

**N-A** Not Assessed

## Controls in place to address threats

Any new development would be subject to legislative requirements and environmental assessment including the need to comply with the requirements of the Habitats Regulations as well as the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS).

## Mitigation to address threats

The following recommendations, developed as an outcome of the appropriate assessment in this HRA, provide mitigation for potential effects on the bird features of Belfast Lough and connected sites.

- Seek further information from DAERA before LPP to identify any areas adjacent to the plan area that are of high sensitivity for birds or marine mammals so that this can be addressed in spatial designations.

- B. Address at LPP, through criteria for review and selection of sites and Key Site Requirements (KSRs) to avoid or reduce potential effects.
- C. At LPP requirements can be identified for sites within a given distance of Belfast Lough so that potential disturbance impacts can be identified and measures put in place such as timing of construction and operations.
- D. Identify and assess plans that in-combination may lead to a cumulative adverse effect on site integrity through disturbance for the final HRA.
- E. Identify types of projects that should be assessed for indirect disturbance effects to ensure the need for HRA of these effects is not overlooked.
- F. Land release should be phased to ensure alignment of housing delivery with planned infrastructure investment and development lead-times to reduce the risk of water pollution.

#### Implications for each qualifying interest in light of its conservation objectives

Feature	AESI before mitigation	AESI after mitigation
<b>Redshank</b>	Potential AESI	No AESI
<b>Black-tailed Godwit</b>	Potential AESI	No AESI
<b>Bar-tailed Godwit</b>	Potential AESI	No AESI
<b>Great Crested Grebe</b>	Potential AESI	No AESI
<b>Red-throated Diver</b>	Potential AESI	No AESI
<b>Eider Duck</b>	Potential AESI	No AESI
<b>Manx Shearwater</b>	Potential AESI	No AESI
<b>Common Tern</b>	Potential AESI	No AESI
<b>Arctic Tern</b>	Potential AESI	No AESI
<b>Sandwich tern</b>	Potential AESI	No AESI
<b>Roseate Tern</b>	Potential AESI	No AESI
<b>Mediterranean Gull</b>	Potential AESI	No AESI

#### In-combination effects from other plans or projects that are likely to have significant effects

The assessment found that, with mitigation in place, there will be no adverse effect on site integrity. The sites and selection features may be subject to effects arising from Belfast Harbour or development activities in the Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001, Ards and Down Area Plan 2015 and the Banbridge Newry and Mourne Area Plan 2015. Councils are preparing new local development plans and these may contribute to in-combination effects. The need to consider and assess in-combination effects will be reviewed before the HRA is finalized.

### Appropriate Assessment consideration

Based on information available on European sites connected to Belfast Lough and their selection features the draft Plan Strategy proposals are considered to have potential for one or more of the following effects on the integrity of these sites and their features.

Integrity of site checklist	
<p><b><i>Does the plan have the potential to:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cause delays in progress towards achieving the conservation objectives of the site?</li> <li>• interrupt progress towards achieving the conservation objectives of the site?</li> <li>• disrupt those factors that help to maintain the favourable conditions of the site?</li> <li>• interfere with the balance, distribution and density of key species that are the indicators of the favourable condition of the site?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Yes/No</b></p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>Yes</p>
<p><b><i>Other indicators: Does the plan have the potential to:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cause changes to the vital defining aspects (e.g. nutrient balance) that determine how the site functions as a habitat or ecosystem?</li> <li>• change the dynamics of the relationships (between, for example, soil and water or plants and animals) that define the structure and/or function of the site?</li> <li>• interfere with predicted or expected natural changes to the site (such as water dynamics or chemical composition)?</li> <li>• reduce the area of key habitats?</li> <li>• reduce the population of key species?</li> <li>• change the balance between key species?</li> <li>• reduce diversity of the site?</li> <li>• result in disturbance that could affect population size or density or the balance between key species?</li> <li>• result in fragmentation?</li> <li>• result in loss or reduction of key features (e.g. tree cover, tidal exposure, annual flooding , etc.)?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Yes/No</b></p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p>

### Appropriate Assessment Conclusion

The evidence gathered and assessment undertaken does not enable us to conclude reasonably and objectively that the implementation of the plan will not adversely affect key species and key habitats or the integrity (structure and function and conservation objectives) of the following sites:

- Belfast Lough Open Water SPA
- Belfast Lough Ramsar
- Belfast Lough SPA
- Copeland Islands SPA
- East Coast (NI) Marine pSPA
- Larne Lough SPA
- Larne Lough Ramsar
- Outer Ards SPA
- Strangford Lough Ramsar
- Strangford Lough SPA

Mitigation measures are required to ensure that the plan will not have any effect on the integrity of these sites with regard to:

- Habitat Loss
- Disturbance: Direct
- Disturbance: Indirect
- Water Pollution

These mitigation measures are detailed above and their incorporation and implementation is discussed in Chapter 5.

## Appropriate Assessment for Harbour Porpoise Sites (Skerries and Causeway SAC & North Channel cSAC)

### Sites Assessed

Site Name:	<b>Skerries and Causeway SAC</b>	Site Code:	UK0030383
Status:	Classified Special Protection Area	County:	Antrim
Year:	2017	Area:	10875.96 ha
Site Name:	<b>North Channel cSAC/SCI</b>	Site Code:	UK0030399
Status:	Candidate Special Area of Conservation Site of Community Interest (SCI)	County:	Marine
Year:	Listed as SCI in 2017	Area:	160,367ha/1604km <sup>2</sup>

### STAGE 1: TEST OF LIKELY SIGNIFICANCE

#### Summary Site Description

##### *Skerries and Causeway SAC*

The Skerries and Causeway site is located adjacent to the coastline of Portstewart, Portrush, Bushmills and the Giant's Causeway World Heritage Site (which lends part of its name to the SAC site; the other half of the SAC name comes from the Skerries islands and rocks off Portrush). The site contains the qualifying Features: Annex I *Reef*; Annex I *Sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater at all times*; Annex I *Submerged or partially submerged sea caves*; and Annex II *Harbour Porpoise*.

Much of the reef in this area is sand scoured reef, an unusual type of reef in a Northern Ireland context. This produces a close relationship between the reef and the adjacent sediments: as well as the sand scoured areas of reef and stony reef, there are also large areas of bedrock reef that have a thick veneer of sediment, but still support bedrock epifauna (attached to the bedrock but growing up through the sediment); and conversely, there are also areas of coarse and mixed sediments that support epifauna communities more reminiscent of the reef habitat.

Harbour Porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) have been consistently recorded during more than 140 dedicated effort watches at six sites within the proposed boundary. These records span every month of the year, including months outside of the breeding and calving seasons and confirm the continuous presence of harbour porpoise within this area. Continuous or regular presence is graded A (excellent conservation).

##### *North Channel cSAC*

Located along the eastern coast of Northern Ireland, the North Channel cSAC, which is also listed as a Site of Community Interest (SCI), has been identified as an important winter area for harbour porpoise *Phocoena phocoena*, supporting an estimated 1.2% of the UK Celtic and Irish Seas Management Unit population. This site includes locations where some of the largest groups of harbour porpoise have been observed around Northern Ireland. Groups of up to 100 harbour porpoise have been sighted.

Habitats within the site consist mainly of coarse or sandy sediments, with patches of rock and mud. Water depths reach a maximum of 150m along the eastern boundary, but much of the site lies between 10m and 40m. 85% of the site lies in Northern Irish inshore waters (0 – 12 nm from shore).

The site covers important winter habitat for harbour porpoise and extends from the coast into offshore waters, overlapping with the Pisces Reef Complex SAC.

Much of the site incorporates shallow depths of less than 40m and the seabed energy layer of EU Seemap indicates that most of the site is of moderate energy. In particular the coastal strip from the Copelands to south of Cloughey on the Northern Irish coast has higher current energy, where it can be expected that eddy activity (turbulence) is higher.

Most of the areas with frequent sightings are in coastal waters. These are often areas where there is a high degree of water mixing, sometimes associated with strong tidal streams. Such areas have high biological productivity, and are often associated with important concentrations of small prey fish.

#### Location and connectivity with the plan area

Both sites are connected to the plan area via marine waters. The nearest point of the North Channel cSAC is 18.5kms from the plan area via the coastline. Skerries and Causeway SAC is 98km away via marine waters. Harbour Porpoise are however found all around the coast of Ireland including Belfast Harbour and Strangford Lough. They can occur close to shore and in tidal rivers and the Ulster Wildlife Trust lists Belfast Harbour as a location to view the species.

In light of the distance to Skerries and Causeway SAC the marine habitat features cannot be affected by the draft Plan Strategy therefore only Harbour Porpoise is considered further.

#### Selection Features

Feature type	Feature	Global Status	Size/ extent/ population
Species	Harbour Porpoise <i>Phocoena phocoena</i>	C (Skerries and Causeway SAC)  B (North Channel cSAC)	No fixed number of harbour porpoise above or below which the population would be viable or not as the number naturally varies.

#### Conservation Objectives

*Skerries and Causeway SAC*

The Conservation Objectives for this site are:

To maintain (or restore where appropriate) the

- Reefs
- Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time, and
- Submerged and partially submerged sea caves
- Harbour Porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*)

The SAC selection feature component objectives for Harbour Porpoise are:

- Ensure the species is a viable component of the site.
- Ensure there is no significant disturbance of the species.
- Ensure the supporting habitats and processes relevant to harbour porpoises and their prey are maintained.

North Channel cSAC

The Conservation Objectives for this site are:

To avoid deterioration of the habitats of the harbour porpoise or significant disturbance to the harbour porpoise, thus ensuring that the integrity of the site is maintained and the site makes an appropriate contribution to maintaining Favourable Conservation Status (FCS) for the UK harbour porpoise.

The SAC selection feature component objectives for Harbour Porpoise are:

To ensure for harbour porpoise that, subject to natural change, the following attributes are maintained or restored in the long term:

1. The species is a viable component of the site.
2. There is no significant disturbance of the species.
3. The supporting habitats and processes relevant to harbour porpoises and their prey are maintained.

**Main Threats, Pressures and Activities with Impacts on the Site**

The following information is sourced from the Draft Conservation Objectives and Advice on Activities for North Channel cSAC which are specific to Harbour Porpoise and gives an indication of potential threats to this site selection feature. Those pressures ranked ‘high’ are known to have the greatest impact relative to other pressures on the population of UK harbour porpoises.’

**Key activities and the relative risk of impacts on harbour porpoise throughout UK waters**

Activities	Pressures	Impacts	Current relative level of impact	Could Plan Add to Threat?
Commercial fisheries with bycatch of harbour porpoise (predominantly static nets)	Removal of non-target species	Mortality through entanglement/bycatch	High	No
Discharge/run-off from land- fill, terrestrial and offshore industries	Contaminants	Affects on water and prey quality Bioaccumulation through contaminated prey ingestion Health issues (e.g. on reproduction)	High	Yes
Shipping, drilling, dredging and disposal, aggregate extraction, pile driving, acoustic surveys, underwater explosion, military activity, acoustic deterrent devices and recreational boating activity	Anthropogenic underwater sound	Mortality Internal injury Disturbance leading to physical and acoustic behavioural changes (potentially impacting foraging, navigation, breeding, socialising)	Medium	Yes
Shipping, recreational boating, tidal energy installations	Death or injury by collision	Mortality Injury	Medium/Low	Yes
Commercial fisheries (reduction in prey resources)	Removal of target species	Reduction in food availability Increased competition from other species Displacement from natural range	Medium	No



### Sensitivities of Selection Features to plan

Potential impacts arising from the plan as identified in Chapter 3 are listed in the following table which identifies which of these could affect the selection features of Skerries and Causeway SAC and North Channel cSAC.

Potential Impacts Arising From Plan	Pathway for Impact to affect this site?	If there is a pathway is it identified above as a threat?	Features that may be affected
Habitat Loss	Yes	No	Harbour Porpoise
Disturbance: Direct	Yes	Yes	
Disturbance: Indirect	Yes	Yes	
Aerial Emissions	Yes	No	
Water Pollution	Yes	Yes	

### Potential for Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts will be considered in Stage Two Appropriate Assessment.

### Screening conclusion

Under the precautionary approach it was deemed that Skerries and Causeway SAC and North Channel cSAC will require Appropriate Assessment to consider the impacts of direct and indirect disturbance and water pollution on Harbour Porpoise as a selection feature.

## STAGE TWO APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

### Site specific evidence sources

Conservation Objectives: DAERA & JNCC January 2016 Draft Conservation Objectives and Advice on Activities North Channel cSAC draft Conservation Objectives; Inshore and Offshore SAC: North Channel SAC Selection Assessment Document, All available on JNCC<sup>9</sup>

### Elements of plan that are likely to give rise to significant effects

Location of Feature	Source of impact	Pathway	Effect	Qualifying feature affected
Mobile species found across the North Channel cSAC	<p>Discharges and/or runoff from landfill, agriculture, forestry, sewage/effluent treatments, construction/infrastructure/development activities, including offshore/coastal projects including renewables.</p> <p>Noise from shipping, piling, dredging and coastal/marine based recreational activities.</p> <p>Increased presence of boating activity linked to industry or leisure/recreation.</p>	Hydrological including travel of underwater noise	Higher sediment levels and contaminant levels affecting visibility/water quality and the food chain. Increased risk to health and wellbeing of species due to this and to increased disturbance levels that can affect species physiology and behaviour, influencing movements, breeding and feeding activities. Increased risk of displacement, injury and mortality.	Harbour Porpoise <i>Phocoena phocoena</i>

### Impacts that may arise as a result of the plan

Harbour Porpoise is a mobile species that can be found in high densities across the North Channel cSAC with sightings at various points along the east coast. Discharges and contaminants to the water/marine environment can come from many sources – landfill, agriculture, forestry, construction sites, coastal/marine development/activities, shipping, renewables and the leisure/recreation industry too. All of these sources also lead to various types of disturbance including noise, light, litter and people. The effect of these on water quality and existing disturbance levels, could affect the physiological and behavioural activity of Harbour Porpoise during breeding, feeding and resting cycles as well as their general health and well-being through impacts on the food chain.

Physical disturbance from recreational activity and vessel strikes can also be an issue in coastal areas where high densities of porpoises coincide with high densities of boat traffic, particularly during the summer season.

### Site selection features that could be impacted

Harbour Porpoise *Phocoena phocoena* appears to favour the continental shelf and may make seasonal movements to the coast. This inshore movement appears to be connected with the feeding

<sup>9</sup> <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-7242>

of calves in shallow waters. During this time they have a very intense ‘social’ life. The highest number of births occurs during June and July. The young to adult ratio is at its highest level during this period. As the end of summer approaches, young and adult individuals appear to range more widely together.

Harbour Porpoise *Phocoena phocoena* occur in elevated densities in the site, particularly during the winter months (October – March). The seasonality in porpoise density within the site should be considered in the assessment of impacts and proposed management.

#### Controls in place to address threats

Any new development would be subject to legislative requirements and environmental assessment including the need to comply with the requirements of the Habitats Regulations as well as the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS).

Any boating activity or marine based recreational activity should be subject to byelaws contained in The Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Order) 1985.

Any associated development to these activities should be subject to The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations in Northern Ireland (as amended) 1995.

Regional and Local Planning Policy will apply through the Strategic Planning Policy Statement and Local Policies under the Local Development Plan.

Any planning applications, proposals, plans or projects in the coastal area will be subject to a suite of policies for environment, natural heritage, landscape and coast.

#### Mitigation to address threats

The following recommendations, developed as an outcome of the appropriate assessment in this HRA, provide mitigation for potential effects on Harbour Porpoise as a selection feature of Skerries and Causeway SAC and North Channel cSAC.

- A. Seek further information from DAERA before LPP to identify any areas adjacent to the plan area that are of high sensitivity for birds or marine mammals so that this can be addressed in spatial designations.
- B. Address at LPP, through criteria for review and selection of sites and Key Site Requirements (KSRs) to avoid or reduce potential effects.
- C. At LPP requirements can be identified for sites within a given distance of Belfast Lough so that potential disturbance impacts can be identified and measures put in place such as timing of construction and operations.
- D. Identify and assess plans that in-combination may lead to a cumulative adverse effect on site integrity through disturbance for the final HRA.
- E. Identify types of projects that should be assessed for indirect disturbance effects to ensure the need for HRA of these effects is not overlooked.
- F. Land release should be phased to ensure alignment of housing delivery with planned infrastructure investment and development lead-times to reduce the risk of water pollution.

#### Implications for each qualifying interest in light of its conservation objectives

Feature	AESI before mitigation	AESI after mitigation
Harbour Porpoise <i>Phocoena phocoena</i>	Potential AESI	No AESI

### In-combination effects from other plans or projects that are likely to have significant effects

The assessment found that, with mitigation in place, there will be no adverse effect on site integrity. The sites and selection features may be subject to effects arising from Belfast Harbour or development activities in the Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001, Ards and Down Area Plan 2015 and the Banbridge Newry and Mourne Area Plan 2015. Councils are preparing new local development plans and these may contribute to in-combination effects. The need to consider and assess in-combination effects will be reviewed before the HRA is finalized.

### Appropriate Assessment consideration

Based on information available on Harbour Porpoise as a selection feature of Skerries and Causeway SAC and North Channel cSAC the draft Plan Strategy proposals are considered to have potential for the following effects on the integrity of these sites for Harbour Porpoise.

Integrity of site checklist	
<p><b><i>Does the plan have the potential to:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cause delays in progress towards achieving the conservation objectives of the site?</li> <li>• interrupt progress towards achieving the conservation objectives of the site?</li> <li>• disrupt those factors that help to maintain the favourable conditions of the site?</li> <li>• interfere with the balance, distribution and density of key species that are the indicators of the favourable condition of the site?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Yes/No</b></p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>Yes</p>
<p><b><i>Other indicators: Does the plan have the potential to:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cause changes to the vital defining aspects (e.g. nutrient balance) that determine how the site functions as a habitat or ecosystem?</li> <li>• change the dynamics of the relationships (between, for example, soil and water or plants and animals) that define the structure and/or function of the site?</li> <li>• interfere with predicted or expected natural changes to the site (such as water dynamics or chemical composition)?</li> <li>• reduce the area of key habitats?</li> <li>• reduce the population of key species?</li> <li>• change the balance between key species?</li> <li>• reduce diversity of the site?</li> <li>• result in disturbance that could affect population size or density or the balance between key species?</li> <li>• result in fragmentation?</li> <li>• result in loss or reduction of key features (e.g. tree cover, tidal exposure, annual flooding , etc.)?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Yes/No</b></p> <p>Yes</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p>

### Appropriate Assessment Conclusion

The evidence gathered and assessment undertaken does not enable us to conclude reasonably and objectively that the implementation of the plan will not adversely affect key species and key habitats or the integrity (structure and function and conservation objectives) of the North Channel cSAC or Skerries and Causeway SAC.

Mitigation measures are required to ensure that the plan will not have any effect on the integrity of these sites with regard to

- Disturbance: Direct
- Disturbance: Indirect
- Water Pollution

These mitigation measures are detailed above and their incorporation and implementation is discussed in Chapter 5.

## Appropriate Assessment for Grey Seal as a Selection Feature of The Maidens SAC and Strangford Lough Ramsar

### Sites Assessed

Site Name:	<b>The Maidens SAC</b>	Site Code:	UK0030384
Status:	Designated Special Area of Conservation	County:	Down
Year:	2017	Area:	7461.3ha/74.61km <sup>2</sup>
Site Name:	<b>Strangford Lough Ramsar</b>	Site Code:	UK12021
Status:	Designated Ramsar Site	County:	Down
Year:	1998	Area:	15581.3ha

### STAGE 1: TEST OF LIKELY SIGNIFICANCE

#### Summary Site Description

##### *The Maidens SAC*

The Maidens SAC is a group of rocky reefs detached from the coast, northeast of Larne, Northern Ireland. The Maidens (or Hulin Rocks) are identified on the Admiralty Charts as a group of small rocky reefs either awash or just emergent. In only two cases are they large enough to be termed islands and to carry buildings, namely the West Maiden, which has a disused lighthouse and the East Maiden, which supports the present lighthouse.

As well as the main reef plateau (the Maidens plateau) of East and West Maiden, there are also four other reef areas that form a part of the SAC. The primary reason for the designation of The Maidens as an SAC is for the Annex I habitat Reef. Most of the reef area of The Maidens is bedrock reef with a smaller proportion of stony reef.

A small area to the south of East Maiden island has been shown by diving surveys to be shallow stable sandy gravels (partially sheltered by East and West Maiden islands) that includes maerl and other long lived species and this small area has therefore been classed as Annex I Sandbanks slightly covered by sea water all of the time.

Grey Seals (Annex II) are not the primary feature of The Maidens proposed SAC. However, these relatively remote rocks, islands and the waters surrounding them in the North Channel are important for providing haul-out sites, resting sites and foraging areas for Grey Seals, with a maxima count of 70 adults recorded in a July 2000 survey. Recent surveys in 2009 confirmed use of the site for both pupping and breeding. The site is almost entirely subtidal and is remote from the coast. At the small islands of East Maiden and West Maiden and on the emergent outlying rocks, the boundary of the proposed SAC extends up to Mean High Water. These intertidal areas include haul-outs for Annex II Grey Seal and Common Seal. The Maidens have important haul outs for non-breeding resting and are well located for accessing good feeding grounds for both pups and adults.

##### *Strangford Lough Ramsar*

Strangford Lough is a large (150 km<sup>2</sup>) marine inlet on the east coast of County Down, of which about 50 km<sup>2</sup> lies between high water mark mean tide (HWMMT) and low water mark mean tide (LWMMT). It is connected to the open sea by the Strangford Narrows, an 8 km long channel with a minimum width of 0.5 km. The Lough is 30 km long from head to mouth and up to 8 km wide. The tidal flats of Strangford Lough form extensive deposits around its northern limits. The Lough supports an impressive range of marine habitats and communities with over 2,000 recorded species. It is

important for marine invertebrates, algae and saltmarsh plants, for wintering and breeding wetland birds, and for marine mammals including Grey Seal.

#### Location and connectivity with the plan area

The Maidens SAC is approximately 32km north from the plan area via the coastline. The draft Plan Strategy will not have any impact on the reef or sandbank habitats due to the distance to the SAC. However, the Grey Seal *Halichoerus grypus* is a mobile species able to use haul out sites including breeding sites within the Belfast Lough area and a few Grey Seals are reported to occur within the Belfast Harbour area. This creates an ecological link between the SAC and the plan area. Grey Seals use haul out sites for resting, pupping and breeding and they forage across the wider marine area. DAERA advises that plans or projects within 135km of a site designated for Grey Seal should be assessed for impacts on the species.

Strangford Lough Ramsar is 66km away via marine waters. There is limited information about the status of Grey Seal in Strangford Lough and it is not a SAC feature. Therefore the significance of Belfast Lough for the Strangford Lough Grey Seal population is uncertain.

#### Selection Features

Feature type	Feature	Global Status	Size/ extent/ population
<b>The Maidens</b>			
Species	Grey Seal <i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	C	50 individuals (70 recorded in 2000)
<b>Strangford Lough Ramsar</b>			
Species	Grey Seal <i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	NA	50 individuals (70 recorded in 2000)

As a mobile species, the Grey Seal has been taken as an SAC feature that requires further assessment. Grey Seal is a mobile species across the North Atlantic. Grey Seals linked to the Maidens SAC can take advantage of haul out sites along the coast including sandy and rocky shores, estuaries and rocky outcrops in the Belfast Lough area.

#### Conservation Objectives

*The Maidens SAC*

The site Conservation Objectives are:

To maintain (or restore where appropriate) the:

- Reefs;
- Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time; and
- Grey Seal *Halichoerus grypus*

to favourable condition.

The SAC selection feature component objectives for Grey Seal are:

- Maintain (and if feasible enhance) population numbers and distribution of Grey Seal
- Maintain and enhance, as appropriate, physical features used by Grey Seals within the site.

### Main Threats, Pressures and Activities with Impacts on the Site

The following information is sourced from the Conservation Objectives and gives an indication of potential threats to all of the site selection features.

Threat	Could Plan Add to Threat?	Features which may be impacted
Aggregate/maerl extraction	No	
Agriculture and Forestry operations	No	
Aquaculture - Finfish	No	
Aquaculture - Shellfish	No	
Coastal / Marine development and infrastructure maintenance	Possibly	Grey Seal <i>Halichoerus grypus</i>
Discharge of commercial effluent/sewage	Possibly	Grey Seal <i>Halichoerus grypus</i>
Disposal of dredge spoil	Possibly	Grey Seal <i>Halichoerus grypus</i>
Commercial Fishing – mobile gear – dredging and bottom trawling	No	
Commercial Fishing – pelagic mid water trawling	No	
Commercial Fishing – static gear (creel/pot fishing)	No	
Marine Traffic – Boat maintenance and antifoulant use	Possibly	Grey Seal <i>Halichoerus grypus</i>
Marine Traffic – commercial and recreational vessels	Possibly	Grey Seal <i>Halichoerus grypus</i>
Marine traffic – boat anchorages and moorings	Possibly	Grey Seal <i>Halichoerus grypus</i>
Marine Renewables	No	
Scientific Research	No	
Geological surveys and military exercises	No	
Wildlife watching trips	Possibly	Grey Seal <i>Halichoerus grypus</i>
Climate Change	No	

The draft plan strategy may have a number of direct or indirect effects on Grey Seal. Although a small portion of Belfast Lough adjoins the plan area it is possible that, if present, Grey Seals could be disturbed by construction or maintenance activity. The potential for a cumulative impact from water pollution from discharges or the need for dredging exists which could lead to deterioration of habitat and prey. An indirect effect of development in the plan area could be an increase in shipping, watersports or wildlife watching which could disturb Grey Seals feeding in or hauled out in Belfast Lough. Impacts such as aquaculture and fishing are not under the control of planning and no proposals are put forward for marine renewables in the plan area.

### Sensitivities of Selection Features to plan

Potential impacts arising from the plan are listed in the following table which identifies which of these could affect the selection features of The Maidens SAC.

Potential Impacts Arising From Plan	Pathway for Impact to affect this site?	If there is pathway is it identified as a threat above?	Features that may be affected
Habitat Loss	Yes	Yes – linked to coastal development, marine renewables and climate change.	Loss of Grey Seal haul out sites used for breeding, pupping and resting.
Disturbance: Direct	Yes	Yes – linked to coastal development, disposal of dredge spoil, marine traffic, marine renewables and wildlife watching trips.	Impacts on Grey Seal haul out sites used for breeding, pupping and resting.
Disturbance: Indirect	Yes	Yes – linked to coastal development, dredge disposal, marine traffic, marine renewables and wildlife watching trips.	Impacts on Grey Seal haul out sites used for breeding, pupping and resting.
Aerial Emissions	Yes	No	None
Water Pollution	Yes	Yes – if considered under agriculture and forestry, coastal development, discharge of effluent/sewage, disposal of spoil, marine traffic, marine renewables and wildlife watching trips.	If water quality deteriorates there could be a reduction on prey species.

### Potential for Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts will be considered in Stage Two Appropriate Assessment.

### Screening conclusion

Under the precautionary approach, it was deemed that Maidens SAC will require an Appropriate Assessment for potential impacts on Grey Seal.



## STAGE TWO APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

### Site specific evidence sources

Conservation Objectives: DAERA The Maidens SAC UK 0030384 Conservation Objectives V2<sup>10</sup>

Condition Assessment: None available at August 2018

### Elements of plan that are likely to give rise to significant effects

Location of Feature:	Grey Seal is a mobile species that uses haul out sites around Belfast Lough as well as foraging across the wider marine environment.
Direct/Indirect:	Indirect
Source of impact:	See threats referred to above. Discharges to water from activities on land; effluent discharge; disposal of spoil at sea; marine related traffic; disturbance from marine related/located activities including development, renewables and recreation; coastal development; climate change.
Pathway:	Ecological
Effect	Loss of haul out sites through disturbance, or displacement of individuals; from erosion and higher sea levels. Impacts on behaviour of individuals with breeding and feeding likely to be affected.
Qualifying feature affected	Grey Seal

### Site selection features that could be impacted

The following is sourced from [JNCC](#):

‘Grey Seals *Halichoerus grypus* are a mobile species and they spend most of the year at sea, and may range widely in search of prey. They come ashore in autumn to form breeding colonies on rocky shores, beaches, in caves, occasionally on sandbanks, and on small largely uninhabited islands. In such locations they may spread some distance from the shore and ascend to considerable heights.

They are among the rarest seals in the world: the UK population represents about 40% of the world population and 95% of the EU population. Globally, there are three reproductively-isolated stocks of Grey Seal: a west Atlantic (northern North American) stock; a Baltic stock; and an East Atlantic stock. The latter extends from Iceland and northern Norway southwards to northern France, with the majority breeding around Great Britain and Ireland. At the start of the 2000 breeding season, 300-400 were found around the Isle of Man *and* Northern Ireland.

Since the late 1970s, no licences have been issued in the UK for commercial hunting or large-scale control measures, and the population has increased markedly since that time.’

Culloch et al, 2017, reviews Northern Ireland seal count data from 1992 to 2017. There are two count sections in Belfast Lough – North and South. Grey Seals were recorded at South Belfast Lough

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<sup>10</sup> [DAERA The Maidens SAC UK 0030384 Conservation Objectives V2](#)

in 1998 (maximum count 6 adults) and 2014 (1). They were recorded more regularly at North Belfast Lough with 3 to 6 adults recorded from 2003 to 2006. The only count year since 2009 was 2015 when 11 adults were the maximum survey count. No pups were recorded at either section.

Due to access issues few counts were undertaken at The Maidens SAC. In Strangford Lough maximum adult Grey Seal counts appear to have peaked in 2010 at approximately 180. While there appears to be an overall increase in Grey Seal adults and pups in Northern Ireland over the report period the reliability of the data is affected by low count effort in early and recent years. It is recommended that the data on Grey Seals is further investigated before the HRA is finalised.

#### Impacts that may arise as a result of the plan

The impacts are detailed above and in summary are:

- Habitat Loss
- Disturbance: Direct
- Disturbance: Indirect
- Water Pollution

#### Controls in place that address threats

Any new development would be subject to legislative requirements and environmental assessment including the need to comply with the requirements of the Habitats Regulations as well as the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS). Projects arising from the plan which are below high water mark are subject to marine licensing where necessary. Planners are already advised to consult DAERA on all development close to the coast.

#### Mitigation to address threats

Given the low numbers of Grey Seals in Belfast Lough in comparison to the NI estimated population (maximum count approximately 280 in 2010) it is unlikely that impacts arising from the draft plan strategy could have an adverse effect on site integrity. Limited distribution data however makes it difficult to rule out an adverse effect on the integrity of these sites from the draft Plan Strategy. It is therefore recommended that a precautionary approach is taken to minimize impacts that the draft Plan Strategy may have on marine mammals through disturbance or water pollution and therefore mitigation is recommended as follows:

- A. Seek further information from DAERA before LPP to identify any areas adjacent to the plan area that are of high sensitivity for birds or marine mammals so that this can be addressed in spatial designations.
- B. Address at LPP, through criteria for review and selection of sites and Key Site Requirements (KSRs) to avoid or reduce potential effects.
- C. At LPP requirements can be identified for sites within a given distance of Belfast Lough so that potential disturbance impacts can be identified and measures put in place such as timing of construction and operations.
- D. Identify and assess plans that in-combination may lead to a cumulative adverse effect on site integrity through disturbance for the final HRA.
- E. Identify types of projects that should be assessed for indirect disturbance effects to ensure the need for HRA of these effects is not overlooked.
- F. Land release should be phased to ensure alignment of housing delivery with planned infrastructure investment and development lead-times to reduce the risk of water pollution.

### Implications for each qualifying interest in light of its conservation objectives

In the absence of mitigation an adverse effect on site integrity of The Maidens SAC and Strangford Lough Ramsar site cannot be excluded. With the controls and mitigation in place it is concluded that there will be no adverse effect on site integrity.

### Implications for each qualifying interest in light of its conservation objectives

Feature	AESI before mitigation	AESI after mitigation
Grey Seal <i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	Potential AESI	No AESI

### In-combination effects from other plans or projects that are likely to have significant effects

The assessment found that, with mitigation in place, there will be no adverse effect on site integrity. The sites and selection features may be subject to effects arising from Belfast Harbour or development activities in the Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001, Ards and Down Area Plan 2015 and the Banbridge Newry and Mourne Area Plan 2015. Councils are preparing new local development plans and these may contribute to in-combination effects. The need to consider and assess in-combination effects will be reviewed before the HRA is finalized.

### Appropriate Assessment consideration

Based on information available on Grey Seal as a selection feature of The Maidens SAC and Strangford Lough Ramsar Site, and taking a precautionary approach in the light of limited distribution data, draft Plan Strategy proposals are considered to have potential for the following effects on the integrity of these sites for Grey Seal.

Integrity of site checklist	
<p><b><i>Does the plan have the potential to:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cause delays in progress towards achieving the conservation objectives of the site?</li> <li>• interrupt progress towards achieving the conservation objectives of the site?</li> <li>• disrupt those factors that help to maintain the favourable conditions of the site?</li> <li>• interfere with the balance, distribution and density of key species that are the indicators of the favourable condition of the site?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Yes/No</b></p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>Yes</p>
<p><b><i>Other indicators: Does the plan have the potential to:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cause changes to the vital defining aspects (e.g. nutrient balance) that determine how the site functions as a habitat or ecosystem?</li> <li>• change the dynamics of the relationships (between, for example, soil and water or plants and animals) that define the structure and/or function of the site?</li> <li>• interfere with predicted or expected natural changes to the site (such as water dynamics or chemical composition)?</li> <li>• reduce the area of key habitats?</li> <li>• reduce the population of key species?</li> <li>• change the balance between key species?</li> <li>• reduce diversity of the site?</li> <li>• result in disturbance that could affect population size or density or the balance between key species?</li> <li>• result in fragmentation?</li> <li>• result in loss or reduction of key features (e.g. tree cover, tidal exposure, annual flooding, etc.)?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Yes/No</b></p> <p>Yes</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p>

### Appropriate Assessment Conclusion

The evidence gathered and assessment undertaken does not enable us to conclude reasonably and objectively that the implementation of the plan will not adversely affect Grey Seal as a key species or

the integrity (structure and function and conservation objectives) of The Maidens SAC or Strangford Lough Ramsar.

Mitigation measures are required to ensure that the plan will not have any effect on the integrity of these sites with regard to

- Disturbance: Direct
- Disturbance: Indirect
- Water Pollution

These mitigation measures are detailed above and their incorporation and implementation is discussed in Chapter 5.

## 5. Outcome and Recommendations

### Overview

HRA has been carried out to assess impacts of the draft Plan Strategy proposals on European sites that are in close proximity to the Belfast City Council area, or connected to it by ecological or infrastructural links. The assessment considered the draft Plan Strategy. Further assessment will be carried out on the Local Policies Plan (LPP) as it is prepared. This will allow consideration of site specific development and land use proposals, local policies and their potential impacts and appropriate mitigation to avoid adverse effects on European sites.

A total of 14 European sites were subject to appropriate assessment. The appropriate assessments found that there is potential for adverse effects on site integrity of some European sites arising from habitat loss, direct and indirect disturbance, and water pollution. Discussion follows about each of these impacts with recommended mitigation. In some cases the same mitigation applies to more than one impact. Although there is a pathway for aerial emissions to have an effect on some sites and features, the conservation objectives for the sites assessed did not identify aerial emissions as a threat. Aerial emissions are however included in the discussion to inform future HRAs in the plan process.

### Habitat Loss

#### *Discussion*

This represents direct habitat loss in a European site or loss of supporting habitat e.g. roost sites. In a number of locations parts of Belfast Lough SPA and Ramsar, Belfast Lough Open Water SPA and East Coast (NI) Marine pSPA are within draft BMAP 2015 Development Limits or Belfast Urban Waterfront. New development proposals or other land use within or adjacent to these overlapping areas have the potential to damage the integrity of these European Sites. Any new development proposals within development limits which are within or adjacent to a European Site will be subject to a HRA to ensure that there would be no adverse impact on the integrity of the European Site. This will be addressed through HRAs for projects however it is also recommended that the need for HRA is highlighted in relevant spatial designations at LPP.

Consultation zones may be required for lands outside Belfast Lough SPA and Ramsar due to the utilization of the adjacent land by feature bird species. Proposed developments within these consultation zones should be considered for HRA to ensure that, in line with the Habitats Directive, there will be no adverse effects on the integrity of the features of these European Sites.

#### *Recommendations*

- A. Seek further information from DAERA before LPP to identify any areas adjacent to the plan area that are of high sensitivity for birds or marine mammals so that this can be addressed in spatial designations.**
- B. Address at LPP, through criteria for review and selection of sites and Key Site Requirements (KSRs) to avoid or reduce potential effects.**

### Disturbance: Direct

#### *Discussion*

This includes noise, vibration or light disturbance arising from a development site during construction or operational use of a site and the presence of people on land zoned or developed for recreational use. Potential noise or vibration disturbance to birds or marine mammals may be caused for example by piling. Given the existing mixed use of many of the areas close to designated sites, including residential, operational noise and light levels are unlikely to exceed background levels

to which birds are acclimatised. Marine mammals including Grey Seal and Harbour Porpoise may range to Inner Belfast Lough from the sites for which they are designated and potential subject to direct disturbance.

#### *Recommendations*

- A. **Seek further information from DAERA before LPP to identify any areas adjacent to the plan area that are of high sensitivity for birds or marine mammals so that this can be addressed in spatial designations.**
- B. **Address at LPP, through criteria for review and selection of sites and Key Site Requirements (KSRs) to avoid or reduce potential effects.**
- C. **At LPP requirements can be identified for sites within a given distance of Belfast Lough so that potential disturbance impacts can be identified and measures put in place such as timing of construction and operations and use of Marine Mammals Observers during construction.**

#### **Disturbance: Indirect**

##### *Discussion*

Disturbance beyond development sites arising from increased levels of shipping, boating or watersports.

Belfast Lough and the Irish Sea are utilized by many birds that are features of nearby European Sites including Belfast Lough SPA, Belfast Lough Open Water SPA, Belfast Lough Ramsar, Copeland Islands SPA, Larne Lough SPA / Ramsar, Outer Ards SPA / Ramsar and Strangford Lough SPA / Ramsar and East Coast (Northern Ireland) Marine pSPA. Marine mammals including Grey Seal and Harbour Porpoise may range to Inner Belfast Lough from the sites for which they are designated.

Proposals that will result in increased shipping, watersports or other boating activity have the potential to increase disturbance of marine mammals or bird features of these SPAs and Ramsar sites. Proposals or projects in the Belfast Harbour Area or arising under OS6 that will increase shipping, boating or watersports must be subject to HRA. This should take the cumulative impact of marine traffic into account, to ensure that there would be no adverse impact on the integrity of any European Site.

The Belfast Harbour Area includes the Science Park, North Foreshore and Duncrue Industrial Estate which are zoned as employment and industry or mixed-use. These lands are close to Belfast Lough SPA and Ramsar and Belfast Lough Open Water SPA which have been designated due to their important bird populations. Inappropriate proposals in this location have the potential to damage the integrity of the SPA and Ramsar site and associated bird features by increasing disturbance levels. Proposals or projects within this zoning must be subject to a HRA to ensure that there would be no adverse impact on the integrity of Belfast Lough SPA and Ramsar.

##### *Recommendations*

- D. **Identify and assess plans that in-combination may lead to a cumulative adverse effect on site integrity through disturbance for the final HRA.**
- E. **Identify types of projects that should be assessed for indirect disturbance effects to ensure the need for HRA of these effects is not overlooked.**

#### **Aerial Emissions**

##### *Discussion*

Aerial emissions primarily arise from industry and transport but domestic fuel and agricultural intensification are also sources.

Aerial depositions can damage habitats and associated species however the conservation objectives for the sites subject to appropriate assessment did not identify aerial emissions as a threat to the features assessed. The draft Plan Strategy includes a number of measures to mitigate increases in aerial emissions. Promoting a low carbon economy includes measures to reduce private car use. The proposed Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) on Environmental Quality for ENV1 will seek to reduce aerial emissions. Designing for a reduction in traffic from new developments will also be a consideration at LPP, through KSRs and through the proposed Urban Design and Creating an Accessible Environment SPGs.

#### *Recommendations*

Mitigation for aerial emissions was not identified as a requirement to avoid adverse effects on site integrity. It is however recommended that, as proposed in the Sustainability Appraisal, indicators of air quality and emissions are included in plan monitoring so that air quality trends can be assessed in relation to plan implementation. This monitoring can provide evidence about aerial emissions for future HRAs.

### Water Pollution

#### *Discussion*

Water pollution impacts may lead to deterioration of, or failure to improve, water quality. This may be due to direct runoff of pollutants including fuel, chemicals and sediments from development during construction or operation; or indirect pollution due to inadequacy of wastewater treatment infrastructure. For individual developments, this can be addressed through HRA and by the conditioning of pollution prevention measures through the requirement to submit a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) and/or a Construction Method Statement (CMS).

Deterioration of water quality in the Belfast City Council area could have adverse impacts on the integrity of European Sites connected with Belfast Lough. Section C.9 of the Sustainability Appraisal Appendix 5 Baseline Information for Belfast, presents evidence on water quality and flood risk, and section C.11 details Water Infrastructure: Wastewater.

Although NI Water has advised capacity at WwTWs (Wastewater Treatment Works) is currently available, and new connections are currently permitted, there may be potential capacity issues in the future and during the plan period. The council has explored the issue of capacity in relation to the potential growth scenarios and taken account of discussions with NI Water, existing land allocations within BMAP and other approvals within the system to arrive at Policy SP1 – Growth strategy. It also recognises investment and alternative methods of treatment will be required during the plan period to support the projected level of growth (e.g. ITU 2).

The draft Plan Strategy acknowledges the need to align development with infrastructure capacity and investment over the plan period as follows

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*5.1.4: Land will be zoned for housing, employment uses and mixed-use sites within the Local Policies Plan to deliver the council's growth aspirations. The delivery of employment space and homes will be phased to align with infrastructure capacity and investment over the plan period.*

*7.1.9: However, there is no automatic assumption that existing housing land will form part of the formal provision, particularly where detailed analysis identifies*

*constraints affecting the availability and deliverability of sites. If necessary, land may be phased to ensure alignment of housing delivery with planned infrastructure investment and development lead-times.*

*Recommendations*

Mitigating for the effects of water pollution should be addressed by the following recommendations.

- B. Address at LPP, through criteria for review and selection of sites and Key Site Requirements (KSRs) to avoid or reduce potential effects.**
- F. Land release should be phased to ensure alignment of housing delivery with planned infrastructure investment and development lead-times to reduce the risk of water pollution.**

**Implementation of Recommendations**

The recommendations are summarized in Table 4 to show how they relate to the potential impacts of the draft Plan Strategy.

**Table 4: Summary of Mitigation to Address Potential Impacts**

	Habitat Loss	Disturbance: Direct	Disturbance: Indirect	Water Pollution
A. Seek further information from DAERA before LPP to identify any areas adjacent to the plan area that are of high sensitivity for birds or marine mammals so that this can be addressed in spatial designations.	Y	Y		
B. Address at LPP, through criteria for review and selection of sites and Key Site Requirements (KSRs) to avoid or reduce potential effects.	Y	Y		Y
C. At LPP requirements can be identified for sites within a given distance of Belfast Lough so that potential disturbance impacts can be identified and measures put in place such as timing of construction and operations and use of Marine Mammals Observers during construction.		Y		
D. Identify and assess plans that in-combination may lead to a cumulative adverse effect on site integrity through disturbance for the final HRA.			Y	
E. Identify types of projects that should be assessed for indirect disturbance effects to ensure the need for HRA of these effects is not overlooked.			Y	
F. Land should be phased to ensure alignment of housing delivery with planned infrastructure investment and development lead-times.				Y



Some of the recommendations have already been incorporated in the draft Plan Strategy and some are to be implemented at later stages. Table 5 shows what mitigation has already been incorporated in the draft Plan Strategy and proposed mitigation to be implemented at a later stage. All references are to paragraphs in the draft Plan Strategy (dPS)

**Table 5: Implementation of Recommendations**

*A.- F. Recommendations for mitigation; I – Incorporated already; L – Later actions*

Recommendation		Action
<b>Review and Finalization of HRA for Plan Strategy</b>		
A.	The final HRA should be reviewed and updated to take account of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the most up to date information available about European Sites;</li> <li>representations during the public consultation and independent examination;</li> <li>representations from NIEA as the Statutory Nature Conservation Body;</li> <li>any plans or projects that should be considered in combination and</li> <li>to assess any changes in the final Plan Strategy.</li> </ul>	Prior to adoption of the Plan Strategy.
<b>Plan Strategy</b>		
I.	The status of the SPPS as an overarching policy should be highlighted as this provides a control for protection of European sites.	The role of the SPPS is addressed in the dPS at 3.1.1.
I.	The need to protect European sites should be highlighted.	Policy ENV1 seeks to generally maintain and, where possible, enhance environmental quality. Policy NH1 seeks to complement SPPS Natural Heritage policies and emphasize application of the precautionary principle, it has been informed by DAERA. Some policies reiterate protection by specifying protective criteria, for example ITU4, W1 – W5, M1, OS1&4
L.	Any further review and update of Sustainability Appraisal should reflect the HRA and its findings.	The Sustainability Appraisal reflects baseline information on European sites and this informed the appraisal.
F.	Measures to ensure that there is sufficient wastewater treatment infrastructure.	Incorporated in dPS at 5.1.4, 7.1.9, IUT 2.
<b>Local Policies Plan</b>		
A.	Seek further information from DAERA before LPP to identify any areas adjacent to the plan area that are of high sensitivity for birds or marine mammals so that this can be addressed in spatial designations.	Obtain in time to inform the criteria for reviewing and identifying spatial zones in the LPP.
B. C. D. E.	The LPP will be subject to HRA which will reflect the most up to date information available about European Sites that may be affected. This will include consideration of all spatial designations and policies.	HRA will be carried out in conjunction with preparation of the LPP. It is recommended that the criteria for reviewing and identifying spatial zones in the LPP include criteria to assess and where necessary mitigate

Recommendation		Action
		for potential impacts on European sites.
B.	All spatial designations in the LPP within 1km of Belfast Lough SPA and Ramsar should be assessed in particular detail.	Incorporate in criteria for reviewing and identifying spatial zones.
B.	Consideration given to key site requirements to highlight and address potential impact on European sites.	KSRs may be identified to e.g. identify evidence needs for planning applications, site constraints, buffers to European sites.
I.	Monitoring measures should be included to assess changes in air quality.	The Sustainability Appraisal (SA) includes proposed measures to monitor air quality. Both the dPS and the SA include monitoring of modes of travel. This will inform future reviews of the plan.
I.	Monitoring measures should be included to assess changes in water quality.	The SA includes proposed measures to monitor water quality and consumption.
<b>Supplementary Planning Guidance</b>		
L.	Supplementary planning guidance falls within the scope of the Habitats Regulations therefore a system should be set up to screen SPGs for the need for HRA and where necessary carry out HRA.	As SPGs are being prepared.

### Conclusions of the HRA

During the HRA process potential risks were identified in so far as they may be reasonably foreseeable and in light of such information as can reasonably be obtained. The appropriate assessments identified that, although effects are uncertain at this strategic stage, a number of mitigation measures are recommended to ensure that the draft Plan Strategy will not have any adverse effect on the integrity of the European Sites connected to the plan area and listed below.

This is based on the inclusion of mitigation to address potential for adverse effects on site integrity arising from habitat loss, direct and indirect disturbance and water pollution. Associated mitigation measures have been incorporated where appropriate into the draft Plan Strategy, with the aim of avoiding potential impacts. Mitigation that is more appropriate for inclusion at later stages of plan preparation is also recommended.

Taking the incorporated mitigation measures and recommended mitigation into account, the integrity of site checklist associated with the appropriate assessment of each of the sites which required appropriate assessment can be revised to read:

<b>Integrity of site checklist</b>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>Does the plan have the potential to:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cause delays in progress towards achieving the conservation objectives of the site?</li> <li>• interrupt progress towards achieving the conservation objectives of the site?</li> <li>• disrupt those factors that help to maintain the favourable conditions of the site?</li> <li>• interfere with the balance, distribution and density of key species that are the indicators of the favourable condition of the site?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Yes/No</b></p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>Other indicators: Does the plan have the potential to:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cause changes to the vital defining aspects (e.g. nutrient balance) that determine how the site functions as a habitat or ecosystem?</li> <li>• change the dynamics of the relationships (between, for example, soil and water or plants and animals) that define the structure and/or function of the site?</li> <li>• interfere with predicted or expected natural changes to the site (such as water dynamics or chemical composition)?</li> <li>• reduce the area of key habitats?</li> <li>• reduce the population of key species?</li> <li>• change the balance between key species?</li> <li>• reduce diversity of the site?</li> <li>• result in disturbance that could affect population size or density or the balance between key species?</li> <li>• result in fragmentation?</li> <li>• result in loss or reduction of key features (e.g. tree cover, tidal exposure, annual flooding , etc.)?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Yes/No</b></p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p>

The evidence gathered and assessment undertaken enables us to conclude reasonably and objectively that, subject to included and proposed mitigation, the implementation of the draft Plan Strategy will not adversely affect the integrity of:

- Belfast Lough Open Water SPA
- Belfast Lough Ramsar
- Belfast Lough SPA
- Copeland Islands SPA
- East Coast (NI) Marine pSPA
- Larne Lough SPA
- Larne Lough Ramsar
- Murlough SAC
- North Channel cSAC
- Outer Ards Ramsar
- Outer Ards SPA
- Strangford Lough Ramsar
- Strangford Lough SAC
- Strangford Lough SPA
- The Maidens SAC
- Skerries and Causeway SAC

The HRA will be reviewed, updated and finalised following public consultation and independent examination of the draft Plan Strategy and published alongside the adopted Plan Strategy.

## Abbreviations

AE	Aerial Emissions
AESI	Adverse Effect on Site Integrity
AoHSV	Area of High Scenic Value
BMAP	Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan
CA	Competent Authority
CEMP	Construction Environmental Management Plan
CJEU	Court of Justice of the European Union
CMS	Construction Method Statement
cSAC	Candidate Special Area of Conservation
DAERA	The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
DD	Direct Disturbance
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DI	Indirect Disturbance
dPS	Draft Plan Strategy
EC	European Commission
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
FCS	Favourable Conservation Status
HL	Habitat Loss
HMO	Houses in Multiple Occupation
HRA	Habitats Regulations Assessment
HWMMT	High Water Mark Mean Tide
JNCC	Joint Nature Conservation Committee
KSR	Key Site Requirement
LDP	Local Development Plan
LLPA	Local Landscape Policy Area
LPP	Local Policies Plan
LSE	Likely significant effect
LWMMT	Low Water Mark Mean Tide
N2K	Natura 2000
NA	Not Applicable
NIEA	Northern Ireland Environment Agency
NIW	Northern Ireland Water
nm	Nautical mile
POP	Preferred Options Paper
pSPA	Proposed Special Protection Area
RDS	Regional Development Strategy
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SA	Sustainability Appraisal
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SCI	Statement of Community Involvement (planning context)

SCI	Site of Community Importance (European site context)
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SES	Shared Environmental Service
SLNCI	Site of Local Nature Conservation Importance
SPA	Special Protection Area
SPG	Strategic Planning Guidance
SPPS	Strategic Planning Policy Statement
SuDS	Sustainable Drainage Systems
WQ	Water Quality
WwTW	Wastewater Treatment Works

## Glossary

Adverse effect on site integrity (AESI)	An effect on the qualifying features of a European site which would undermine the achievement of the conservation objectives for that site and which would have a negative effect on the coherence of its ecological structure and function, across its whole area, that enables it to sustain the habitats, complex of habitats and/or the levels of populations of the species for which the site is or will be designated.
Competent Authority	For the purposes of the Habitats Regulations the expression 'competent authority' includes government departments, district councils and statutory undertakers, and any trustees, commissioners, board or other persons who, as a public body and not for their own profit, act under any statutory provision for the improvement of any place or the production or supply of any commodity or service.
Candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC)	These are sites that have been submitted to the European Commission, but not yet formally adopted.
De minimis	Having no appreciable effect
European sites	Collective term referred to in guidance that includes SACs, SPAs, cSACs, pSPAs, SCIs and Ramsar sites (although the latter is a wider international designation).
Favourable Conservation Status (FSC)	In summary conservation status is favourable when conditions are right to sustain habitats and the population and range of species. This term is fully defined in the Habitats Directive.
Habitats Regulations	The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended)
In-combination effect	Refers to effects that may be likely significant effects when considered in combination with effects from other plans or projects.
Likely significant effect (LSE)	An effect that cannot be ruled out on the basis of objective information. Likely in this context means there is a risk or possibility that an effect will be significant. An effect is significant if it would undermine a site's conservation objectives.
Natura 2000 (N2K)	The European network of special areas of conservation and special protection areas under the Wild Birds Directive, provided for by Article 3(1) of the Habitats Directive
PBMSA	Purpose built managed student accommodation
Ramsar site	Sites listed under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance adopted at Ramsar, Iran in 1971. As a matter of policy these sites are treated in the same way as European sites.

SACs	Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are sites that have been adopted by the European Commission and formally designated by the government of each country in whose territory the site lies.
SCI	Sites of Community Importance (SCI) have been nominated or submitted by Member States and entered onto the list of sites compiled by the European Commission that form the Natura 2000 network and which Member States then have an obligation to designate as SACs within 6 years.
The Directives	Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora and Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds. These Directives are referred to as the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive respectively and together are called 'The Directives' for the purposes of this report.

## Appendix 1: References

In the absence of specific Northern Ireland guidance on carrying out Habitats Regulations Assessment for plans and programmes reference has been made to other sources of guidance and relevant documents including those listed below:

*Habitats Regulations Appraisal of Plans Guidance for Plan-Making Bodies in Scotland* Version 3.0, (2015) Scottish Natural Heritage (Initially Prepared by David Tyldesley and Associates)

Tyldesley, D., and Chapman, C., (2013) *The Habitats Regulations Assessment Handbook*, December 2017 edition UK: DTA Publications Ltd

JNCC Standard data forms (2015) generated from the Natura 2000 Database submitted to the European Commission on 22/12/2015. [jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-0](http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-0)

NIEA Conservation Objectives [www.daera-ni.gov.uk/topics/biodiversity-land-and-landscapes/protected-areas](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/topics/biodiversity-land-and-landscapes/protected-areas)

Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites, Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC (2001), European Commission Environment DG

*Belfast Metropolitan Plan 2015 Habitats Regulations Assessment*, (2013), Department of the Environment Northern Ireland  
[www.planningni.gov.uk/index/policy/development\\_plans/devplans\\_az/bmap\\_2015.htm](http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/policy/development_plans/devplans_az/bmap_2015.htm)

Culloch, R., Horne, N., & Kregting, L. (2017) A review of Northern Ireland seal count data 1992-2017: Investigating population trends and recommendations for future monitoring. *Unpublished DAERA Report*



## Appendix 2: The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended), Regulation 43

### Assessment of implications for European site

**43.**—(1) A competent authority, before deciding to undertake, or give any consent, permission or other authorisation for, a plan or project which—

(a) is likely to have a significant effect on a European site in Northern Ireland (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects), and

(b) is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site,

shall make an appropriate assessment of the implications for the site in view of that site's conservation objectives.

(2) A person applying for any such consent, permission or other authorisation shall provide such information as the competent authority may reasonably require for the purposes of the assessment.

(3) The competent authority shall for the purposes of the assessment consult the Department and have regard to any representations made by it within such reasonable time as the authority may specify.

(4) The competent authority shall, if it considers it appropriate, take such steps as it considers necessary to obtain the opinion of the general public.

(5) In the light of the conclusions of the assessment, and subject to regulation 44, the authority shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the European site.

(6) In considering whether a plan or project will adversely affect the integrity of the site, the authority shall have regard to the manner in which it is proposed to be carried out or to any conditions or restrictions subject to which it proposed that the consent, permission or other authorisation should be given.

(7) This regulation does not apply in relation to a site which is a European site by reason only of regulation 9(1)(c) (site protected in accordance with Article 5(4)).

## Appendix 3: The Approach to Habitats Regulations Assessment for Plans

### Stage 1: Screening for likely significant effects

#### *Step 1: Deciding whether a plan should be subject to Habitats Regulations Assessment*

This involves considering the nature of the plan and its individual proposals to determine whether there is a requirement to carry out a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA).

The following questions help determine whether the document being reviewed is a plan in the context of the Directives.

- Is the whole of the plan directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European site for nature conservation purposes?
- Is the plan a strategic development plan, local development plan, supplementary guidance?
- Is the plan a general statement of policy showing only the general political will or intention of the plan making body, and no effect on any particular European site can reasonably be predicted?
- Does the plan contain a programme, or policies, or proposals which could affect one or more particular European sites?

If in the review there is found to be a requirement for HRA those proposals with potential likely significant effects are identified along with the types of impact that they may have. If on the other hand it is found that the plan is not subject to HRA then it is not necessary to progress beyond this step.

#### *Step 2: Identifying the European sites that should be considered in the Appraisal*

European sites that are within the plan area, within a zone of influence beyond the plan area or connected to the plan area though ecology or infrastructure are identified creating a long list of sites.

#### *Step 3: Gathering information about the European sites*

Information for each site on the long list identified at Step 2 is compiled to include the designation status, qualifying interests, conservation objectives and site condition. Available information on factors currently affecting sites which may be affected and vulnerabilities to potential effects of the plan may be included.

#### *Step 4: Discretionary discussions on the method and scope of the appraisal*

The Statutory Nature Conservation Body, represented by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) of the Department of Agriculture, the Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) may be consulted informally to ensure that the information at Step 3 is up to date and reflects known issues for the European sites. This provides the opportunity to invite comment on the scope of the HRA and potential in combination considerations.

#### *Step 5: Screening the draft / proposed plan for likely significant effects*

This step is divided into a higher level review of proposals against sites followed by a detailed assessment of proposals and their potential impacts against site qualifying features. Presentation of this step may vary according to the complexity and spatial scale of the plan under consideration.

5a. Those proposals identified at Step 1 as having potential likely significant effects are assessed in relation to the long list of sites from Step 2. This is presented as a matrix of potential impacts against sites in which impacts are categorised as having no likely significant effect, a likely significant effect or an uncertain effect. Some of the potential effects identified at Step 1 may be discounted at this

stage if there is no pathway by which they could impact on a European site or its selection features or because the location or scale is such that any effect would be de minimis. The outcome of this part is a short list of proposals and a short list of sites for which more detailed assessment is required.

5b. A detailed assessment considers the potential modes of impacts against all site selection features for short listed sites. This identifies whether there are likely significant effects. In light of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) judgment, *Case C323/17 (People over Wind & Sweetman)* this step does not take account of mitigation incorporated in the plan although it can take account of essential features and characteristics without which the plan could not be implemented.

If there are likely significant effects, either alone or in-combination, then the sites and features which may be affected and potential impacts should be summarised in preparation for Stage 2.

## Stage 2: Appropriate Assessment and the Integrity Test

### *Step 6: The appropriate assessment*

The summary from Step 5 is the starting point for the appropriate assessment. Step 6 assesses whether any likely significant effect could lead to an adverse effect on site integrity for each site. Where it is found that there could be such an adverse effect then measures are identified to remove any potential for adverse effects. This may include case-specific policy restrictions or caveats; adding mitigation in a further plan that will deliver the current plan; removing proposals that could have an adverse effect on site integrity; specific mitigation plans or a large scale mitigation strategy which includes measures to mitigate adverse effects of the current plan.

### *Step 7: Amending the plan until there would be no adverse effects on site integrity*

Any mitigation identified in Step 6 is incorporated in the plan.

### *Step 8: Preparing a draft of the HRA Record*

This is a draft report which records the HRA and supporting evidence.

### *Step 9: Consultation*

If the HRA is concluded at Stage 1 the HRA Report with a Statement of Finding of No Likely Significant Effects is published. Consultation is not required on this Stage 1 Test of Likely Significance in these circumstances however it is recommended that the record is published as a supporting document for the plan. If the draft plan is subject to consultation a draft Stage 1 HRA Report may be included in the consultation with a note that it will be updated to take account of any changes in the proposals or European sites before the plan is finalised.

If the HRA progresses to Step 8 then NIEA must be consulted on a draft Stage 2 HRA Report (also known as an Appropriate Assessment). Other stakeholders such as managers of European sites should be consulted where appropriate. Public consultation is not required on the draft Stage 2 HRA Report however it may be included as a supporting document for any public consultation on the draft plan with a note that it will be updated to take account of any changes in the proposals or European sites before the plan is finalised.

### *Step 10: Proposed modifications*

Representations by NIEA and other consultees are recorded with a note on if and how they have been addressed. Further mitigation identified in Step 9 is incorporated in the plan.

### *Step 11: Modifying and completing the appraisal record*

Steps 6 - 8 are updated to reflect any additional mitigation and adverse effects reviewed. If it is found that there are no adverse effects on site integrity then the HRA may be concluded and a Stage 2 HRA Appropriate Assessment Report published to include a Record of No Adverse Effect on the Integrity of Any European Site under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended).

### *Stage 3: Alternative Solutions*

If Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment finds that there would be an adverse effect on site integrity then alternative solutions which are financially, legally and technically feasible need to be considered further.

Alternative solutions are already considered in preparation of many plans, for example through the Preferred Options Paper for Local Development Plans and in carrying out Strategic Environmental Assessment which requires consideration of reasonable alternatives. Compliance with regional policies and strategies also means that environmental effects will have been taken into account. It is therefore rare for HRAs for LDPs to progress beyond Stage 2.

### *Stage 4: Imperative reasons of overriding public interest and compensatory measures*

In the event that there is an imperative reason of public interest which overrides the risk and harm to sites, and priority features where appropriate, then compensatory measures to protect the overall coherence of the Natura 2000 network must be identified, delivery detailed and the government notified. As already noted it is rare for HRAs for LDPs to progress beyond Stage 2.

### *Criteria for assessing whether a plan is subject to the Habitats Regulations*

At Step 1 above the following criteria are used to assess whether an overall plan and its individual proposals require HRA.

#### 1. General Policy Statements

These include:

- General strategic and political aspirations (often includes plan objectives)
- Ambitions which state a direction without details
- General criteria based policies, for example relating to design, social considerations, public safety, which do not relate to measures that may protect or affect European sites.

If the whole plan falls into this category and does not include detail about how it will be delivered then it is reasonable to record that it would not be likely to have a significant effect and not to assess it any further under the Habitats Regulations.

2. Plans or projects referred to but not proposed
  - Existing projects or plans that will support delivery of the current plan (may include infrastructure plans which have a bearing on the current plan but are not delivered by it)
  - Projects or plans in preparation or proposed to be prepared to support the current plan but which are not included within it (these should be considered under the Habitats Regulations by the relevant competent authority).
  - Existing projects, plans or programmes which are referenced in the current plan but which do not necessarily support its delivery
  - Plans or projects that would be likely to proceed under another plan irrespective of the current plan.

If the current plan will influence other projects or plans, for example by adding detail, then further consideration is required. Development that is an inevitable consequence of the current plan also requires further consideration although this may not be necessary if it has been or will be subject to HRA.

3. No likely significant effect
  - a. The proposal or policy is intended to protect the environment and in doing so will not be likely to have a significant negative effect.
  - b. Proposals or policies that will not lead to development or other change or include a presumption against effects on European sites.
  - c. Proposals which may bring about change but could have no conceivable effect for example as there is no pathway to a European site or effects are likely to be positive and could not undermine conservation objectives. Baseline information about European sites should be taken into account to ensure all pathways and links with qualifying features have been considered.
4. Proposals too general to assess
  - The effect cannot be predicted because the policy is too general and, for example, how and where it will be implemented is unknown.
  - Broad proposals where the implementation will be detailed and can be assessed at a later stage

These do not apply if the scale of the proposal or constraints mean it will be difficult to accommodate development without impacting a European site.

5. Potential minor effects
  - Proposals which may bring about change but that change would be insignificant on its own for example due to distance, duration or scale. These will be reviewed for potential in combination effects.
6. Potential significant effects
  - Potential negative effects that cannot be confirmed to be insignificant on the basis of objective information without mitigation for which further assessment is required.

## Appendix 4: Detailed Review of draft Plan Strategy Proposals

Plan Proposal	Screening Category	Screening Comment	PSI	S76	LPP	SPG
<b>VISION, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES</b>						
Vision	1	Out	Overall aspiration for Belfast			
Shaping a liveable place	1	Out	Refers to the health and well-being of people and places.			
Creating a vibrant economy	1	Out	Strengthening Belfast's economy, may lead to greater development which will be assessed under SP1.			
Promoting a green and active place	1	Out	Includes a protected, enhanced and attractive natural setting. Promotion of accessibility could put pressure on European sites, will be considered under SP3.			
Building a smart connected and resilient place	1	Out	Improving connectivity - may lead to additional transport or energy infrastructure for example. Will be considered under SP7.			
<b>SHAPING A LIVEABLE PLACE OBJECTIVES</b>						
To grow the population of Belfast and connect with other cities across the UK and Ireland in supporting a greater level of inward investment.	1	4	In	The effect of an overall growth of development needs to be considered.		
To address the current and future residential needs through ensuring the supply of suitable land to meet the future requirements for new socially inclusive residential development where there is an appropriate type, size, density, tenure and a mix to suit all needs of the population	1	4	In	The effect of an overall growth of residential development needs to be considered.		
To promote sustainable urbanism to deliver high quality design by including policies to protect and enhance the built environment that fosters local distinctiveness.	1	3	Out	General Policy Statement about design.		

1 General Policy Statement | 2 Plans or projects referred to but not proposed | 3 No likely significant effect | 4 Proposals too general to assess | 5 Potential minor effects | 6 Potential significant effects  
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Plan Proposal	Screening Category		Screening Comment	PSI	S76	LPP	SPG
To improve community safety and reduce the potential for antisocial behaviour or crime through an approach to new development focused on design quality.	1	3	Out				
To improve safe access for all groups in society to public services through the design and location of new development.	1	3	Out				
To protect, conserve and enhance the historic environment through effective management of proposed development and ensuring high quality design.	1	3	Out				
To promote collaborative cross-community projects that utilise derelict interface sites, that contribute to the integration of neighbourhoods and the development of shared spaces to build social cohesion.	1	4	In				
<b>CREATING A VIBRANT ECONOMY OBJECTIVES</b>							
To maintain a strong and growing economy by ensuring a range of suitable sites for employment uses are available and able to be developed to meet the future growth of the economy and employment.		4	In				
To support local economies by promoting development of suitable land and buildings to provide sustainable access to retail, leisure, culture, office and commercial uses within the city centre and district centres, ensuring the future needs are addressed and their continued vibrancy and viability maintained.		4	In				
To strengthen the potential of local tourism to appeal to a wide range of visitors, and the development of suitable tourism infrastructure, including overnight accommodation, leisure and cultural facilities for this important sector of the economy.	1		Out				

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Plan Proposal	Screening Category		Screening Comment	PSI	S76	LPP	SPG
To support the continued regeneration of disadvantaged areas, to facilitate well linked high-quality mixed developments, designed to create diverse communities, to break down the social and sectarian divisions of existing city neighbourhoods.	1	3	Out				
<b>BUILDING A SMART CONNECTED AND RESILIENT PLACE OBJECTIVES</b>							
To build stronger communities by protecting and improving social, economic, green, digital and physical infrastructure through supporting its development and enhancement, and through securing contributions from new development.	1	3	Out				
To ensure availability of land to facilitate sustainable patterns of development and promote travel by more sustainable modes of transport.	1	3	Out				
Address the local elements that could contribute to wider environmental challenges through ensuring new development is designed to minimise carbon emissions, use resources efficiently and be resilient to longer term implications.	1	3	Out				
Adapt for the potential implications of environmental changes through management of development within areas of risk and designing new development to reduce future risk from flooding.	1		Out				
Ensure new development minimises the production of waste and supports recycling	1	3	Out				
In relation to Minerals, to safeguard the environment by ensuring new development proposals address the potential risks in respect of environmental pollution or damage.	1	4	In				

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Plan Proposal	Screening Category	Screening Comment	PSI	S76	LPP	SPG
<b>PROMOTING A GREEN AND ACTIVE PLACE OBJECTIVES</b>						
To support healthy lifestyles by managing existing open spaces and ensuring sufficient land availability for the development of a blue and green infrastructure network to encourage walking, cycling, accessible play, allotments, sports and recreational opportunities.	1 4	In	There is a potential for disturbance to arise from recreational use of land adjacent to European sites or roost sites.			
To protect, enhance and link the natural environment and biodiversity by managing the location and design of new development.	1 3	Out	Underlying protective principle			
To protect the natural ecosystem services and conserve the natural asset of Belfast's countryside, coast and hills by managing proposed development in sensitive areas.	1 3	Out	Underlying protective principle			
To support the development of a blue and green infrastructure network to manage water through sustainable urban drainage and connected green spaces.	1 3	Out	Underlying protective principle			
<b>STRATEGIC POLICIES</b>						
SP1 - Growth Strategy	4 5 6	In	The growth strategy will lead to jobs and homes therefore loss of land to these uses. There could be potential effects but assessments are not feasible until a later stage. The potential cumulative effects do however need to be considered at this stage.			
SP2 – Sustainable Development	3	Out	Overarching policy to support sustainable development so no likely significant effects on European sites should be feasible under this policy.			
SP3 – Improving Health and Well-Being	1	Out	Overarching policy to support health and well-being, will not increase the level of development however may influence design and layout. (Relates to HC1)			

Plan Proposal	Screening Category		Screening Comment	PSI	S76	LPP	SPG
SP4 – Community Cohesion and Good Relations	1	Out	A high level, strategic statement of support for development that promotes community cohesion and good relations. Not intended to increase the overall level of development.				
SP5 – Positive Placemaking	1	Out	This is an aspirational policy that appears supportive of sustainable development strategies and due to its strategic nature it is unlikely to have a significant effect on European sites.				
SP6 - Environmental Resilience	1	Out	Support for development that helps to reduce GHG emissions and is adaptable to environmental change. Seeks to build environmental resilience and support the transition to a low carbon future. (Relates to ENV2 and ENV3)				
SP7 – Connectivity	4	In	Policy supportive of a more sustainable transport system but locations of possible routes not known so further assessments at a later stage may be required although significant effects are unlikely.				
SP8 – Green and Blue Infrastructure Network	4	In	Policy supportive of green/blue infrastructure which can help add protection to European sites and incorporate sustainable modes of transport (e.g. walking) but exact locations not known so further assessments at a later stage may be required although significant effects are unlikely. (Relates to GB1)				
<b>SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY</b>							
SD1 – Settlement Hierarchy	1	Out	Overarching strategic policy that in itself is unlikely to have a significant effect on European sites.				
SD2 – Settlement Areas	1	Out	Overarching strategic policy that in itself is unlikely to have a significant effect on European sites.				
SD3 - City Centre	1	Out	Overarching strategic policy that in itself is unlikely to have a significant effect on European sites.				

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<b>SHAPING A LIVEABLE PLACE POLICIES</b>						
<b>HOUSING</b>						
HOU1 – Accommodating new homes	4	In	This option outlines the quantum of residential units required for each settlement in the Plan area and Iso provides indicative average annual rates of delivery for each of the three 5-year phases over the plan period. New homes required in known settlements but finer details regarding locations not known so further assessments will be required to avoid significant effects on European sites. The potential cumulative effects do however need to be considered at this stage.			
HOU2 – Windfall housing	4	In	Policy approach is strategic and aims to use brownfield sites and support sustainable development strategies i.e. walking and cycling routes. All other policy requirements must be met so there is unlikely to be any significant effects on European sites.			
HOU3 – Protection of existing residential accommodation	1 3	Out	Policy supports retaining housing where it already exists but even if a change of use is approved, it is unlikely to lead to a change that would have a significant effect on European sites.			
HOU4 - Density of residential development	4	In	Density bands will be applied to help guide location of new housing but similar to HOU1 the exact locations and finer details are not known and further assessments may be required at LPP to ensure effects are carefully considered to ensure no adverse effects on European sites.			
HOU5 - Affordable Housing	1 3	Out	Y	Y	Y	Y

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Plan Proposal	Screening Category		Screening Comment	PSI	S76	LPP	SPG
HOU6 - Housing mix	1	3	Out	Y		Y	Y
HOU7 - Adaptable and accessible accommodation	1	3	Out				Y
HOU8 - Special residential accommodation	1	3	Out			Y	Y
HOU9 - Traveller accommodation		4	In			Y	
HOU10 - Housing Management Areas	1	3	Out			Y	
HOU11 - Intensive housing needs	1	3	Out			Y	
HOU12 - Large scale purpose built managed student accommodation (PBMSA)		4	In		Y		Y
HOU13 - Short term let accommodation		4	In		Y	Y	

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Plan Proposal	Screening Category	Screening Comment	PSI	S76	LPP	SPG
<b>URBAN DESIGN</b>						
DES1 - Principles of Urban Design	1 3	Out		Y	Y	Y
DES2 - Master Planning for major development	4	Out		Y	Y	Y
DES3 - Tall Buildings	3	Out		Y	Y	Y
DES4 - Advertising and signage	1 3	Out			Y	Y
<b>RESIDENTIAL DESIGN</b>						
RD1 - New residential Design	1 3	Out			Y	Y
RD2 - Residential extensions and alterations	3	Out				Y
RD3 - Conversion or subdivision of existing buildings for residential use	3	Out				Y
<b>BUILT HERITAGE</b>						
BH1 - Listed buildings	3	Out		Y		Y

Plan Proposal	Screening Category		Screening Comment	PSI	S76	LPP	SPG	
BH2 - Conservation areas	3	Out	Policy aimed at managing development in conservation areas in an appropriate manner with consideration of the local environment.			Y	Y	
BH3 - Areas of townscape character	3	Out	Policy aimed at managing development in areas of townscape character in an appropriate manner.			Y	Y	
BH4 - Works to grounds affecting built heritage	3	Out	Relates to built heritage assets with regard to boundary treatments, ancillary structures and plot subdivision. Does not in itself promote new development.				Y	
BH5 - Archaeology	3	Out	Policy aimed at conserving and protecting archaeological remains in an appropriate manner and unlikely to lead to any significant effects on European sites.		Y	Y	Y	
BH6 - Historic Parks, gardens and demesnes	3	Out	Policy aimed at protecting and enhancing parks, gardens and demesnes in an appropriate manner and so unlikely to lead to any significant effects on European sites.			Y		
<b>COMMUNITY COHESION &amp; GOOD RELATIONS</b>								
CGR1 - Community Cohesion and good relations	1	3	Out	Overarching policy guiding development that will promote community cohesion based on principles so policy unlikely to significantly effect European sites.	Y	Y	Y	Y
CGR2 - Meanwhile uses in interface areas		4	In	Policy refers to possible uses of interface locations which are unlikely to lead to significant effects on European sites however any designations at the LPP or SPG policies will be reviewed for HRA.	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>PROMOTING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES</b>								
HC1 - Promoting healthy communities	1		Out	Overarching policy to support health and well being, will not increase the level of development however may influence design and layout.		Y	Y	Y

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Plan Proposal	Screening Category	Screening Comment	PSI	S76	LPP	SPG
<b>COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE</b>						
CI1 - Community Infrastructure	1 4	Out		Y	Y	Y
CI2 - Cemeteries and crematoria	1 3	Out	Y		Y	
<b>CREATING A VIBRANT ECONOMY OBJECTIVES</b>						
<b>ECONOMIC GROWTH</b>						
EC1 - Delivering economic growth	1	Out		Y		Y
EC2 – Employment Land Supply	4	In		Y		Y
EC3 – Major Employment and Strategic Employment Locations	4	In		Y	Y	Y
EC4 – Loss of zoned employment land	4	In		Y		Y

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Plan Proposal	Screening Category		Screening Comment	PSI	S76	LPP	SPG
EC5 – Industry, Storage & Distribution Uses	4	In	Policy can enable extensions to sites so further assessment may be required.			Y	Y
EC6 – Office Development	4	In	Policy supports city centre locations as well as some other employment locations so long as certain criteria are met but due to the location of European sites and potential pathways there may be a need for further assessment and review in some cases.			Y	Y
EC7 - Higher education institutions	1	Out	Policy is aspirational and more of a guide to developers and decision makers.			Y	Y
<b>RETAIL</b>							
RET1 - Establishing a centre hierarchy	4	In	This ensures a city centre approach is taken with balanced sustainable development of equitable growth across the district. Location of centres will be within existing urban areas therefore policy in itself will not have effect but individual developments may require further assessment. If centres are to be defined at LPP they should be further assessed.			Y	
RET2 - Out of centre development	4	In	The LDP shall build on the town centre first approach. This policy would have positive effects by consolidating development, increasing the amount of development on previously development land and remediating contaminated land. Will be within existing urban areas therefore policy in itself will not have effect but individual developments may require further assessment.		Y		Y
RET3 – District Centre, Local Centre & City Corridors	4	In	The LDP builds upon the precautionary approach to out of centre development. If District Centres are to be defined at LPP they should be further assessed.		Y	Y	Y
RET4 – Retail warehousing	4	In	Consolidating development within existing centres would minimise development on greenfield sites and remedy contaminated brownfield land.			Y	Y

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Plan Proposal	Screening Category		Screening Comment	PSI	S76	LPP	SPG
RET5 – Primary Retail and Leisure Area	3	Out	This defines uses within the Retail Core and would not in itself lead to any impact on European sites.			Y	
RET6 - Temporary and meanwhile uses	3	Out	Enables short term use of vacant spaces, encourages development to be concentrated on brownfield sites.			Y	
<b>CITY CENTRE</b>							
CC1 - Development opportunity sites	4	In	Policy refers to key locations within the urban environment but further assessment and review may be required to ensure no significant effects on European sites that are located nearby.	Y	Y	Y	
<b>SUPPORTING TOURISM, LEISURE AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT</b>							
TLC1 - Supporting tourism, leisure and cultural facilities and assets	1	Out	Policy is aspirational and more of a code of conduct for the Council to abide by when considering leisure related proposals.	Y	Y	Y	
TLC2 - Existing tourism, leisure and cultural facilities and assets	3	Out	Policy refers to the protection of sites and in itself is unlikely to have a significant effect on European sites.	Y	Y	Y	
TLC3 - Overnight visitor accommodation	4	In	Policy refers to potential sites in the city centre but also in new locations that meet certain criteria so further assessment and review may be required to help ensure no likely significant effects on European sites.			Y	
TLC4 - Evening and night-time economy	4	In	Policy supports the night-time economy and as proposals may be located near to European sites and may have associated light and noise levels, further assessment and review may be needed to help ensure no likely significant effects on European sites.		Y	Y	

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<b>BUILDING A SMART CONNECTED AND RESILIENT PLACE POLICIES</b>						
<b>INFRASTRUCTURE, TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND UTILITIES</b>						
ITU1 - Telecommunications development	4	In	Policy refers to telecommunications infrastructure in appropriate locations so environmental impacts must be considered but further assessment and review may be required in some instances to help ensure no likely significant effects on European sites.			Y
ITU2 – Water and sewerage Infrastructure	4	In	Policy refers to developments for water and sewerage infrastructure that consider minimising environmental impacts and using sustainable initiatives and technologies and so in itself the policy is unlikely to have a significant effect on European sites. All proposals should however be subject to HRA as they are likely to discharge to designated areas.			Y
ITU3 - Electricity and gas infrastructure	4	In	Policy refers to electricity and gas infrastructure proposals that minimise environmental impacts but in some cases further assessment and review may be needed to help ensure no likely significant effects on European sites.			Y
<b>RENEWABLE ENERGY</b>						
ITU4 - Renewable energy development	4	In	Policy supports renewable energy projects with criteria to ensure the proposal will not result in an unacceptable adverse impact on biodiversity, nature conservation and air quality. States that environmental reports and mitigation may be required to ensure this.			Y
<b>WASTE INFRASTRUCTURE</b>						

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W1 - Environmental impact of a waste management facility	4	In	Policy refers to criteria for waste management facilities and refers to consideration of local and wider environmental impacts but further review and assessment will be required to ensure no likely significant impacts on European sites.		Y		Y
W2 - Waste collection and treatment facility	4	In	Policy refers to criteria for waste management collection and treatment facilities and refers to consideration of local and wider environmental impacts but further review and assessment may be required to ensure no likely significant impacts on European sites.		Y		Y
W3 - Waste disposal	4	In	Policy refers to landfilling or land raising with criteria that consider environmental impacts but further assessment and review may be needed to help ensure no likely significant effects on European sites.				
W4 - Land improvement	4	In	Policy refers to dumping of inert waste for land improvement with criteria that refer to consideration of environmental impacts but further assessment and review may be needed to help ensure no likely significant effects on European sites.				Y
W5 - Development in the vicinity of waste management facilities	3	Out	Policy refers to compatibility of land development near waste facilities and in itself is unlikely to have a significant effect on European sites.				
<b>MINERALS</b>							
M1 - Minerals	4	In	Policy refers to appropriate use of minerals and environmental conditions are considered within the policy but as sites may be considered near to designations, further review and assessments may be needed to help ensure no likely significant effects on European sites.		Y		
<b>TRANSPORTATION</b>							

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Plan Proposal	Screening Category		Screening Comment	PSI	S76	LPP	SPG
TRAN1 - Active travel, walking and cycling	3	Out	Policy supports consideration of active travel within development proposals and so the policy in itself is unlikely to have significant effects on European sites.		Y		
TRAN2 - Creating an accessible environment	3	Out	Policy is aspirational and more of a guide to developers to help ensure access needs are considered for all so the policy in itself is unlikely to lead to significant effects on European sites.				
TRAN3 - Transport assessment	1	Out	Refers to other considerations and so in itself would not lead to likely significant effects on European sites.		Y		
TRAN4 - Travel plan	3	Out	Planning permission for development proposals with significant travel generating uses will require a travel plan. This in itself would not lead to likely significant effects on European sites however may inform potential impacts.		Y		
TRAN5 - New transport schemes	4	In	Further assessment and review may be required in certain cases to ensure no significant effects on European sites.			Y	
TRAN6 - Access to public roads	3	Out	Informs requirements for access to public roads. Does not promote additional development.		Y		
TRAN7 - Access to protected routes	3	Out	Informs requirements for access to protected routes. Does not promote additional development.		Y		
TRAN8 - Car parking and servicing arrangements	4	In	Further assessment and review may be required in certain cases to ensure no significant effects on European sites.				
TRAN9 - Parking standards with area of parking restraint	1 3	Out	Refers to design considerations.			Y	
TRAN10 - Design of car parking	1	Out	Refers to design considerations.				
TRAN11 - Provision of public and private car parks	4	In	Further assessment and review may be required in certain cases to ensure no significant effects on European sites.		Y		

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TRAN12 - Temporary car parks	4	In	Further assessment and review may be required in certain cases to ensure no significant effects on European sites.					
<b>ENVIRONMENTAL RESILIENCE</b>								
ENV1 - Environmental quality	1	3	Out	An aspirational policy providing guidance to developers to maintain and where feasible enhance the environment for communities - noise, air, water, ground, light. Application of the policy in itself would not lead to significant effects on European sites.	Y	Y	Y	Y
ENV2 - Mitigating environmental change	1	3	Out	An aspirational policy providing guidance to developers to aim for the best environmental options and most sustainable design and development strategies so in itself it is unlikely to lead to significant effects on European sites.	Y	Y	Y	Y
ENV3 - Adapting to environmental change	1	3	Out	Support for development that includes measures to adapt to environmental change, including resilience to flood risk and extreme weather conditions and enhancement of green and blue infrastructure, to ensure sustainable and enduring development and protect public safety. In itself it is unlikely to lead to significant effects on European sites.	Y	Y	Y	Y
ENV4 - Flood risk	4	In	Policy provides guidance on what should be provided with any planning proposal in a flood risk area and promotes a precautionary approach requiring a Flood Risk Assessment but as some designated areas are water environments further assessments and reviews under this policy may be required to help ensure no likely significant effects on European sites.	Y	Y	Y	Y	

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ENV5 - Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)	1	3	Out	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>PROMOTING A GREEN AND ACTIVE PLACE POLICIES</b>							
<b>OPEN SPACE</b>							
GB1 - Green and Blue Infrastructure	1	3	Out		Y	Y	Y
OS1 - Protection of open space	1	3	Out		Y	Y	
OS2 - New open space within settlements		3	Out	Y	Y	Y	Y
OS3 - Ancillary open space	1		Out	Y	Y	Y	Y
OS4 - New open space outside settlements		4	In		Y	Y	
OS5 - Intensive sports facilities		4	In		Y	Y	Y

1 General Policy Statement | 2 Plans or projects referred to but not proposed | 3 No likely significant effect | 4 Proposals too general to assess | 5 Potential minor effects | 6 Potential significant effects  
PSS Public Sector Intervention | S76 Planning Agreements | LPP Local Policy Plan Designations | SPG Supplementary Planning Guidance

Plan Proposal	Screening Category		Screening Comment	PSI	S76	LPP	SPG
OS6 - Facilities ancillary to water sports	4	In	Policy refers to development that may impact on European sites particularly when cumulative effects are considered.		Y		
OS7 - Floodlighting	3	Out	Policy refers to criteria that incorporate consideration of the natural environment and so any likely significant effects on European sites would be unlikely.		Y		
<b>NATURAL HERITAGE</b>							
NH 1 - Protection of Natural Heritage Resources	3	Out	Policy supports the precautionary principle when assessing new developments and seeks to protect natural heritage and biodiversity.		Y	Y	Y
<b>TREES</b>							
TRE 1 - Trees	3	Out	Policy recognises the natural heritage importance of trees for e.g. nature conservation, biodiversity, visual amenity, air quality and any significant effects on European sites are unlikely.		Y	Y	Y
<b>LANDSCAPE AND COAST</b>							
LC1 - Landscape	4	In	Policy supports protection of the visual amenity of landscape by aiming to manage new development that can restore or improve the quality and visual amenity of the landscape. As the policy may enable new development in areas designated for landscape importance there could be a need for further assessments or reviews to ensure no likely significant effects on European sites.		Y	Y	Y
LC1A - AONBs	3	Out	Policy supports protection of AONBs and is unlikely to have a significant negative effects on European sites.		Y	Y	Y
LC1B - AHSVs	3	Out	Policy supports protection of AHSVs and is unlikely to have a significant negative effects on European sites.		Y	Y	Y

Plan Proposal	Screening Category		Screening Comment	PSI	S76	LPP	SPG
LC1C - LLPAs	3	Out	Policy supports protection of LLPAs and is unlikely to have a significant negative effects on European sites.		Y	Y	Y
LC1D - Landscape Wedges	3	Out	Policy supports protection of landscape wedges and is unlikely to have a significant negative effects on European sites.		Y	Y	Y
LC2 - Lagan Valley Regional Park (LVRP)	3	Out	Policy supports the protection of the LVRP area by protecting its character, although the policy enables appropriate development in designated nodes it is unlikely to have any significant effects due to the distance to European sites.			Y	Y
LC3 - Belfast Hills	3	Out	Policy supports the protection of the Belfast Hills by protecting and enhancing the landscape, its natural heritage and visual amenity but , although the policy enables appropriate development in designated nodes it is unlikely to have any significant effects due to the distance to European sites.			Y	Y
LC4 - Coastal Area	4	In	Policy supports the protection and enhancement of the coast and states that proposals should not have any significant impacts on European sites but in some cases there may be a need for further assessment and review to ensure no likely significant impacts on European sites.			Y	Y
<b>DEVELOPMENT IN THE COUNTRYSIDE</b>							
DC1 - All countryside development general policy principles	1	Out	Policy is a guide to developers that aims to support the conservation, protection and enhancement of the countryside from detrimental impacts.	Y	Y		
DC2 - Housing in the countryside	3	Out	Policy supports rural housing only in certain circumstances with a general presumption against it and none will be in close proximity to European sites.	Y	Y		

1 General Policy Statement | 2 Plans or projects referred to but not proposed | 3 No likely significant effect | 4 Proposals too general to assess | 5 Potential minor effects | 6 Potential significant effects  
PSS Public Sector Intervention | S76 Planning Agreements | LPP Local Policy Plan Designations | SPG Supplementary Planning Guidance



Plan Proposal	Screening Category		Screening Comment	PSI	S76	LPP	SPG
DC3 - Replacement dwellings	3	Out	Policy supports replacement dwellings under certain circumstances and is unlikely to lead to significant effects on European sites.	Y	Y		
DC4 - The conversion and reuse of existing buildings	3	Out	Policy supports conversion and reuse of existing buildings including as a dwelling but under certain criteria that consider environment and so is unlikely to lead to any significant impacts on European sites.	Y	Y		
DC5 - New dwellings - Personal and domestic circumstances	3	Out	Policy supports new dwellings under certain circumstances however none will be in close proximity to European sites.	Y	Y		
DC6 - Dwellings for non-agricultural business enterprises	3	Out	Policy refers to social/economic needs/conditions of business enterprises and is unlikely in itself to lead to significant impacts on European sites.	Y	Y		
CD7 - Ribbon development	3	Out	Policy aimed at deterring ribbon development by supporting refusals and so unlikely to lead to significant effects on European sites.	Y	Y		
DC8 - New dwellings in existing clusters	4	In	Policy supports cluster development to be defined at LPP. Unlikely to have an effect as distant from European sites however designations should be considered at LPP.	Y	Y		
DC9 - Residential caravans and mobile homes	3	Out	Policy supports provision of caravans/mobile homes in very limited circumstances	Y	Y		
DC10 - New dwellings on farms	3	Out	Policy refers to social need on existing farms by supporting dwellings on farms and is unlikely in itself to lead to significant effects on European sites.	Y	Y		

Plan Proposal	Screening Category		Screening Comment	PSI	S76	LPP	SPG
DC11 - Agriculture	4	In	Enables development proposals on an active and established agricultural or forestry holding where it is demonstrated that it is necessary for the efficient use of the agricultural holding or forestry enterprise. May lead to an increase in ammonia emissions, developments will not be within 7.5km of any European site the current screening threshold advised by NIEA however may generate waste with potential to affect unspecified European sites through land spreading. Recommended to review before finalising Plan Strategy to ensure it accommodates most recent policy on ammonia.	Y	Y		
DC12 - Farm diversification	3	Out	Policy refers to economic need on farms by supporting diversification proposals with environmental consideration criteria and so is unlikely to lead to significant effects on European sites.	Y	Y		
DC13 - Other proposed development in the countryside	1	Out	An aspirational policy providing guidance to developers.	Y	Y		
<b>DELIVERY</b>							
Implementation		In	Not applicable				
Monitoring		In	Monitoring can inform HRAs for future reviews of the LDP.				
Review		In	HRA will be required for any changes brought about at plan review and also to take account of the latest information available about European sites.				
<b>LOCAL POLICIES PLAN</b>							
Local Policies Plan (LPP) Designations		In	However will be subject to new HRA.				

## Appendix 5: Baseline Report for European Sites Connected with the Belfast LDP Area

### Introduction

HRA will be an iterative process carried out in parallel with Local Development Plan (LDP) preparation which will be updated in line with knowledge of potential plan effects and any changes relating to European sites. This report provides a long list of sites for which effects of the plan will be reviewed. These will be considered in the context of how they are connected with the LDP area and potential effects of the LDP on its own and in combination with other plans and projects. These are described in terms of how they are connected with the whole Belfast City Council area, their selection features and potential effects of plans and projects.

Map A5.1 shows the SPAs and Ramsars and Maps A5.2 and A 5.3 the SACs in relation to Belfast City Council. The sites are listed in Table A5.1. Definitions of each type of connection follow.

This long list takes a precautionary approach. There will be no conceivable effect from plans or projects on many of the long listed sites, for example on those that are over 10km away and have no ecological or infrastructure connection. None or only a few of the potential impacts may arise depending on the nature of the project or plan. Measures to avoid, reduce or mitigate for impacts may be incorporated in plans or projects where necessary and feasible, or proposals amended to avoid adverse effects on site integrity.

Projects and plans should be assessed to determine whether any of the potential impacts could occur. This involves consideration of the nature of the plan or project, sources of potential impacts, any pathways to European sites and whether the impact could have a significant effect on site selection features, their conservation objectives and site integrity alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

The policies and spatial zonings proposed within the plan will be assessed to determine whether any of the potential impacts could materialise as a result of the plan. This will consider the source of potential impacts, any pathways to European sites and whether the impact could have a significant effect on site selection features, their conservation objectives and site integrity along with any avoidance and mitigation measures identified in the course of assessment and plan preparation.

### Sources of evidence

The following evidence and further evidence available at each stage of assessment will be taken into account.

DAERA, NIEA (2015 – 2017) Conservation Objectives (*Online*) Last Accessed August 2018. Available at <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/landing-pages/protected-areas>

DAERA, NIEA (2017) Data Layers for designated and proposed European and Ramsar sites Last Accessed August 2018. Available at <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/download-digital-datasets>

DOE (2013) Habitats Regulations Assessment Report, Belfast Metropolitan Plan 2015 (*Online*) Last Accessed August 2018. Available at [http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/policy/development\\_plans/devplans\\_az/hra\\_bmap\\_2013.pdf](http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/policy/development_plans/devplans_az/hra_bmap_2013.pdf)

JNCC (Dates vary) Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS). (*Online*) Last Accessed August 2018. Available at <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-1393>

JNCC (Dates vary) Standard data form generated from the Natura 2000 Database submitted to the European Commission. (*Online*) Last Accessed August 2018. Available at <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-161>

Spatial NI (2017) Data Layers for Local Government boundaries (*Online*) Last Accessed August 2018. Available at <https://www.spatialni.gov.uk/>

### Developing the Long List of Sites

The sites listed are those for which there is a potential pathway allowing a connection with the plan area. Sites within 15km of the Council area have been considered on a precautionary basis. Map A5.1 shows the SPAs

and Ramsars and Maps A5.2 and A 5.3 the SACs in relation to Belfast City Council. The sites are listed in Table A5.1. Definitions of each type of connection follow.

#### *Within or Adjacent*

All or part of the European or Ramsar Site is within or directly adjacent to the plan area. Belfast Lough SPA and Ramsar is the most obvious example.

#### *Ecological*

The European or Ramsar Site is ecologically connected to the plan area. Ecological connections include linkages by ecological corridors such as river systems; hydrological links between the Council area and peatland or wetland sites; known areas of land in the Council area which are regularly used by birds which also use a SPA or Ramsar Site; and sites that form part of the coastal ecosystem to which the Council area is connected. This adds Lough Neagh and Lough Beg SPA and Ramsar as a small part of the Council area drains to Lough Neagh. There are also several sites such as The Maidens SAC which are connected through marine waters.

#### *Within 15km*

The European or Ramsar Site is within 15km of the Council area so potential for aerial pollution may exist. This adds Aughnadarragh Lough SAC to the long list.

#### *By Infrastructure*

The European or Ramsar Site is connected by infrastructure with the plan area. Infrastructural connectivity is related to the potential linkage of sites to the Council area by infrastructure services such as water abstraction or wastewater discharges. Water supply for the Council area comes from Lough Neagh, the Mourne and Antrim Hills therefore this also brings Eastern Mourne SAC and Antrim Hills SPA into consideration. Wastewater treatment works ultimately discharge to a number of designated areas therefore the influence of plans or projects on this infrastructure needs to be considered.

Table A5.1: Potential Connections between Belfast City Council area and European Sites

European Site Name	Connection with Belfast City Council area			
	Within or Adjacent	Ecological	Within 15km	By Infrastructure
Belfast Lough SPA	•	•	•	•
Belfast Lough Ramsar	•	•	•	•
Belfast Lough Open Water SPA	•	•	•	•
East Coast (Northern Ireland) Marine pSPA	•	•	•	•
North Channel cSAC		•	•	•
Outer Ards SPA		•	•	•
Outer Ards Ramsar		•	•	•
Lough Neagh and Lough Beg SPA		•	•	•
Lough Neagh and Lough Beg Ramsar		•	•	•
Strangford Lough SPA		•	•	
Strangford Lough SAC		•	•	
Strangford Lough Ramsar		•	•	
Larne Lough SPA		•		
Larne Lough Ramsar		•		
Copeland Islands SPA		•		
The Maidens SAC		•		
Murlough SAC		•		
Skerries and Causeway SAC		•		
Aughnadarragh Lough SAC			•	
Eastern Mourne SAC				•
Antrim Hills SPA				•
Rea's Wood and Farr's Bay SAC				•

### Overall Potential Impacts

More detailed description follows in Table A5.2 of all the potential development impacts that could arise as a result of plans or projects which may need to be assessed in relation to European sites and their features. Note that this is a full list and some of the effects listed may not apply to the selection features of sites connected with the Council area or to plan proposals.

### Summary Site Information

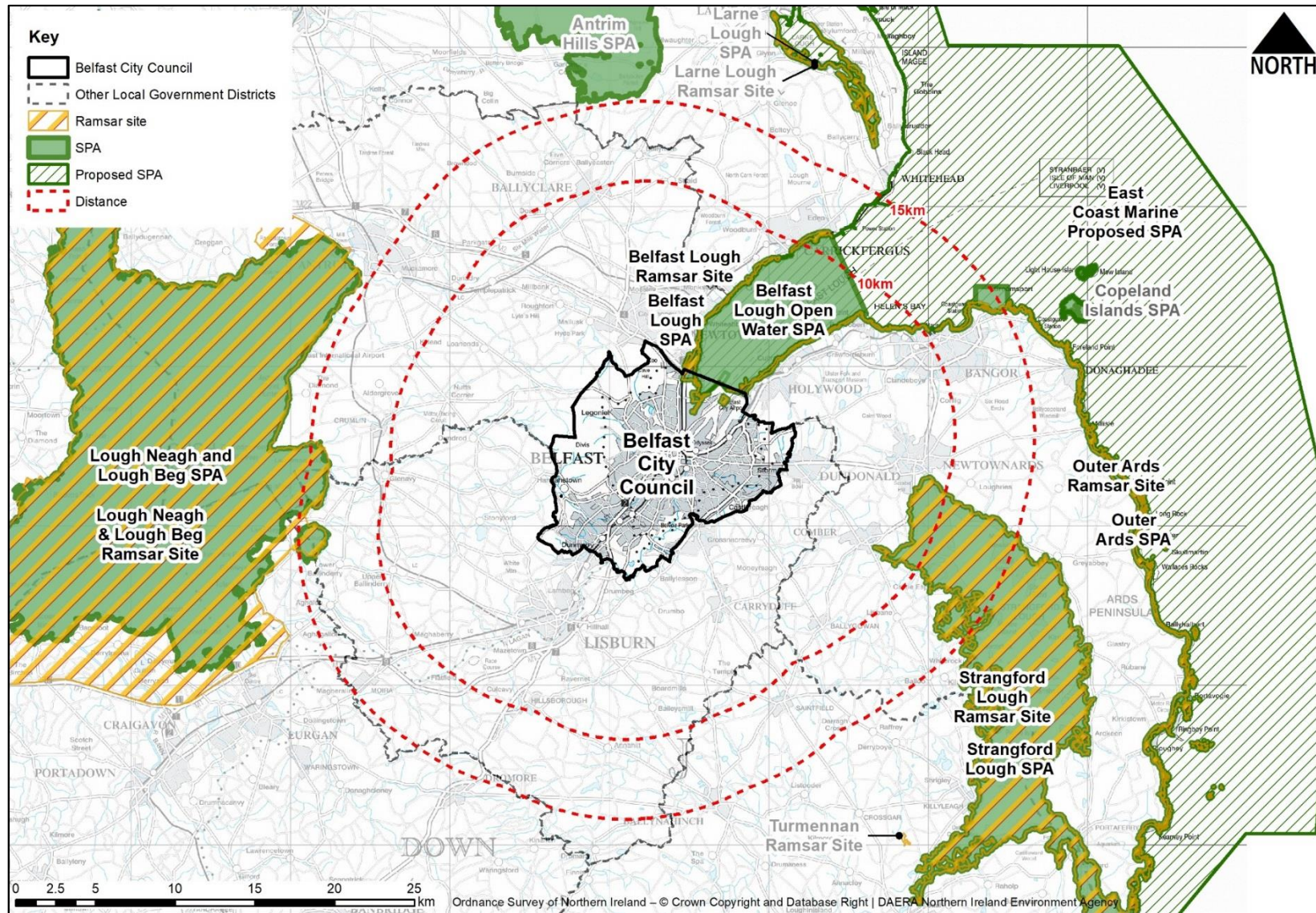
Table A5.2 presents more information about each of these sites describing how they relate to the Belfast City Council area, qualifying interests, conservation objectives and threats to site integrity. This however is a summary of information and [www.daera-ni.gov.uk/topics/biodiversity-land-and-landscapes/protected-areas](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/topics/biodiversity-land-and-landscapes/protected-areas) may be referred to for more detailed information about each site.

**Table A5.2: Potential development impacts to be assessed in relation to European sites**

Potential Impacts	Potential arising from the implementation of the LDP
<b>Loss, fragmentation, damage of habitats and / or species:</b>	Construction activities associated with LDP could lead to the loss, fragmentation (or obstruction of movement) or damage of habitats and / or species through:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct land take and / or land clearance and the use of machinery/materials.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct and indirect impacts resulting from the construction and operation of built development and required infrastructure.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impacts caused during repair and maintenance activities for built development and required infrastructure.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct impacts associated with mineral development in the plan area.</li> <li>• Removal, fragmentation or physical changes to important connectivity features could create barrier effects to species, alter habitat availability or ecological functioning or result in changes in breeding, roosting, commuting and foraging behaviour.</li> </ul>
<b>Disturbance: physical, noise, lighting</b>	Noise or activity during construction and operational activities could have adverse impacts on sensitive species (marine mammals and birds in particular).
	Increased lighting from construction or additional built development could: create barrier effects to species; result in changes in species breeding, roosting, commuting and foraging behaviour; or increase predation.
<b>Biological Disturbance: invasive species, human disturbance</b>	Sensitive habitats and species may experience adverse impacts from the introduction of invasive species, non-native, competitive or predatory species through construction activities and associated machinery, movement of soils and waste or from garden escapes.
	Increased human activity (including recreation; increase in pet ownership; increased incidence in fires) close to sensitive habitats and species may cause disturbance that could impact negatively on these features and lead to displacement of sensitive species from certain locations.
<b>Contamination of land</b>	Waste arising from the operation of developments associated with LDP could cause contamination of land which could have a direct detrimental impact on sensitive habitats or species or indirect impacts if subsequent emissions to water occur.
<b>Emissions by air</b>	The construction and operation of developments associated with LDP (in particular industrial developments) have the potential to generate chemical and dust emissions and could make a contribution to acid rain or nutrient deposition resulting in significant adverse impacts to animals and sensitive habitats for example they could cause localised smothering of vegetation or potential health issues in animals e.g. birds.
	Increased traffic generation could lead to increased air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions which could have localized impacts on sensitive habitats or species.

Potential Impacts	Potential arising from the implementation of the LDP
<b>Emissions by water and changes to hydrology</b>	<p>There is potential for an increased transport of chemical contaminants reaching the aquatic environment during the construction and operation of development associated with the LDP. This could range from transportation of fuels to cleaning or wastewater treatment materials and associated drainage and discharges into watercourses. Changes to water quality can have harmful effects on fish, invertebrates, and vegetation, e.g. as a result of lowered oxygen levels.</p>
	<p>Surface run off and sediment release from construction works and operational activities associated with LDP can increase sediment deposition and turbidity within aquatic systems. This can adversely impact on associated wildlife by causing shading effects that can inhibit plant and algal growth and smother organisms thereby limiting productivity and survival.</p>
	<p>Water abstraction from streams or lakes required for construction and operation of developments associated with LDP could have physical impacts on water levels, fish species at intakes, affect populations of fish or alter the configuration or availability of breeding gravels.</p>
	<p>Construction and operation of development associated with BDLP could alter the hydrology of sensitive habitats and species by either increasing or decreasing runoff or water percolation into aquifers.</p>
	<p>Increased demands on wastewater treatment works or for septic tanks could lead to increased nutrient enrichment of waterbodies which could change water quality and increase eutrophication. This in turn could have a harmful effect on the ecological functioning of these systems.</p>

Map A5.1: SPAs and Ramsar sites in relation to Belfast City Council









**Table A5.3: Details of European sites Connected with Belfast City Council Area***Sourced online from JNCC and DAERA August 2017*

Site name	Location relative to Belfast City Council Area	Qualifying interests	Conservation objectives	Potential Impacts from Development in Belfast City Council Area
<b>Antrim Hills SPA</b>	Just over 15km away from Council area. A source for water supply therefore infrastructural connection. While the site selection features may range well beyond the site boundary the Belfast Urban area would not make up a significant part of their range.	Breeding Merlin and Hen Harrier	Same as for Belfast Lough SPA.	The only conceivable impact would be if development growth in the plan area is to such an extent that abstraction for water supply needs to be significantly increased resulting in habitat damage in the course of constructing new infrastructure.
<b>Aughnadarragh Lough SAC</b>	12.5km to Council area therefore need to consider aerial emissions, no hydrological connection	Marsh fritillary butterfly	To maintain (or restore where appropriate) the Marsh Fritillary Butterfly population to favourable condition. Maintain (and if feasible enhance) population numbers and distribution. Maintain (and if feasible enhance) the extent and quality of suitable Marsh Fritillary breeding habitat, particularly suitable rosettes of the larval food plant <i>Succisa pratensis</i>	The sensitivity of Devil's Bit Scabious to aerial deposition is uncertain therefore cumulative impacts from development within and beyond the plan area need to be considered further.
<b>Belfast Lough Open Water SPA</b>	Adjacent to and ecologically connected. Will be subsumed by East Coast (Northern Ireland) Marine Proposed SPA and therefore considerations for that site address all considerations for Belfast Lough Open Water SPA	Wintering populations of Great Crested Grebe	Same as for Belfast Lough SPA.	Same as for Belfast Lough SPA
<b>Belfast Lough Ramsar</b>	Ecologically connected. The boundary is entirely the same as that for Belfast Lough SPA.	Common redshank Black-tailed godwit	Ramsar conservation objectives are not published however they are assumed to be the same as those for Belfast Lough SPA.	In the absence of Conservation Objectives for the Ramsar and given the selection criteria it is considered to be subject to the same impacts as those for Belfast Lough SPA.

Site name	Location relative to Belfast City Council Area	Qualifying interests	Conservation objectives	Potential Impacts from Development in Belfast City Council Area
<b>Belfast Lough SPA</b>	Ecologically connected. Belfast Lough is situated at the mouth of the River Lagan on the east coast of Northern Ireland. The inner part of the lough, part of which is within the Belfast City Council area, comprises a series of mudflats and lagoons. The brackish lagoon at the Harbour Estate (D2) together with the tidal channel at Dargan Road are included. The SPA is also designated as ASSI but excludes some areas within the immediate harbour area where permitted port related development and landfill has taken place. Some open grassland areas in parks and schools are important as high water roost sites for redshank.	Redshank (W); 2015 additions: Black-tailed Godwit (W); Bar-tailed Godwit (W); Common Tern (B); Arctic Tern (B) (Great Crested Grebe removed - in Belfast Open Water SPA)	The overall site objective is to maintain each feature in favourable condition. The features objectives are: To maintain or enhance the population of the qualifying species. To maintain or enhance the range of habitats utilised by the qualifying species. To ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained. To ensure there is no significant disturbance of the species and to ensure that the following are maintained in the long term: Population of the species as a viable component of the site; Distribution of the species within site; Distribution and extent of habitats supporting the species; Structure, function and supporting processes of habitats supporting the species.	Negative impacts on the site are High: Shipping lanes, ports, marine constructions; Marine water pollution; Changes in abiotic conditions (relating to physical conditions); Medium: Fishing and harvesting aquatic resources; Pollution to surface waters (limnic & terrestrial, marine & brackish); Changes in biotic conditions (relating to other species) and LOW: Outdoor sports and leisure activities, recreational activities. The features already experience significant levels of disturbance within the Harbour area. The use of piling during construction may cause an additional disturbance factor but is one that is short lived and can be timed to avoid affecting bird features. There are many potential pollution sources; those that require the most careful attention are wastewater treatment works, landfill sites, large developments incorporating on site wastewater treatment; storage of chemicals and fuels; contaminated land if pollutants could be mobilised.
<b>Copeland Islands SPA</b>	More than 15km from the Council area however some birds that are site selection features forage or loaf in the East Coast (Northern Ireland) Marine pSPA	Breeding Arctic tern and Manx Shearwater	Same as for Belfast Lough SPA.	The site selection features most likely to be affected are ones for which East Coast (Northern Ireland) Marine SPA (Proposed) and Belfast Lough SPA have been proposed/designated to protect the foraging area of species from these sites. Therefore the threats for Belfast Lough SPA also apply to this site.

Site name	Location relative to Belfast City Council Area	Qualifying interests	Conservation objectives	Potential Impacts from Development in Belfast City Council Area
<b>East Coast (Northern Ireland) Marine SPA (Proposed)</b>	Public consultation on the proposed East Coast (Northern Ireland) Marine Special Protection Area took place in early 2016. The proposed SPA is adjacent to and ecologically connected. It would subsume Belfast Lough Open Water SPA and includes coastal and near shore waters from Ringfad near Carnlough, Co. Antrim in the north, the marine area of Larne Lough, the marine area of Belfast Lough, waters around the Copeland Islands and offshore of the Ards Peninsula to Cloghan Head, near Ardglass in the south.	Wintering populations of Great Crested Grebe, Red-throated Diver and Eider Duck; Rafting Manx Shearwater in the breeding season originating from an adjoining colony; Foraging Sandwich, Common and Arctic Tern in the breeding season originating from adjoining tern colonies.	Same as for Belfast Lough SPA.	Same as for Belfast Lough SPA
<b>Eastern Mourne SAC</b>	A source for water supply therefore infrastructural connection.	European dry heaths; Northern Atlantic wet heaths with <i>Erica tetralix</i> ; Active blanket bogs; Alpine and boreal heaths; Siliceous alpine and boreal grasslands; Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation; Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels.	To maintain (or restore where appropriate) the site selection features to favourable condition.	The only conceivable impact would be if development growth in the plan area is to such an extent that abstraction for water supply needs to be significantly increased resulting in habitat damage in the course of constructing new infrastructure.
<b>Larne Lough Ramsar</b>	More than 15km from the Council area however some birds that are site selection features forage or loaf in the East Coast (Northern Ireland) Marine pSPA.	Breeding Common Tern, Roseate Tern, Sandwich Tern and Mediterranean Gull	Same as for Belfast Lough SPA.	The site selection features most likely to be affected are ones for which East Coast (Northern Ireland) Marine SPA (Proposed) and Belfast Lough SPA have been proposed/designated to protect the foraging area of species from these sites. Therefore the threats for Belfast Lough SPA also apply to this site.

Site name	Location relative to Belfast City Council Area	Qualifying interests	Conservation objectives	Potential Impacts from Development in Belfast City Council Area
<b>Larne Lough SPA</b>	More than 15km from the Council area however some birds that are site selection features forage or loaf in the East Coast (Northern Ireland) Marine pSPA.	Breeding Common Tern, Roseate Tern, Sandwich Tern and Mediterranean Gull; Wintering Light-bellied Brent Goose	Same as for Belfast Lough SPA.	The site selection features most likely to be affected are ones for which East Coast (Northern Ireland) Marine SPA (Proposed) and Belfast Lough SPA have been proposed/designated to protect the foraging area of species from these sites. Therefore the threats for Belfast Lough SPA also apply to this site.
<b>Lough Neagh and Lough Beg Ramsar</b>	A source for water supply therefore infrastructural connection.	Wetlands; rare plant and animal species; waterfowl populations as for SPA; pollen.	Ramsar conservation objectives are not published however they are assumed to be the same as those for Lough Neagh and Lough Beg SPA	Impacts that should be considered are those from a major development such as landfill or quarrying within the Lough Neagh catchment, or development growth to the extent that abstraction for water supply needs to be significantly increased.
<b>Lough Neagh and Lough Beg SPA</b>	A source for water supply therefore infrastructural connection.	Breeding Common Tern and Great Crested Grebe; Wintering Bewick's Swan, Golden Plover, Whooper Swan, Great Crested Grebe, Goldeneye, Pochard, Scaup, Tufted Duck, Shelduck; Passage Great Crested Grebe; Wintering waterbird assemblage	Same as for Belfast Lough SPA.	Impacts that should be considered are development growth in the plan area to the extent that abstraction for water supply needs to be significantly increased such that water levels in Lough Neagh are impacted.

Site name	Location relative to Belfast City Council Area	Qualifying interests	Conservation objectives	Potential Impacts from Development in Belfast City Council Area
Murlough SAC	77km via marine waters to the Council area. Common (Harbour) Seal is a mobile species and a significant colony has become established in recent years at the Musgrave Channel on the shore of East Twin Island. Peak counts of as many as 50 adults are reported and there was an estimated 20-25 pups in 2015. NIEA has advised that the screening distance for Common Seal is 50km. Therefore it is reasonable to assume that the Belfast Lough population does not represent part of the population of Common Seal for which Murlough SAC is designated.	Habitats: Atlantic decalcified fixed dunes (Calluno-Uliceteta); Atlantic salt meadows ( <i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima</i> ); Dunes with <i>Salix repens ssp. Argentea</i> ( <i>Salicion arenariae</i> ); Embryonic shifting dunes; Fixed dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes); Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide; Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time; Shifting dunes along the shoreline with <i>Ammophila arenaria</i> (white dunes); Species: Common Seal <i>Phoca vitulina</i> Common (Harbour) Seal <i>Phoca vitulina</i>	To maintain (or restore where appropriate) the Common Seal <i>Phoca vitulina</i> to favourable condition. Maintain (and if feasible enhance) population numbers and distribution of Common Seal. Maintain and enhance, as appropriate, physical features used by Common Seals within the site.	None, see comments under Location to the left.

Site name	Location relative to Belfast City Council Area	Qualifying interests	Conservation objectives	Potential Impacts from Development in Belfast City Council Area
<b>North Channel cSAC</b>	Submitted to the EC as a candidate SAC January 2017, confirmed as SCI December 2017. Connected via marine waters, small proportion within 15km of Council area. The northern part of the site would include the mouth of Belfast Lough the western boundary is about 15.5km from the Council area running approximately from the south of Whitehead to Orlock Point. Harbour Porpoise are found all around the coast of Ireland including the Skerries near Portrush, Maidens (off Islandmagee), Belfast harbour and Strangford Lough. They may therefore venture into Belfast Lough, Belfast Harbour and the tidal Lagan.	Harbour Porpoise	To avoid deterioration of the habitats of the harbour porpoise or significant disturbance to the harbour porpoise, thus ensuring that the integrity of the site is maintained and the site makes an appropriate contribution to maintaining Favourable Conservation Status (FCS) for the UK harbour porpoise. To ensure for harbour porpoise that, subject to natural change, the following attributes are maintained or restored in the long term: 1. The species is a viable component of the site; 2. There is no significant disturbance of the species; 3. The supporting habitats and processes relevant to harbour porpoises and their prey are maintained.	The potential for disturbance and injury impacting on harbour porpoise populations needs to be considered. Disturbance during construction can normally be addressed through mitigation measures applied as conditions of planning permission such as requiring the use of marine mammal observers. As harbour porpoise are not frequently observed in Belfast Lough they are unlikely to be adversely affected by new or changed levels of recreational activities or boat traffic.
<b>Outer Ards Ramsar</b>	Connected via marine waters, small proportion within 15km of Council area. 9km from Council area to nearest point.	Wintering Golden Plover, Light-bellied Brent Goose, Ringed Plover, Turnstone	Ramsar conservation objectives are not published however they are assumed to be the same as those for Belfast Lough SPA.	The site selection features which could be impacted are those which forage in the area proposed as the East Coast (Northern Ireland) Marine SPA. The potential impacts for Belfast Lough SPA therefore also apply to this site.
<b>Outer Ards SPA</b>	Connected via marine waters, small proportion within 15km of Council area. 9km from Council area to nearest point.	Breeding Arctic Tern; Wintering Golden Plover, Light-bellied Brent Goose, Ringed Plover, Turnstone	Same as for Belfast Lough SPA.	The site selection features most likely to be affected are those for which East Coast (Northern Ireland) Marine SPA (Proposed) has been designated to protect the foraging area of species from these sites therefore the threats to Belfast Lough SPA also apply to this site.



Site name	Location relative to Belfast City Council Area	Qualifying interests	Conservation objectives	Potential Impacts from Development in Belfast City Council Area
Rea's Wood and Farr's Bay SAC	On shore of Lough Neagh which is a water source for the plan area.	Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (Alno-Padion, <i>Alnion incanae</i> , <i>Salicion alvae</i> )	To maintain (or restore where appropriate) the Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (Alno-Padion, <i>Alnion incanae</i> , <i>Salicion alvae</i> ) to favourable condition. Maintain and expand the extent of existing swamp woodland. (There is an area of wetland and damp grassland which have the potential to develop into carr woodland); Maintain and enhance swamp woodland species diversity and structural diversity; Maintain the diversity and quality of habitats associated with the swamp woodland, e.g. fen, swamp, especially where these exhibit natural transition to swamp woodland; Seek nature conservation management over adjacent forested areas outside the ASSI where there may be potential for woodland rehabilitation; Seek nature conservation management over suitable areas immediately outside the ASSI where there may be potential for woodland expansion.	Just over 15km away. This is too far away for there to be aerial impacts. While there is a hydrological connection via the Six Mile Water and Lough Neagh this could not result in a significant effect on the alluvial forest site selection feature of this SAC.

Site name	Location relative to Belfast City Council Area	Qualifying interests	Conservation objectives	Potential Impacts from Development in Belfast City Council Area
<b>Skerries and Causeway SAC</b>	98km away via marine waters. Harbour Porpoise are however found all around the coast of Ireland including the Skerries near Portrush, Maidens (off Islandmagee), Belfast harbour and Strangford Lough. They may therefore venture into Belfast Lough, Belfast Harbour and the tidal Lagan.	Habitats: Reefs, Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time, Submerged and partially submerged sea caves; Species: Harbour Porpoise	Site: To maintain (or restore where appropriate) the habitats and Harbour Porpoise to favourable condition. Habitats: Maintain and enhance, as appropriate the extent of the reefs. Allow the natural processes which determine the development, structure, function and distribution of the habitats associated with the reefs, to operate appropriately. Maintain and enhance, as appropriate, the viability, distribution and diversity of typical species within this habitat. Species: Ensure the species is a viable component of the site. Ensure there is no significant disturbance of the species. Ensure the supporting habitats and processes relevant to harbour porpoises and their prey are maintained.	The potential for disturbance and injury impacting on harbour porpoise populations needs to be considered. Disturbance during construction can normally be addressed through mitigation measures applied as conditions of planning permission such as requiring the use of marine mammal observers. As harbour porpoise are not frequently observed in Belfast Lough they are unlikely to be adversely affected by new or changed levels of recreational activities or boat traffic.
<b>Strangford Lough Ramsar</b>	7km in direct line and 66km away via marine waters. DAERA advises that plans or projects within 135km of a site designated for Grey Seal or 50km for common seal should be assessed for impacts on the species. Although seals are one of the designation criteria it is reasonable to assume that the Belfast Lough population of Common Seals does not represent part of the population of Common Seal for which Strangford Lough Ramsar is designated. There is limited information about the status of Grey Seal in Strangford Lough and they are not a SAC feature.	Wetland features including fringing saltmarsh; vulnerable and endangered wetland plants and animals including common seal, Grey Seal and otter. Eel grass beds on the mudflats; waterfowl, wintering and breeding birds including those listed for the SPA.	Ramsar conservation objectives are not published however they are assumed to be the same as those for Strangford Lough SPA and SAC.	The threats are as for Strangford Lough SPA for birds; as for Strangford Lough SAC for Common Seal. Otherwise only major developments in the catchment of the Enler River with substantial impacts during construction or long term emissions could have any impact.

Site name	Location relative to Belfast City Council Area	Qualifying interests	Conservation objectives	Potential Impacts from Development in Belfast City Council Area
<b>Strangford Lough SAC</b>	Strangford Lough is 66km away via marine waters. Common (Harbour) Seal is a mobile species and a significant colony has become established in recent years at the Musgrave Channel on the shore of East Twin Island. Peak counts of as many as 50 adults are reported and there was an estimated 20-25 pups in 2015. NIEA has advised that the screening distance for Common Seal is 50km. Therefore it is reasonable to assume that the Belfast Lough population does not represent part of the population of Common Seal for which Strangford Lough SAC is designated.	Large shallow inlet and bay; Coastal lagoons; Mudflats and sandflats not covered by sea water at low tide; Reefs; Annual vegetation of drift lines; Atlantic salt meadows ( <i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima</i> ); Perennial vegetation of stony banks; <i>Salicornia</i> and other annuals colonising mud and sand; Common (Harbour) Seal <i>Phoca vitulina</i>	To maintain (or restore where appropriate) the site selection features to favourable condition.	The potential for disturbance and injury impacting on seal populations needs to be considered. Disturbance during construction can normally be addressed through mitigation measures applied as conditions of planning permission such as requiring the use of marine mammal observers. While seals are coexisting with people in an urban area there may be certain forms of disturbance, for example from speed boats, that could cause a significant adverse effect on seals therefore there may need to be limitations on some types of development. Otherwise only a major development in the catchment of the Enler River with long term emissions is likely to have any impact.
<b>Strangford Lough SPA</b>	Ecological connection	Breeding Arctic Tern, Common Tern and Sandwich Tern; Wintering Bar-tailed Godwit, Light-bellied Brent Goose, Shelduck, Knot, Redshank; Wintering waterbird assemblage	Same as for Belfast Lough SPA.	The site selection features most likely to be affected are those for which East Coast (Northern Ireland) Marine SPA (Proposed) has been designated to protect the foraging area of species from these sites therefore the threats to that site also apply to this site. Otherwise only major developments in the catchment of the Enler River with substantial impacts during construction or long term emissions could have any impact.

Site name	Location relative to Belfast City Council Area	Qualifying interests	Conservation objectives	Potential Impacts from Development in Belfast City Council Area
The Maidens SAC	30km via marine waters. A few Grey Seals are reported to occur within the Belfast Harbour area.	Grey Seal <i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	To avoid deterioration of the qualifying habitats and species thus ensuring that the integrity of the site is maintained and the site makes and appropriate contribution to achieving favourable conservation status for the qualifying interest. To ensure for the qualifying habitats that the following are maintained in the long term, subject to natural change: Extent of the habitats on site; Distribution of the habitats within the site; Structure and function of the habitats; Processes supporting the habitats; Distribution of typical species of the habitats; Viability of typical species as components of the habitat; No disturbance of typical species of the habitat.	The potential for disturbance and injury impacting on seal populations needs to be considered. Disturbance during construction can normally be addressed through mitigation measures applied as conditions of planning permission such as requiring the use of marine mammal observers. While seals are coexisting with people in an urban area there may be certain forms of disturbance, for example from speed boats that could cause a significant adverse effect on seals therefore there may need to be limitations on certain types of development.



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