

Local Development Plan | 2030

Draft Plan Strategy

Evidence Paper 20: Loughs

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Executive Summary

- This paper outlines the current policy context for Lough Neagh and Lough Beg, including current relevant operational planning policy and legacy development plans for the Borough.
- The Lough Neagh and Lough Beg area is a strategic regional planning matter and shares a boundary with five Councils, each preparing their own Local Development Plan.
- The Lough Neagh and Lough Beg area is an extremely important natural heritage asset for the Borough, reflected in the many European and natural heritage designations.
- The lough also contributes significantly to the quality of life of residents through recreational and leisure opportunities, as well as creating economic opportunities through tourism. The Lough and its shoreline is also home to a number of important business enterprises.
- The Council acknowledges the significant contribution that the Lough Neagh and Lough Beg area makes to the Borough and consequently it will strike an appropriate balance in formulating policy, between allowing development opportunities, protecting and conserving the environment of the Loughs, and the well-being and economic prosperity of its residents.
- The water quality of Lough Neagh fails standards on a number of indicators, which can be an indicator of nutrient enrichment.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This is one of a series of background papers and studies being presented as part of the evidence base to inform the preparation of the Antrim and Newtownabbey Local Development Plan 2030 (LDP). This paper draws together the evidence base used in relation to the topic of Loughs. The evidence in this paper was collated at a point in time and may be subject to further updates. Evidence papers should be read collectively.
- 1.2 In line with Departmental guidance, the Council has updated its evidence base to inform the next stage of the LDP known as the Plan Strategy. This paper updates the 'Shaping Our Environment' baseline evidence paper, as it relates to Loughs and Coast, which accompanied the Preferred Options Paper (POP) published in January 2017.
- 1.3 It should be noted that the evidence base collected to inform the draft Plan Strategy also forms the basis for additional assessments and appraisals required as part of the plan preparation process, most notably the Sustainability Appraisal.
- 1.4 This paper outlines the key natural heritage, landscape, tourism and economic contribution that Lough Neagh and Lough Beg make to the Borough. The inland loughs of Lough Neagh and Lough Beg are recognised as a source of recreation and tourism, as well as a source of employment within the area. It is therefore important that planning policy strikes a balance, with the need for protection of the environment and landscape, whilst continuing to meet the needs of those individuals that live and work in the area.
- 1.5 Each of the five Councils with a common boundary with Lough Neagh has contributed to the work of the Lough Neagh Forum. A number of issues have arisen from the forum meetings; these include environmental conservation and landscape quality, sustainable tourism and flooding. This paper sets out the data to help support the generation of robust and appropriate policies for the draft plan strategy and helps to inform how the new LDP can aid the areas of natural environmental heritage, landscape quality, sustainable tourism, economic sustainability and flooding within the environs of Lough Neagh and Lough Beg.

2 Legislative Context

The Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

- 2.1 The Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (hereafter referred to as the 2011 Act) is the principal planning legislation in Northern Ireland, which underpins the reformed two-tier planning system that commenced on 1 April 2015. It introduced the plan-led system, where the LDP is the primary consideration for decision making on all new development schemes and proposals will be

required to accord with its provisions unless, exceptionally other material considerations indicate otherwise.

- 2.2 Under the new Planning System introduced in 2015, the LDP will comprise of two documents, a Plan Strategy and a Local Policies Plan that will be prepared in sequence. It also requires the LDP to be subject to a Sustainability Appraisal.

The Planning (Local Development Plan) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015

- 2.3 These Regulations set out the sequence in which the Council's new LDP is to be prepared and provides detail on the content and procedure of each stage in the plan preparation process and independent examination.

The Planning (Statement of Community Involvement) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015

- 2.4 These Regulations set out the sequence in which the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) is to be prepared and provides detail on the content and procedures required. The Council published it's SCI in January 2016 the purpose of which is to define how the Council will engage with the community in the delivery of the LDP. It is set within the context of the Council's Corporate Plan and meets the requirements of the 2011 Act.

Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act

- 2.5 Section 25 of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 requires all Northern Ireland Departments and Councils, in exercising their functions, to act in the way they consider best calculated to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. Section 5 of the 2011 Act copper-fastens this duty by requiring those who exercise any function in relation to LDPs to do so with the objective of furthering sustainable development.

Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014

- 2.6 The Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 introduced a statutory link between a Council's Community Plan and LDP, and requests that the preparation of the LDP must take account of the Community Plan.

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

- 2.7 The Council has a statutory duty under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 as a public authority, in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between the nine equality categories of persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation; men and women generally; persons with a disability and persons without; and persons with dependants and persons without.
- 2.8 The Council has engaged and will continue to engage with Section 75 groups throughout the LDP process, adhering to the Council's SCI.

Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016

- 2.9 The Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 provides a statutory duty on public authorities to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans, and when designing and delivering public services and came into effect for Councils in June 2017.
- 2.10 Rural needs will be an ongoing and integral component of the Council's LDP.

The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004

- 2.11 It is a statutory requirement that all plans and programmes that are likely to have a significant environmental effect must be subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). The European Union Directive '2001/42/EC' states that an SEA is mandatory and was transposed into local legislation in the form of The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004 (the EAPP (NI) Regulations). The objective of the SEA directive is to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the Council's LDP, with the view to promoting sustainable development.
- 2.12 The SEA is an ongoing process and must be carried out in conjunction with, and integrated into the LDP process. Under the provisions of the SEA Directive and the Regulations, an Environmental Report is published with the LDP document.

The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995

- 2.13 The LDP is required to consider its impact on the integrity of Natura 2000 sites (these comprise Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and RAMSAR Sites) and will be subject to a Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA). Similar to the SEA the HRA is an on-going process, which will take place at key stages during the preparation of the LDP. The Regulations contribute to transposing the requirements of the EC Habitats and Birds Directives.

The Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017

- 2.14 Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations reinforce the quality of decision-making and improve the current levels of environmental protection. Notably, this legislation identifies sensitive areas listed in Schedule 2, including Areas of Special Scientific Interest, scheduled monuments and a European designation relating to environmental or habitat importance.

European Directives for Protection of the Natural Environment

- 2.15 There is a complex framework of legislation for the protection of the natural environment from the European Parliament. European Directives that are of relevance to natural heritage and biodiversity of the Borough are as follows:
- The Birds Directive - 1979 EC Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds;

- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive – 1985;
- The Habitats Directive - 1992 EC Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora;
- Water Framework Directive – 2000;
- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive 2001; and
- Marine Strategy Framework Directive – 2008.

2.16 The relevant UK and Northern Ireland legislation for transposing EC Directives in relation to natural heritage is as follows:

- The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 ('Conservation Regulations') transpose the requirements of the EC 'Habitats' Directive and aspects of the 'Wild Birds' Directive into domestic legislation;
- The Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 apply the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive to the planning process in Northern Ireland;
- The Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 transposes the Water Framework Directive;
- The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004 transpose the SEA Directive into Northern Ireland legislation;
- The UK Marine Strategy Regulations 2010 transposes the Marine Strategy Framework Directive into UK legislation.

The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995

2.17 The LDP is required to consider its impact on the integrity of Natura 2000 sites (these comprise Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and RAMSAR Sites) and will be subject to a Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA). Similar to the SEA the HRA is an on-going process, which will take place at key stages during the preparation of the LDP. The Regulations contribute to transposing the requirements of the EC Habitats and Birds Directives.

The Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002

2.18 This provides the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) with the power to declare areas of land as ASSIs, where the land is of special interest for its flora, fauna, geological, physiographical or other features that need to be protected. The Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 provides DAERA the power to acquire land for management as a nature reserve. The Department may also enter into a management agreement with the owners and occupiers for this purpose.

The Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985

- 2.19 This created a number of offences relating to killing, injuring or removing wild birds or wild animals listed in Schedule 5, and prohibits interference with places used for shelter or protection. Additionally, the Order makes it an offence to uproot or trade in any wild plant listed in Schedule 8. The Order aims to prevent the spread of non-native species (i.e. Japanese Knotweed) which may be detrimental to native wildlife.

The Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

- 2.20 This Act amended the 1985 Order by giving greater protection to a wider range of plants, animals and birds. The Act introduced a statutory duty on all public bodies to further the conservation of biodiversity.

3 Regional Policy Context

Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-2021

- 3.1 The key aim of the draft Programme for Government (PfG) is to grow a sustainable economy through investing in the future, tackling disadvantage, improving health and wellbeing, protecting the people and the environment, building a strong and shared community and delivering high quality services.
- 3.2 The delivery of many of the strategic outcomes will be the responsibility of central government, however, the LDP will play a supporting role in helping to deliver many of these. Particularly relevant are Outcome 2, 'We Live and Work Sustainably, Protecting the Environment' and Outcome 12, 'We Have Created a Place Where People Want to Live and Work, to Visit and Invest'.

Sustainable Development Strategy Northern Ireland 2010

- 3.3 One of the key principles outlined in the Everyone's Involved - Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS) relates to 'Living within Environmental Limits'. This promotes the need to protect and improve the environment with emphasis on the limits of the planet's environment, resources and biodiversity and to ensure that finite resources are protected for future generations. One of the key priority areas relates to 'striking an appropriate balance between the responsible use and protection of natural resources in support of a better quality of life and a better quality environment'. This promotes sustainable land and marine management, better planning and management of development in ways which are sustainable and which contribute to creating a better environment.

Regional Development Strategy 2035

- 3.4 The Regional Development Strategy 2035 (RDS) aims to protect and enhance the environment for current and future generations. It recognises that Northern Ireland's environment is one of its greatest assets which has benefits in terms of the economy and quality of life.

- 3.5 One of the aims of the RDS is to protect and enhance the natural environment. This aim is achieved through the workings of RG 11: Conserve, protect and, where possible, enhance the built heritage and natural environment. The RDS highlights that water bodies, including Lough Neagh are important inland water bodies that support habitats and species of national and international importance. Furthermore, the RDS indicates that designating special areas of the countryside from inappropriate development for protection is an effective way of ensuring wildlife and natural landscapes retain their individual characteristics.
- 3.6 The RDS recognises the need for distinctive landscape character to be conserved, protected and where possible enhanced in areas of landscape quality. Furthermore, the RDS acknowledges that built heritage assets are intrinsically integrated with their surrounding natural environment and landscape. Protecting and enhancing built heritage along the Lough Neagh fringe will help contribute to local character and ensure the asset makes a valuable contribution to the Borough's tourism economy. The Council's new LDP can play its part in supporting the enhancement and protection of sensitive landscape and countryside of Lough Neagh and Lough Beg.

Regional Transportation Strategy for Northern Ireland 2002-2012

- 3.7 The Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) for Northern Ireland 2002-2012 identifies strategic transportation investment priorities and considers potential funding sources and affordability of planned initiatives over the strategy period. The RTS is a 'daughter document' of the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2035, which sets out the spatial development framework for Northern Ireland up to 2035.
- 3.8 This Strategy was supported by three initiatives namely Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2004, Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan 2015 and the Sub-Regional Transport Plan 2007.

Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2004

- 3.9 The Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP) 2004 is the local transport plan for the Belfast Metropolitan Area (BMA) including Metropolitan Newtownabbey. This plan will deliver a phased and costed implementation programme of transport schemes to 2015. This Plan takes forward the strategic initiatives of the RTS 2002-2012.

Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan 2015 (2005)

- 3.10 The former Department for Regional Development (DRD), now the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) prepared the Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan (RSTN TP) 2015. The Plan is based on the guidance set out in the RDS 2035 and the RTS 2002-2012. The Plan presents a range of multi-modal transport initiatives to manage, maintain and develop Northern Ireland's Strategic Transport Network. The Regional Strategic Transport Network of

Northern Ireland comprises the complete rail network, five Key Transport Corridors (KTCs), four Link Corridors, the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Corridors and the remainder of the trunk road network.

Sub-Regional Transport Plan 2007

- 3.11 The Sub-Regional Transport Plan (SRTP) 2007 covers Antrim and takes forward the strategic initiatives of the Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS) for Northern Ireland 2002-2012. The SRTP deals with the transport needs of the whole of Northern Ireland with the exception of the BMA and the rail and trunk road networks, which are covered, in the BMA and RSTN TP.

Ensuring a Sustainable Transport Future – ‘A New Approach to Regional Transportation’ 2011

- 3.12 Ensuring a Sustainable Transport Future (ESTF) was developed to build on the RTS for Northern Ireland 2002-2012 and to refocus and rebalance the investment in the future. Unlike the 2002 Strategy, Ensuring a Sustainable Transport Future (ESTF) does not include details of schemes or projects. Rather, the Department has set three High Level Aims for transportation along with twelve supporting Strategic Objectives, covering the economy, society and the environment. The ESTF complements the RDS 2035 and contains high-level aims and strategic objectives to support the growth of the economy, enhance the quality of life for all and reduce the environmental impact of transport. It sets out the approach to regional transportation and is used to guide strategic investment decisions beyond 2015. Work is progressing on the implementation of the ESTF and the Council will ensure that any future transportation projects affecting the Borough are appropriately reflected in the LDP.
- 3.13 The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) is working collaboratively with the Councils to produce a new family of Local Transport Plans integrated with the LDPs. The work is staged in nature and increases in level of detail from strategic direction through to specific local policies and schemes.

Forthcoming Transport Plans

- 3.14 The Department for Infrastructure is currently preparing new Transport Plans which will cover the Borough. This includes a new Regional Strategic Transport Network Plan for all of Northern Ireland and a new Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan which will cover Belfast City Council, Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council, Ards and North Down Borough Council and Mid and East Antrim Borough Council as well as Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council. Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council is represented on the Project Boards for both plans along with other Councils.
- 3.15 As part of the preparation for the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan, the Department is preparing a Transport Study for the greater Belfast area and the Council has taken the emerging study into consideration in the preparation of its draft Plan Strategy. Work will also continue to bring forward the next stage of the LDP, the Local Policies Plan, alongside the Department's Transport Plans.

3.16 Further information on the Transport Study and Transport Plans is available on the Department of Infrastructure's website <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/>.

The EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020

3.17 This was published in May 2011 and focuses on six major targets related to loss of biodiversity. It aims to reduce key pressures on nature and ecosystem services in the EU through better implementation of existing nature conservation legislation, anchoring biodiversity objectives into key policies and closing important policy gaps.

3.18 Within the context of the EU Biodiversity Strategy, Valuing Nature 'A Biodiversity Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020' sets out how the government plans to meet its international obligations and local targets to protect biodiversity and ensure that the environment can continue to support people and the economy. To help stakeholder bodies achieve these obligations, in May 2016 DAERA published 'The Biodiversity Duty – A guide for public bodies'.

3.19 The Biodiversity Strategy highlights that wetland habitat restoration is a key 2020 Goal of the Strategy around the Lough Neagh and Lough Beg Basin. Additionally, peatland on the fringes of the Lough environs are important habitats for their ability to act as a sponge for floodwater, as a carbon store and for potentially filtering drinking water.

Sustainable Water – A Long-Term Water Strategy for Northern Ireland 2015-2040

3.20 'Sustainable Water – A Long-Term Water Strategy for Northern Ireland (2015-2040)' sets out a range of initiatives to deliver the Executive's long term goal of a sustainable water sector in Northern Ireland. The Strategy recognises how planning can impact on flood risk and water quality and aims to ensure that existing water and sewerage infrastructure and investment proposals inform future planning decisions and the preparation of LDPs.

3.21 The Strategy sets out a number of matters that the Council's new LDP will need to take into account which are summarised below:

- Ensuring planning decisions are informed by up to date information on the risk from all significant sources of flooding;
- Prevention of inappropriate development in high flood risk areas and ensuring that future development does not increase flood risk;
- Exceptional development within high flood risk areas must make provision for adequate mitigation measures;
- Ensure surface water drainage is adequately addressed; and
- Planning policy should promote sustainable water and sewerage services by making appropriate space for water and sewerage infrastructure including sustainable drainage systems.

Strategic Planning Policy Statement 2015

- 3.22 At the centre of the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) are the pillars of sustainable development. Within the environmental pillar of sustainable development, the SPPS indicates that protecting and enhancing the built and natural environment includes heritage assets, landscape and seascape. To achieve this an integrated approach to the management of the natural and cultural aspects of the landscape is required. The planning system plays an important role in conserving, protecting and enhancing the environment whilst ensuring it remains responsive and adaptive to the everyday needs of society. The SPPS indicates the policy approaches to new development should reflect difference within the region, be sensitive to local needs and sensitive to environmental issues, including the ability of landscapes to absorb development.
- 3.23 The development plan process should consider areas of the countryside that exhibit exceptional landscapes, such as lough shores, where the quality of the landscape and unique amenity value is such that development should only be permitted in exceptional circumstances. These areas should be designated as Special Countryside Areas within LDP and appropriate policies brought forward to ensure their protection from unnecessary and inappropriate development.
- 3.24 The evidence base for countryside/landscape designations within the LDP process is contained within the Natural Heritage and the Landscape Character Assessment Evidence Papers.

Other Planning Policy

- 3.25 Current operational planning policy, in relation to aspects of loughs is primarily included within the following Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 2: Natural Heritage.
- 3.26 Other policies in relation to natural heritage assets, primarily related to protection from the adverse impacts of development are contained within PPS 3; PPS 4; PPS 7; PPS 8; PPS 10; PPS 11; PPS 15; PPS 16; PPS 18; and PPS 21.
- 3.27 These PPSs, as well as the SPPS, have been taken into consideration in the formulation of the detailed development management policies, which are contained within the draft Plan Strategy document.

Departmental Guidance

- 3.28 The LDP has been prepared taking account of Departmental policy and guidance, which is available by contacting the Department for Infrastructure.
- 3.29 The Development Plan Practice Note 7 'The Plan Strategy' published in 2015, guides officers and relevant users through the key requirements for the preparation of the Plan Strategy and deals primarily with procedures as well as good practice.

- 3.30 The supplementary planning guidance 'Living Places: An Urban Stewardship and Design Guide for Northern Ireland' (September 2014) is a key reference point for formulating LDPs and states that 'working with nature' is a key component of responsible place making.
- 3.31 Similarly the rural design guide, 'Building On Tradition - A Sustainable Design Guide for the Northern Ireland Countryside' (April 2012) offers advice on opportunities to build in nature, biodiversity and wildlife habitats into developments in the rural area.
- 3.32 DAERA has produced a number of guidance documents to aid Councils in their preparation of LDPs. These documents have been taken into consideration in the preparation of the draft Plan Strategy and will also be used in the preparation of the Local Policies Plan.

4 Local Policy Context

Legacy Development Plans

- 4.1 The following is a list of the legacy development plans that apply to the Borough:
- Antrim Area Plan 1984-2001 and its alterations (AAP);
 - Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001 (BUAP);
 - Carrickfergus Area Plan 2001¹ (CAP);
 - Draft Newtownabbey Area Plan 2005 (dNAP); and
 - Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (dBMAP).
- 4.2 It should be noted that the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan adopted in September 2014 was subsequently quashed as a result of a judgement of the Court of Appeal delivered in May 2017. As a consequence, the BUAP is now the statutory development plan for the Metropolitan Newtownabbey area of the Borough, with dBMAP remaining a material consideration.

Community Plan – Love Living Here 2017

- 4.3 The Council's Community Plan, 'Love Living Here', sets out a shared vision and agreed outcomes for the area up to 2030. The successful implementation of the Community Plan will be marked by a demonstrable improvement in how services are delivered across the Borough and the quality of life its citizens experience. As such the Community Plan is an important document and has been taken into account in the preparation of the Council's LDP.
- 4.4 The Community Plan sets out four outcomes which are as follows:

¹ Insofar as it relates to that part of the legacy Carrickfergus Borough Council area at Greenisland that transferred to Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough in 2015 under Review of Public Administration (RPA).

- Our citizens enjoy good health and wellbeing;
- Our citizens live in connected, safe, clean and vibrant places;
- Our citizens benefit from economic prosperity; and
- Our citizens achieve their full potential.

4.5 It also sets out one wildly important goal namely that the Borough's vulnerable people are supported.

Corporate Plan – Our Borough Your Vision 2019-2030

4.6 The Council's Corporate Plan sets out a vision for the Borough and identifies what it needs to do between now and 2030 to achieve this. The Vision for the Borough up to 2030 is defined as,

'A progressive, smart and prosperous Borough. Inspired by our people; Driven by ambition.'

4.7 The Corporate Plan sets out a number of objectives in relation to Place, People and Prosperity. The LDP has a key role to play under the objective of 'place' and the Corporate Plan states:

'We will have succeeded if: People take pride in their surroundings. People feel safe. Our environment, natural habitats and built heritage are protected and enhanced. We have vibrant and welcoming towns, villages, neighbourhoods, and rural areas. We have an efficient planning process that promotes positive development and sustainable growth.'

Legacy Antrim Borough Council Biodiversity Strategy

4.8 The legacy Antrim Borough Council's Biodiversity Strategy aims to ensure that variety of life is protected and enhanced, through focused, local action. It is an important step towards ensuring that locally, the Council takes responsibility for biodiversity. Fulfilling the Plan will require the enthusiasm and commitment of many different organisations, groups and individuals. Biodiversity is vital to survival and well-being. Biological diversity or biodiversity describes the total variety of all living things and where they live. This includes people, plants, animals, their genetic variation and the habitats in which they live. Biodiversity is everywhere, from gardens to hedgerows, from loughs to mountains.

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council Biodiversity Action Plan

4.9 The Council is currently updating the Biodiversity Action Plan to include the entire Borough. When published, the data will be taken into account within the LDP process and relevant updates applied.

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council Draft Tourism Strategy

4.10 Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council published its draft Tourism Strategy in July 2017. This document details a range of visitor servicing provision and activities offered throughout the Borough, and identifies potential opportunities for investment and growth. A five-year Action Plan forms part of the overall Strategy, which outlines how the Council can support and grow the

local tourism sector. In addition, an emphasis on collaboration between government, tourism agencies, the Council and the private sector has been outlined to support the delivery of this Tourism Strategy.

Council Masterplans/Village Plans

- 4.11 Through the Village Renewal Scheme as supported by the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 the Council benefited from funding to devise and update plans for the development of villages in the Borough. Whilst these plans are non-statutory, they have been prepared in close conjunction with local residents and identify a range of potential projects to improve the settlements. These range from short term goals to long-term aspirations. The village plans alongside the masterplans relating to the Borough will be considered in the preparation of the LDP where relevant.

Cross Boundary Policy Context

- 4.12 In considering the local policy context, it is important to note that the Borough does not sit in isolation. Accordingly, it will be important to take account of neighbouring local authorities comprising; Belfast City Council; Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council; Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council; Mid Ulster District Council and Mid and East Antrim Borough Council.
- 4.13 Neighbouring Council's Preferred Options Papers (POPs), supporting evidence base and draft Plan Strategies have been taken account of, as these are regarded as the main cross boundary documents to be considered in addition to regional guidance.
- 4.14 Table 1 indicates each Council's position in relation to loughs as set out in their POP and draft Plan Strategy documents.

Table 1: Neighbouring Council Position

Council	Document
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council (ACBCBC)	POP document states that one of the overarching principles is 'Managing and Protecting our Built and Natural Environment.', with Lough Neagh as one of its components. It also contains a range of preferred options with relevance to Lough Neagh, which seek to protecting international, national and local nature conservation designations; Identify and protect local nature conservation designations. Of particular relevance to Lough Neagh is the preferred option to, 'Consider areas of sensitive landscape for designation as Areas of High Scenic Value (AoHSV) or Special Countryside Areas (SCA).
Belfast City Council (BCC)	N/A

Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council(LCCC)	The POP contains a number of preferred options relating to Lough Neagh including, to 'Promote the implementation of the Lagan Navigation as a Key Tourism /Recreation Opportunity Area', as well as the cross-cutting theme, 'Protecting and promoting the natural environment'. It includes the preferred option to 'Retain the existing policy-led approach with regards to the protection and enhancement of Natural Heritage Assets but in addition provide opportunity to identify potential new environmental designations across the Council area.' The POP also highlights the strategic importance of the lough and its environs in terms of the lignite mineral reserve. It is also intended that existing areas of high scenic value (including areas around the shore of Lough Neagh) as designated through BMAP will be reflected in the new LDP.
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council(MEABC)	POP document includes a range of preferred options which seek to achieve Overarching Principle 6 'Protection and Enhancement of the Built and Natural Environment'. These include, 'Provide increased policy protection for the most scenic and environmentally important areas associated with Lough Beg and the Lower River Bann corridor', 'Retain the existing designated Areas of High Scenic Value (which include Lough Neagh Fringe) and associated policy, and designate other areas within the Borough as Areas of High Scenic Value if considered appropriate.'
Mid Ulster District Council(MUDC)	The draft Plan Strategy includes a range of detailed planning policies to conserve, protect and where possible enhance the natural environment. In relation to Lough Neagh, it also makes provision for a 'Dwelling for Holder of Commercial Fishing licence'. The plan also identifies 'Tourism Conservation Zones' around the shore of Lough Neagh, while a Special Countryside area has also been designated around the lough shore. In order to protect and enhance our natural environment to protect the most sensitive landscapes from inappropriate development.

4.15 The Council has responded to neighbouring Council's POPs and LDP documents as they are published. In addition, the Council is also represented on a number of working groups and project boards to discuss cross boundary issues. This includes the Metropolitan Area Spatial Working Group, the Belfast Metropolitan Plan Project Board and the Lough Neagh and Lough Beg Forum in relation to Loughs.

4.16 The strategic issues that are of relevance to the Lough Neagh and Lough Beg are natural environmental heritage, minerals development, sustainable tourism and flooding. In consideration of neighbouring Council's documents as well as regional policy, it is the opinion of the Council that it's draft Plan Strategy is sound and is not in conflict with neighbouring Council's emerging LDPs.

5 Preferred Options Paper

5.1 The Council's Preferred Options Paper (POP) was published in 2017 and was the first formal stage in the preparation of the LDP for the Borough and was

designed to promote debate in relation to key strategic planning issues arising in the area. The POP set out a range of strategic options in relation to how and where development should be located within the Borough. It included options for our settlements, our centres, employment land and housing locations, as well as a number of other key planning issues.

- 5.2 In addition, the Council asked the public for their views on a range of planning topics and issues. A total of 148 representations were received which were considered during the development of the draft Plan Strategy document and, where relevant, these will also be considered during the preparation of the Local Policies Plan. Details are set out in the Council's published 'Preferred Options Paper Public Consultation Report 2019'.

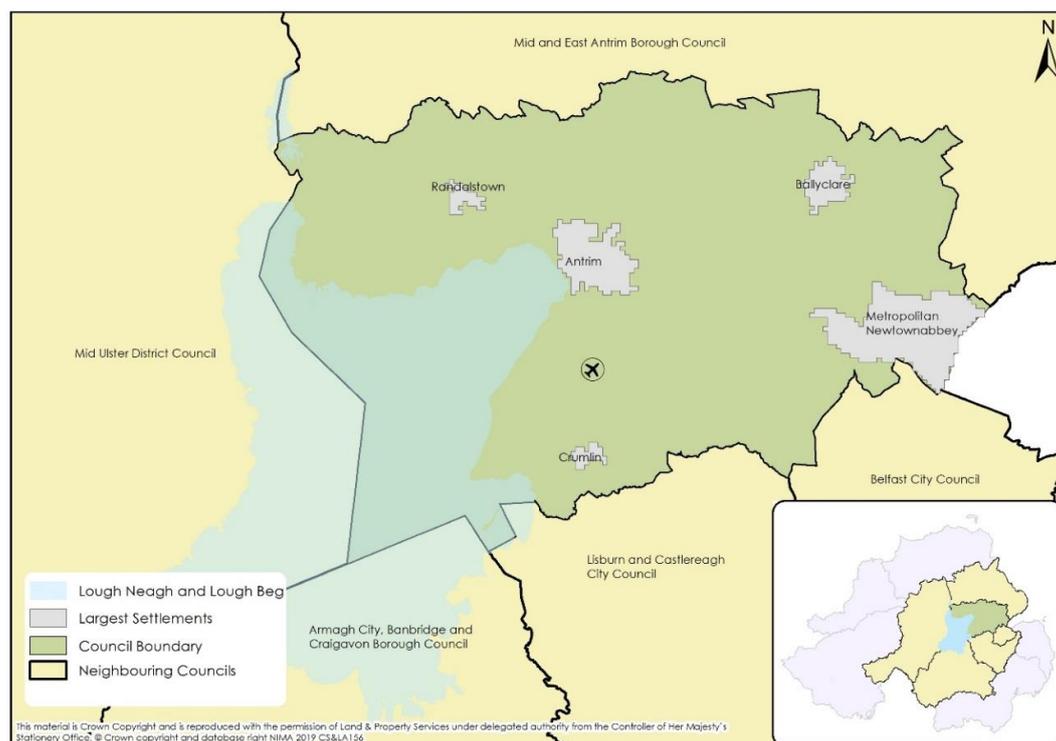
6 Soundness

- 6.1 The LDP is prepared to meet the tests of soundness as set out in the Department for Infrastructure's Development Plan Practice Note 6: Soundness (Version 2, May 2017).

7 Overview of Lough Neagh and Lough Beg

- 7.1 Lough Neagh is the largest freshwater lake in the British Isles. It spans an area of 383 km² and falls between four Council areas (Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council; Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council, and Mid-Ulster District Council).

Figure 1: Boundary of Lough Neagh and Lough Beg within the Borough



- 7.2 The Lough is located 32 km west of Belfast and is approximately 30.5 km long and 12.1 km wide, with a shoreline of approximately 125 km (Lough Neagh Management Strategy 2002-2007). The Lough is shallow around the margins, while the main body of the lake has a depth of approximately 9 metres. At its deepest point, the Lough is 24 metres. In the Antrim and Newtownabbey Council area, approximately 155km of the Lough (40% of total area) is located within the boundary of the new LDP. Lough Neagh is an important habitat and rural asset, which includes a RAMSAR site, Special Protection Area, Special Conservation Area, an Area of Special Scientific Importance (this superseded the Area of Scientific Interest), and six National Nature Reserves. Three of these (Lough Neagh Islands, Rea's Wood and Randalstown Forest) are located within the Borough.
- 7.3 Lough Beg is a small freshwater lake located on the border between County Antrim and County Londonderry, between the Council areas of Antrim and Newtownabbey, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council and Mid Ulster District Council. Lough Beg is an important National Nature Reserve as an ornithological site with 171 recorded species of birds.

Water Quality

- 7.4 The Neagh Bann River Basin Management Plan Summary 2015 published by DAERA indicates that the water quality of much of the Lough Neagh basin is below standard. Results for the Lough itself highlights failures in a number of indicators.
- 7.5 It states that these failures can be an indication that nutrient enrichment is a problem and sources of these could be attributed to agriculture and point sources such as Waste Water Treatment Works (WWTWs), septic tanks and industrial discharge.

Environmental Importance

- 7.6 Lough Neagh is regarded as one of the most important wetland habitats in the UK and Ireland, which supports a wide array of internationally important and nationally important flora, fauna and wildlife species. The 125 km shoreline is mostly exposed with wave-beaten rocks and stones but there are also some sheltered bays with better-developed marginal vegetation including some reed beds. The boundaries of the full range of natural heritage designations relating to Lough Neagh and Lough Beg can be viewed on the interactive Natural Environment Map Viewer, which is available on the DAERA website.

Lough Neagh RAMSAR

- 7.7 The Lough Neagh and Lough Beg area is designated as a RAMSAR site for being one of the most important wetland habitats in the UK and Ireland. The site qualifies under Criteria 1-7 which are listed below:
- Criterion 1- The largest freshwater lake in United Kingdom supporting beds of submerged aquatic vegetation fringed by associated species-rich

damp grassland, reed beds, islands, fens, marginal swampy woodland and pasture;

- Criterion 2 - Supports over forty rare plants and a large number of rare local invertebrates;
- Criterion 3 - Regularly supports substantial numbers of individuals from particular groups of waterfowl which are indicative of wetland values, productivity and diversity. In addition, this site is of special value for maintaining the genetic and ecological diversity of Northern Ireland because of the quality and peculiarities of its flora and fauna;
- Criterion 4 - Supports an important assemblage of breeding birds including, in nationally important numbers, great crested grebe, gadwall, pochard, tufted duck, snipe and redshank. Other important breeding wetland species include shelduck, teal, shoveler, lapwing and curlew;
- Criterion 5 - regularly supporting over 20,000 waterfowl in winter, including nationally and internationally important numbers of pochard, tufted duck, goldeneye, little grebe, great crested grebe, cormorant, mute swan, greylag goose, shelduck, wigeon, gadwall, teal, mallard, shoveler, scaup, and coot;
- Criterion 6 - regularly supports internationally important numbers of wintering Bewick's and whooper swans and regularly supporting nationally important numbers of breeding common tern and;
- Criterion 7 - supports a population of pollan, one of the few locations in Ireland and one of the two known locations in the UK (the other is Lower Lough Erne).

Lough Neagh Special Protected Area

- 7.8 The eutrophic waters of Lough Neagh, Lough Beg and Portmore Lough (41,818 hectares) and surrounding shorelines (swamp fen, wet grassland and swampy woodland) have been designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA). The area qualifies as an SPA by regularly supporting a significant amount of internationally important over wintering wildfowl, including Bewick Swan, Whooper Swan and important numbers of breeding common tern. Additionally, under Article 4.2 of the Birds Directive the area is recognised as a wetland of international importance by regularly supporting over 20,000 wintering waterfowl.
- 7.9 Lough Neagh is also notable for supporting an important assemblage of breeding birds including the following species which occur in nationally important numbers: great crested grebe, gadwall, pochard, tufted duck, snipe gallinago gallinago, redshank tringa totanus, common gull larus canus, lesser black-backed gull larus fuscus, and black-headed gull larus ridibundus. Other important breeding wetland species include shelduck, teal, shoveler, lapwing and curlew.

Rea's Wood and Farris Bay Special Area of Conservation

7.10 The areas of Rea's Wood and Farris Bay along the shoreline of Lough Neagh are designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The site was designated, as it contains habitat types and/or species which are rare and/or threatened. The priority interests within Rea's Wood and Farris Bay is alluvial forestry. The site is considered to be one of the best areas in the United Kingdom. SAC sites are subject to a strict protection under the Habitats Directive and are required to be managed so that any special habitats and/or species are in an appropriate condition. Article 6(1) of the Habitats Directive requires that necessary conservation measures are specifically designed for the sites.

Lough Neagh and Lough Beg Areas of Special Scientific Interest

7.11 The area of Lough Neagh and Lough Beg is of special scientific interest because it is a shallow eutrophic lake occupying a downwarp in Tertiary basalt with its associated physical, chemical and biological characteristics. Specifically, the area is of interest for wintering and breeding birds; wetland vegetation, which includes a large number of rare plant species; and the presence of rare invertebrate and fish species. The site designation includes the whole water body at 38,500 hectares and a marginal fringe of land of 1,000 hectares. The shallow eutrophic lough is supplied by seven main tributaries and is drained by the Lower Bann.

7.12 The Rea's Wood and Farris Bay Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) designation is regulated by The Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002. This aims to protect areas that demonstrate special interest by reason of 'flora, fauna, geological, physiographical or other features. The area was designated an ASSI on 30th November 1992.

National Nature Reserves

7.13 National Nature Reserves (NNRs) represent the best examples of wildlife, habitats and geology. These areas contain a wide array of species, communities and geology. The designation is representative of government recognition of their national natural heritage importance, and where possible, provide opportunities for public access, education and research. Farris Bay NNR and Rea's Wood NNRs were designated in June 1976 for wet woodland habitats. Randalstown Forest Nature Reserve was designated in September 1970.

7.14 Approximately 80 islands in Lough Neagh are managed as part of the Lough Neagh National Nature Reserve. Populations of over 500 pairs of mallard, 300 tufted duck, 500 great crested grebes, 30,000 black headed gulls, 150 common terns and 60 mute swans nest here. The islands are essential to provide secure nesting sites of wetland birds as they provide safety and seclusion from predators and disturbance from people.

Local Nature Reserves and Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance

7.15 The legacy Antrim Area Plan 1984-2001 predates the designations of Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance (SLNCl) and Local Nature Reserves (LNRs). Within the Lough Neagh and Lough Beg area of the Borough, there are currently no designations. At the Local Policies Plan stage of the LDP, the areas around Lough Neagh and Lough Beg will be examined for suitability.

Landscape Importance

7.16 The Lough Neagh and Lough Beg shorelines are exceptionally sensitive landscapes, which are subject to differing pressures. The land surrounding these loughs are primarily low-lying, open and rolling agricultural landscape with relatively small fields and overgrown hedges. The wooded landscape of the northern shore is influenced by modern commercial forestry management and the encroachment of rural single dwellings adjacent to the shoreline. The eastern shores are under pressure from Heavy Good Vehicles from the sand and gravel extraction industry that are eroding the character of narrow roads.

Landscape Character Assessment

7.17 Historically the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment 2000, conducted by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency classified Lough Neagh, Lough Beg and the Lower Bann Corridor as 'An Area of Scenic Quality.' The work associated with the identification of 'Areas of Scenic Quality', was used as a baseline for area plans post-2000 to bring forward countryside designations, such as Areas of High Scenic Quality.

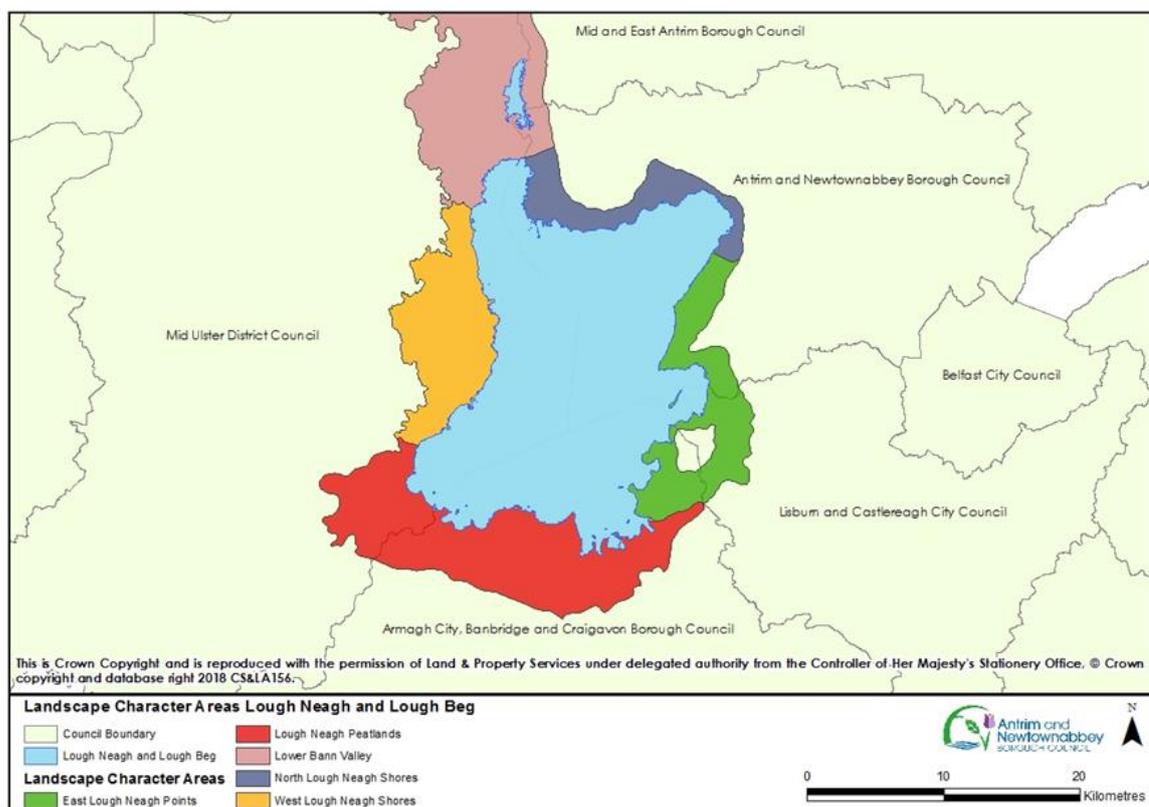
7.18 Lough Neagh and Lough Beg were divided into five Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) within the NILCA 2000. The LCAs that are associated with the Lough Neagh and Lough Beg Area are:

- LCA 48: Lough Neagh Peatlands;
- LCA 52 - Lower Bann Valley;
- LCA 61 - North Lough Neagh Shores;
- LCA 62 – East Lough Neagh Points; and
- LCA 68 – West Lough Neagh Shores

7.19 These LCAs are distributed between the five Council areas of Mid Ulster District Council, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council, Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council. The LCA boundaries were defined with a consistent character and identity. Although landscapes do not stop at administrative boundaries, it must be noted that LCA 64 and LCA 48 are outside of the Borough. Although these LCAs are outside of the Borough, a degree of continuity is desirable for a consistent planning approach for this strategically important area. This consistency will also aid the test of 'Soundness'. Figure 2 illustrates the LCAs that surround the area of Lough Neagh and Lough Beg.

7.20 The Council's Evidence Paper 16: Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) provides an updated perspective of the landscape within the Lough Neagh and Lough Beg area. The update further identified that this area is an important and sensitive environment with important historic, cultural and societal assets for the Borough. There are internationally and nationally important natural heritage designations that support a wide array of priority habitats and species. There are examples of important built heritage through Shane's Castle, Cranfield Church Ruins and Holy Well, Langford Lodge and defence heritage associated with World War 2 Flying Boats. Throughout the Borough, there are stunning distant views across the vast open sheet of water and into the Sperrins Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Figure 2: Landscape Character Areas Lough Neagh and Lough Beg



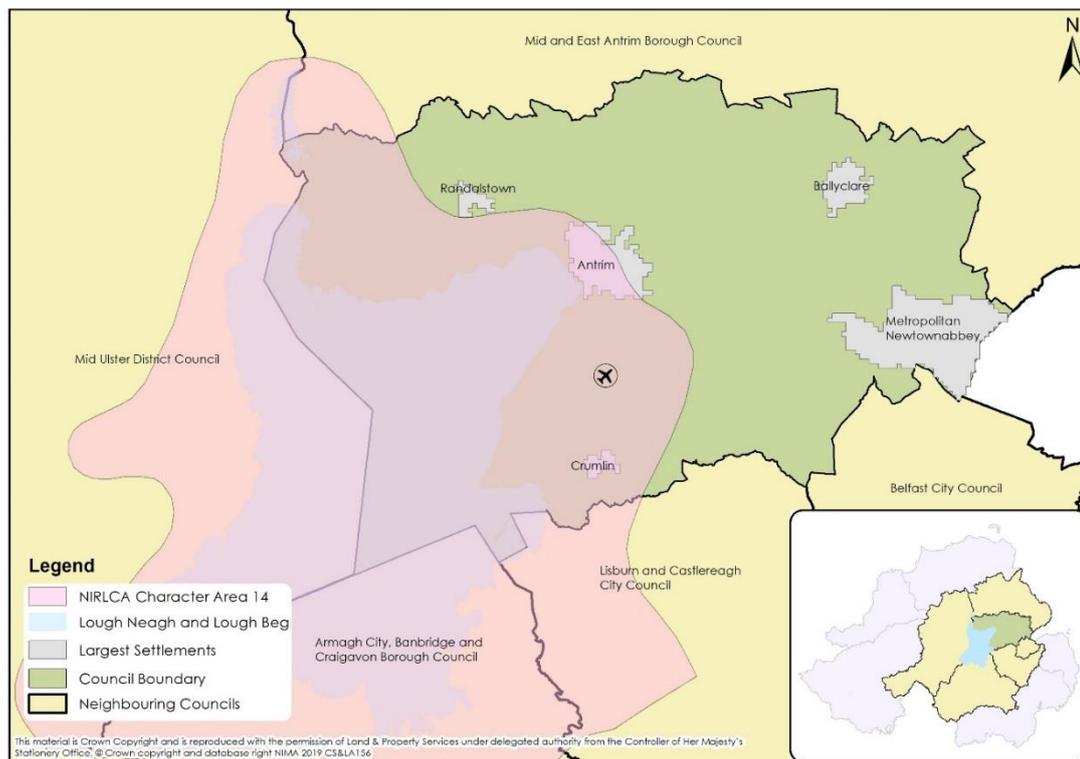
7.21 The character of the area is strongly rural within the farmed interior and the fringes of the shoreline have a tranquil character. The Lough views are perhaps the most distinguishing feature of this landscape. There is a strong sense of cultural heritage associated with the Lough Neagh and Lough Beg area, from tales of Finn McCool to an enchanted underwater city.²

² Full descriptions of the LCAs covering Lough Neagh and Lough are presented within the landscape Character Assessment Update 2018.

7.22 The LCA identified that LCA 52- Lower Bann Valley, LCA 61- North Lough Neagh Shore and LCA 62 East Lough Neagh Points are Landscapes of High Sensitivity to the influences of modern development owing to the important and distinct natural and built heritage character of the area. The LCA has helped to identify the need for the LDP to protect and enhance the internationally important and sensitive qualities of the areas of shoreline, islands and water body of Lough Neagh and Lough Beg.

Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment

- 7.23 The Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment (NIRLCA) provides a strategic overview of landscape across Northern Ireland and subdivides the countryside in to 26 Regional Landscape Character Areas. The areas are based on information on people and place, and the combinations of nature, culture and perception, which makes every part of Northern Ireland unique. The NIRLCA provides an evidence base which can be used by planners, developers and the public to help inform, aid and guide development approaches within different landscapes.
- 7.24 The Lough Neagh and Lough Beg area is contained in NIRLCA 14- Lough Neagh Basin. The regional assessment identifies Lough Neagh as a vast sheet of water surrounded by very low-lying, often boggy land. The area includes Lough Beg and Portmore Lough. The Lough is 30km to the west of Belfast and is divided between five counties in Northern Ireland. The surrounding area is relatively flat, low lying and is overlain by medium scale-farmland. The NIRLCA examines the key characteristics of the character area, the cultural and perceptual influences and discusses the forces for change. The data within the NIRLCA 14 was utilised in part as baseline data for the Council's LCA.

Figure 3: NIRLCA Character Area 14 Lough Neagh Basin

7.25 The environmental and landscape evidence within this report helps to support the identification of Lough Neagh and Lough Beg as an important area of environmental and landscape importance. The data indicates that this area demonstrates the classification of an 'exceptional landscape'. In this regard, the SPPS highlights that 'exceptional landscapes, such as Loughshores, should be designated to protect their unique amenity value and landscape quality, with modern development only permitted in exceptional circumstances'.

7.26 The conservation importance of Lough Neagh and Lough Beg were historically identified in the Antrim Area Plan (1984-2001), which designated a Lough Shore Policy Area. This rural policy area extended along the complete shoreline of Lough Neagh, within the legacy Antrim Borough Council. The area covered 100 m east of the shore road and 200 m from the shoreline, and applied a restrictive policy approach to development. The introduction of PPS21: Sustainable Development in the Countryside superseded this policy and withdrew rural policy areas.

7.27 The Antrim Area Plan (1984-2001) predates the NILCA's identification of 'Areas of Scenic Quality'. As a result, there are no specific landscape or scenic quality policy for the legacy Antrim Borough that aim to enhance or protect important landscape features.

7.28 The Council's LDP will seek to enhance and protect sensitive landscapes and internationally important environs through the identification of appropriate policies in the draft Plan Strategy. This will apply a precautionary approach,

which aims to limit the impact of inappropriate development, promoting long-term sustainability.

- 7.29 The evidence identified within Evidence Paper 16: Landscape Character Assessment has provided robust data which supports a policy approach for the enhancement and protection of the highly sensitive landscape associated with Lough Neagh and its shoreline. It highlights that the open nature of the shore is extremely sensitive to overdevelopment and encroachment, particularly from growing pressure from single dwellings. Such pressures can also negatively impact on water quality, particularly as a consequence of septic tank output.

Tourism and Recreational Importance

- 7.30 Lough Neagh has been identified within the Council and the wider tourism sector for Northern Ireland as an important tourism and recreation asset. Lough Neagh has the potential to become a key tourism destination, which can mimic the tourism appeal of Lough Erne from a strategic level. Tourism NI has identified Lough Neagh as one of nine Key Visitor Destinations in Northern Ireland.
- 7.31 Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council published its draft Tourism Strategy in July 2017. This document details a range of visitor servicing provision and activities offered throughout the Borough, and identifies potential opportunities for investment and growth. This Strategy outlines how Lough Neagh can be a valuable tourism asset to the Borough and sets out a wide range of proposals, including those already being taken forward by the Lough Neagh Partnership Group (i.e. Lock Keeper's Cottage Toome). Full details of these proposals are available in the Strategy.
- 7.32 Lough Neagh provides pleasure craft and water sports opportunities. Currently there are boat tours and day cruises (seasonal) operating from Toome, Antrim and Sandy Bay Marina (Glenavy) respectively, and Antrim Boat Club provides a significant water sports facility. One of the signature tourism projects currently being undertaken by the Council is at the Antrim Loughshore, the £2.3m Gateway Visitor Centre will incorporate flexible activity space, while the first floor will facilitate a new restaurant with panoramic views over the Lough. In addition, the new centre will provide a new operational base for Lough Neagh Rescue.
- 7.33 The shoreline of Lough Neagh and Lough Beg has a 206 km cycle route, known as the 'Loughshore Trail' taking in 25 sites of interest, including marinas, parks, national nature reserves and sites of archaeological and historical interest.
- 7.34 The Antrim Area Plan 1984-2001 identifies several tourist assets in the Borough, including Shane's Castle, the Lough Neagh water system, Randalstown and Tardree Forests, the Riverside Conservation Area, and Castle Upton. It acknowledges that there is potential within the area for future tourism development, which will be dependent upon the development of activities

around Lough Neagh, developing the appeal of the area with regard to business/conference-based tourism, and the provision of accommodation.

- 7.35 The Council's new LDP will bring forward suitable tourism planning policy to meet the needs of the Council and other key interests in the arena of tourism. The policy will seek to protect and improve tourism and recreational facilities attached to Lough Neagh and Lough Beg in unison with the Tourism Strategy. Tourism in this area also needs to be planned and managed sustainably to help contribute to the local economy, and protect the local environment, which in turn will help make the area more attractive to visitors.
- 7.36 The LDP can help to aid and direct sustainable tourism development across the Loughshore area, with the growing potential recognised for Toome and Antrim. The approach for tourism within the Lough Neagh and Lough Beg area will have regard to the tourism strategy. This ensures that small-scale development along the shoreline, i.e. paths and signage is not stifled and larger tourism development will be focused on existing towns within the Borough.

Economic Importance

- 7.37 Within the Lough Neagh basin, there are a number of major employers, important to the economy of the Borough. These companies include RLC (UK) a subsidiary of RLC Engineering Group and Northstone Materials Quarry Group (Sand Extraction). Along the shores of Lough Neagh, the headquarters of Randox Global Health, ranked number 37 of the Top 100 Companies in Northern Ireland 2018. Other employment assets are represented through the Massereene Business Park which is adjacent to Lough Neagh, in the periphery of the town centre of Antrim and the Langford Lodge estate provides manufacturing for the aerospace industry.
- 7.38 The shoreline area provides economic opportunities through recreation and tourism, with key assets including Shane's Castle, Antrim Castle Gardens and the Loughshore Park in Antrim. In addition, given the rural nature of the surrounding area of Lough Neagh and Lough Beg, there are many active farm businesses present.
- 7.39 The Council's new LDP can bring forward policy to support and sustain appropriate economic activity within the rural areas of Lough Neagh and Lough Beg. It can also bring in policy to protect and enhance areas that are at risk from unsustainable modern development that is degrading the sensitive habitat and landscape of the Loughs. In the case of Lough Neagh and Lough Beg, there is a need to ensure that economic development can continue within the area in a balanced approach whilst ensuring there is no detriment to the area.

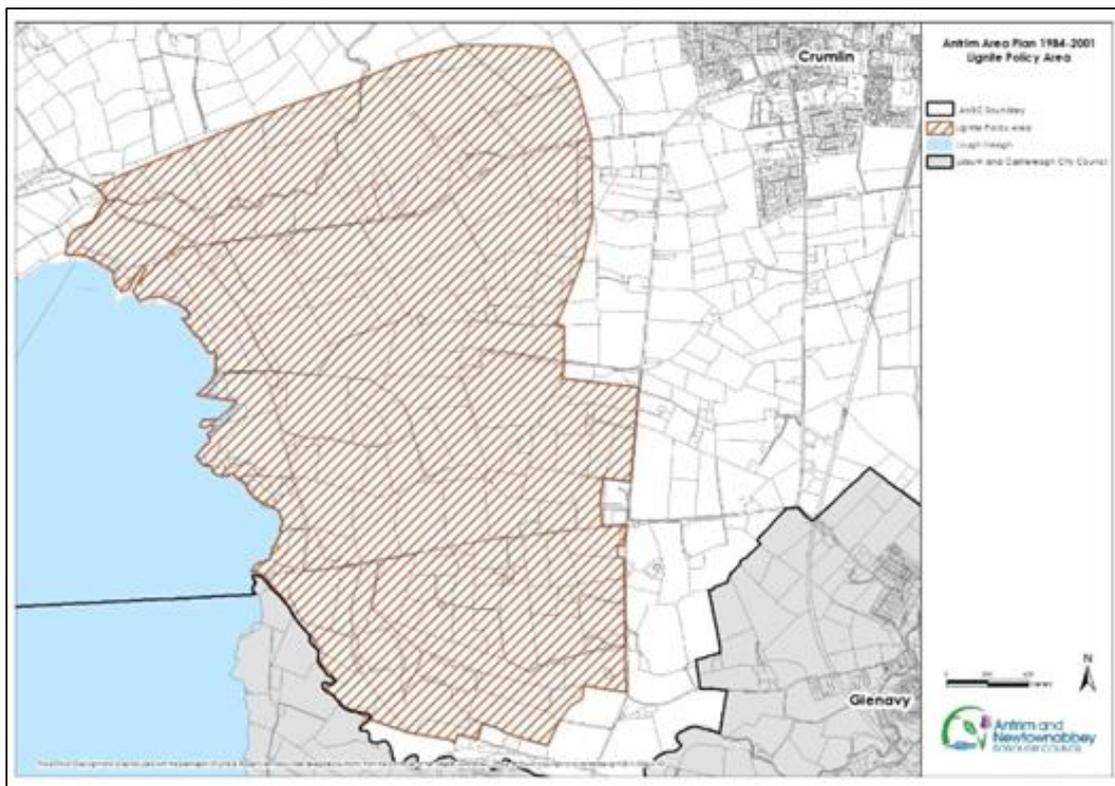
Lough Neagh Mineral Importance

- 7.40 The minerals industry is an important economic contributor to the Northern Ireland economy with an estimated turnover of £630 million, which accounts for 3% of Northern Ireland's GDP. Mineral extraction in the form of quarrying

plays an important part in Antrim and Newtownabbey's economy, employing a large number of people in the industry itself as well as in the manufacturing process (i.e. the production of asphalt and concrete).

- 7.41 The Council seeks to encourage sustainable mineral and energy development. In the Lough Neagh and Lough Beg area, minerals development will seek to balance the needs of supply with the adverse impacts upon local communities, landscape quality, water environment, built and natural heritage and character of an area. Mineral development needs to take account of the safety and amenity of neighbouring residential areas and road users.
- 7.42 Within the Council boundary, there is a lignite reserve adjacent to the boundary of Lough Neagh and with the boundary of Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council. The Department for the Economy has confirmed the extent of this deposit has been established through geological prospecting (with the exception of the lough bed). The lignite deposit has an estimated extent of approximately 440 million tonnes, split between approximately 250 million tonnes onshore, and the remainder offshore.
- 7.43 The Antrim Area Plan (1984-2001) acknowledged the Departmental aim to protect proven reserves of lignite and of any mineral of regional importance. The Department highlights that policy areas in respect of such minerals will, where appropriate, be identified in new LDPs. The extent of the Antrim Area Plan Lignite Policy as identified in the Antrim Area Plan 1984 – 2001 is shown in Figure 4.
- 7.44 County Antrim is the third largest sand and gravel producer in Northern Ireland, accounting for 10% of production, principally from the dredging of Lough Neagh. The Lough is one of the main sources of good quality sand and gravel in Northern Ireland with an estimated 220,000 tonnes of sand and gravel extracted each year. While the main dredging takes place in the Mid Ulster District Council part of the Lough area, sand is landed within the Borough along the loughshore at Northstone Depot, Loughview Road, Crumlin.
- 7.45 Unconventional hydrocarbons refer to oil or gas that is deposited within shale or coal seams, or unconsolidated sandstone. These unconventional hydrocarbons are carboniferous-age organic rich shales that underlie Lough Neagh. The shale deposits may have potential for unconventional shale gas production. To extract these deposits requires a method that is not normally necessary in the conventional extraction of hydrocarbons. This method can raise environmental and safety concerns, including release of pollutants, groundwater contamination and increased seismic activity.³

³ Additional data and information relevant to minerals within the Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough is available within the Minerals Evidence Paper.

Figure 4: Lignite Policy Area

Importance as alternative energy source

- 7.46 Initial borehole investigations carried out by an electric company has identified an alternative renewable energy that could be utilised in the Lough Neagh Basin. The Lough Basin itself has, as demonstrated through evidence of heat-source testing, to be a good source of geothermal energy. In reference to the Preferred Options Paper (2017) consultation, this electric company indicated that there is geothermal potential in Antrim where sandstone is at its deepest, based on geophysics and borehole drill data. Borehole sites are located at Annaghmore, Ballynamullan and Langford Lodge.⁴
- 7.47 The Borough enjoys a wealth of diverse landscapes, heritage and features of scientific value around the Lough Neagh and Lough Beg area. The environmental, amenity, scenic, tourism and economic importance of the area demonstrates why the Council places high value on its residents amenity and well-being. These areas are all worthy of protection from the adverse effects of mineral development and to realise opportunities for enhancement. The new LDP therefore will contain mineral policy addressing these matters, tailored to the Borough and in line with the SPPS.
- 7.48 Additionally, the Council's new LDP will bring forward policy tailored for renewable/ alternative sources of energy which aims to balance the needs of the resource with the impacts on the environmental and societal features of

⁴ Additional data and information relevant to energy/ renewable energy within the Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough is available within the Energy Evidence Paper.

Lough Neagh and Lough Beg. The LDP can highlight inappropriate areas for energy development and indicate where appropriate energy development could be accommodated.

Flooding Lough Neagh and Lough Beg

7.49 Flooding is a natural phenomenon that occurs when an overflow of a large amount of water occurs beyond its natural limits. The excess water cannot be restrained by normal boundaries (i.e. riverbank) and follows the path of least resistance. The European Commission's Floods Directive (2007/60/EC) define a flood as a covering of land by water not normally covered by water. In Northern Ireland recent flood events have demonstrated the widespread impacts and vulnerability to risk.

8 Key Findings

- The Paper outlines the current policy context for inland loughs, including current relevant operational planning policy and legacy development plans for the Borough.
- The Lough Neagh and Lough Beg area is a strategic regional planning matter and shares a boundary with five Councils, each preparing their own LDP.
- The Lough Neagh and Lough Beg area is an extremely important natural heritage asset for the Borough, reflected in the many European and natural heritage designations present.
- The Lough also contributes significantly to the quality of life of residents through recreational and leisure opportunities, as well as creating economic opportunities through tourism. The Lough and its shoreline is also home to a number of important business enterprises.
- The Council acknowledges the significant contribution that the Lough Neagh and Lough Beg area makes to the Borough and consequently it will strike an appropriate balance in formulating policy, between allowing development opportunities, protecting and conserving the environment of the Loughs, and the well-being and economic prosperity of its residents.
- The water quality of Lough Neagh fails standards on a number of indicators, which can be an indicator of nutrient enrichment.



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