

# Local Development Plan | 2030

## Draft Plan Strategy

Evidence Paper 18: Rural Pressure Analysis

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**Forward Planning Team**

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council  
Planning Section  
Mossley Mill  
Newtownabbey  
BT36 5QA

Tel: 0300 123 6677

Email: [planning@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk](mailto:planning@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk)

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## Executive Summary

- The recent past has seen a distinct variation in the number of planning applications for new dwellings in the countryside.
- This has occurred as a result of a changing rural policy context, uncertainties around rural policy and the impact of the overall economic downturn.
- It is evident that the rate of rural housing approvals under Planning Policy Statement 21 is notably reduced, when compared to approvals under historic rural planning policies.
- Overall, the development pressure from new rural dwellings shows little evidence of significant pressure across the Borough, apart from some exceptional 'hotspots'.
- Applications for wind energy development have also varied in the recent past, due to changes in funding regimes and the prioritisation of their determination by the former Department of the Environment.
- A broad overview of the development pressure for both single rural dwellings and wind energy development indicates that in general, upland areas and more scenic areas, which coincide with historically restrictive policy designations, have experienced less pressure for development.
- The Local Development Plan will take forward policies to reflect differences in the ability of landscapes to absorb new development, while striking a balance between protection of the environment from inappropriate development and supporting and sustaining rural communities.

# 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 Rural Pressure Analysis. 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. It should be noted that the evidence base collected to inform the Plan Strategy also forms the basis for additional assessments and appraisals required as part of the plan preparation process, most notably the Sustainability Appraisal.
- 1.3 Furthermore, this paper forms part of the Council's Countryside Assessment which includes the four related strands:
  - A Settlement Evaluation (*Evidence Paper 2*);
  - A Landscape Character Assessment (*Evidence Paper 16*);
  - An Environmental Assets Appraisal (*Evidence Paper 7 and 17*); and
  - A Rural Development Pressure Analysis (*Evidence Paper 18*).
- 1.4 This paper provides an overview of rural development pressures across the Borough. It provides a background to the countryside assessment and aids the preparation of policy framework for the LDP. This paper seeks to identify those areas where significant development pressures have occurred and/or where local rural character is under threat from significant change. Development pressure analysis historically involves an assessment of the spatial distribution and cumulative impacts of one-off single dwellings in the countryside. In recent years due to the influx of wind energy applications and their potential visual impact, an assessment of wind energy has also been undertaken.
- 1.5 Rural development outside of the categories of single dwellings, rural businesses and wind energy can also have an impact upon the environmental character and visual amenity of the countryside. Activities associated with this type of rural development can include agriculture, industrial and mineral development. The LDP includes planning policy which aims to prevent significant change to local rural character from these types of development. A Mineral Evidence Paper has also been published as part of the LDP evidence base. For the purpose of this paper, the countryside in the Borough is defined as land outside of the designated settlements and the boundary of the airport as set out in the legacy Antrim Area Plan 1984-2001.

## 2 Rural Analysis Background

- 2.1 In the years prior to 2010, proposals for rural dwellings were considered under the policy provisions of the former Department of the Environment's Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland (1993) (PSRNI), draft Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 14: Sustainable Development in the Countryside and draft PPS21. The final version of PPS21 was published in June 2010.
- 2.2 The PSRNI, spilt the countryside into a two-band policy context. Band one related to Green Belts and Countryside Policy Areas, with stricter requirements for development in the countryside. The rest of the countryside was considered 'rural remainder', with a more relaxed policy context, where planning permission would be granted based on planning and environmental criteria. This approach enabled a significant growth in rural single dwellings which was arguably unsustainable, causing a significant amount of environmental degradation and gave rise to the need for greater control. Green Belts, Countryside Policy Areas and the Rural Remainder were designated within those area plans which pre-dated the publication of draft PPS 14.
- 2.3 The adoption of draft PPS 14 (which came in with immediate effect) by the Department of Regional Development in 2007 represented a significant tightening of policy for development in the countryside, requiring the applicant to demonstrate a specific need for the proposal. Additionally the policy replaced the existing two-band approach, with all countryside now considered under the same policy provision.
- 2.4 Criticisms of draft PPS 14 highlighted that the policy provisions were unduly onerous and inappropriate given the difficulties faced by the agricultural industry. This resulted in the publication of draft PPS 21 (which was subsequently fully implemented) which aimed to balance the need to protect the environment, while sustaining a strong and vibrant rural community. The new document contained a range of policy provisions which allowed for greater opportunity for dwellings in the countryside, over the more restrictive draft PPS 14.

## 3 Rural Dwelling Applications 2002-2016

- 3.1 In order to carry out an analysis of rural pressures arising from residential development, data was supplied by the Department for Infrastructure's (DfI), Analytical Services Branch. This related to all rural single dwelling applications (Outline, Full and Reserved Matters) with the exception of replacements, from April 2002 to September 2016.

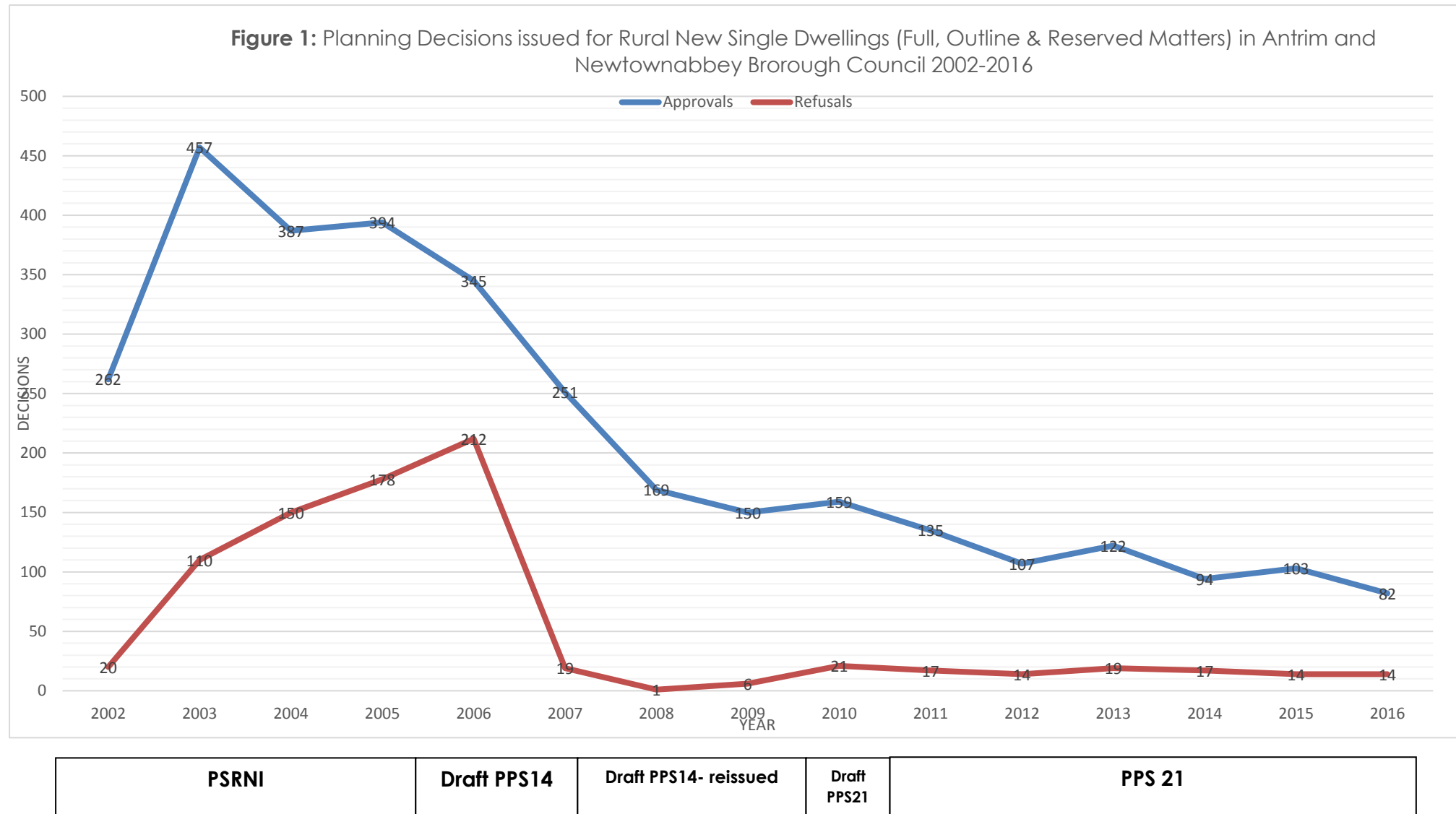
This data provides a 14-year period from which the spatial patterns of applications made for rural dwellings can be assessed. Table 1 and Figure 1 and 2 illustrate the level of applications in the Borough, between the first quarter of 2002 and the third quarter of 2016.

**Table 1: Planning Decisions for New Rural Single Dwellings in Antrim and Newtownabbey (Outline, Full and Reserved Matters 2002-2016)**

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Approvals</b> | <b>Refusals</b> | <b>Withdrawals</b>         | <b>Total</b> |
|-------------|------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|--------------|
| 2002        | 262              | 20              | 37                         | 319          |
| 2003        | 457              | 110             | 131                        | 698          |
| 2004        | 387              | 150             | 114                        | 651          |
| 2005        | 394              | 178             | 84                         | 656          |
| 2006        | 345              | 212             | 42                         | 599          |
| 2007        | 251              | 19              | 27                         | 297          |
| 2008        | 169              | 1               | 11                         | 181          |
| 2009        | 150              | 6               | 18                         | 174          |
| 2010        | 159              | 21              | 17                         | 197          |
| 2011        | 135              | 17              | 12                         | 164          |
| 2012        | 107              | 14              | 9                          | 130          |
| 2013        | 122              | 19              | 8                          | 149          |
| 2014        | 94               | 17              | 3                          | 114          |
| 2015        | 103              | 14              | 12                         | 129          |
| 2016        | 82               | 14              | 3                          | 99           |
|             |                  |                 | <b>Total Over 14 years</b> | <b>4557</b>  |

Source: (DfI Statistics, 2017)

- 3.2 The spike in application numbers from 2003 to 2006 can be explained by several factors, including the commencement of work towards the Antrim, Ballymena and Larne Area Plan 2016 and consequent uncertainty for applicants regarding a possible tightening of rural policy within the Plan. However a draft plan was never published. It was also likely influenced by the comprehensive review of the planning system of Northern Ireland being undertaken by Direct Rule Ministers in early 2004, with again uncertainty around the potential tightening of policy provisions relating to the countryside.
- 3.3 Table 1 illustrates that from 2007 to 2008 there was a sharp downward decline in the volume of rural single dwelling applications from 599 to 297 within the Borough. The change in application numbers can be attributed to the publication of draft PPS 14, as well as wider changes in economic activity due to the 2007-2008 housing market downturn.





- 3.4 There has been a steady rate of decline in the number of applications for new rural single dwellings from 2010 to 2016, during which policies within PPS 21 have led to a significantly lower number of approvals, with 82 in 2016. This period shows an average of 114 approvals per year and is significantly lower than the period of 2003-2007.
- 3.5 As illustrated by Figure 2 (Appendix 1) the spatial distribution of these new single dwelling applications between 2002 and 2016 is shown within the Borough. Replacement dwellings are not included, as these would not represent a true reflection of new rural development, as they are replacing existing building stock. The map provides a general indication of those areas that are under pressure from development, as well as areas that have little development pressure.

## 4 Rural Dwelling Development Pressure

- 4.1 Figure 2 (Appendix 1) illustrates the spatial distribution of new single dwelling applications across the countryside of the Borough between 2002 and 2016. It shows that rural development pressures are not uniformly distributed, instead certain areas are subject to more intensive pressures than others. An analysis of rural dwelling pressures are also shown on the map, through colour-coding into three broad categories and the identification of pressure 'hot spots'. Clusters of applications are categorised as:

- High pressure areas - red
- Medium pressure areas – yellow
- Low pressure areas – green

### High Pressure Areas

- 4.2 The statistical analysis demonstrates that high development pressure for rural single dwellings as indicated through the identification of hotspots, are generally located within the legacy Antrim Council area. The spatial distribution of these high pressure areas which are colour-coded red on the map comprise:
- Rural single dwellings following the road pattern of the Whappstown Road, Doagh Road, Maxwells Road and the Carncome Road, east of Kells (Mid and East Antrim Council area).
  - A particularly large area around the Clonkeen Road and Ballydunmaul Road, west of Randalstown.
  - A pocket of countryside to the west of Crumlin, along the Largy Road, Ballyclan Road, Gortnagallion Road, Ardmore Road and the Cidercourt Road,
  - Lands north of Nutts Corner, along the Straidhavern Road and the Longrig Road.

- An area between Randalstown and Antrim along the Barnish Road, Drumsough Road, Lenagh Road, Maghereagh Road and Whitehill Drive.
- The area commonly known as Loanends, around the Seven Mile Straight, Ballysculty Road and Carmavy Road.
- An area of countryside north-west of Doagh, along the B59 Ballymena Road and the Hollybank Road.
- Along the Gallagher Road and Ballydugennan Villas Road, south-east of Toome.

### **Medium Pressure Areas**

4.3 These areas are colour-coded yellow on the map and are comprised of:

- A particular large area west of Randalstown, along the Staffordstown Road and Creeve Road.
- A pocket of countryside between Randalstown and the area known as Tavnaghmore, along the Craigstown Road.
- A swathe of countryside south of the area known as Tavnaghmore, along the Thornhill Road and Eskylane Road.
- Areas between the Doagh Road, Tardree Road and Parkgate Road.
- An area west of Doagh, along the Ballywee Road, Hollybank Road and Connor Road.
- An area between the Ballyhill Road, Ballyutoag Road, Ballyhill Lane, Ballymather Road and the Seven Mile Straight, east of Nutts Corner.
- Lands between the Manse Road, Nutts Corner Road and Ballydonaghy Road, west of Crumlin.
- An area of countryside between Lough Neagh and the Belfast International Airport in proximity to the Loughview Road and Dungonnell Road.
- Loughbeg Road, Roguery Road, in the proximity of the area known as Gortgill.
- Old Ballynoe Road, Scolboa Meadow and Ballynoe Road.
- North and east of Ballyrobert.

### **Low Pressure Area**

4.4 These areas are colour-coded green on the map and are comprised of:

- The majority of the countryside located within the legacy Newtownabbey Council area.
- Areas within the legacy Antrim Council area that historically had been designated as Countryside Policy Areas.
- The area of countryside between Muckamore and Dunadry.
- Areas around the Groggan Road, between Randalstown and Grange (Mid and East Antrim Council area).
- The fringe of Lough Neagh, to west of Randalstown and south of Creggan-Cranfield.

- The area surrounding the Steeple Road outside of the development limits of Antrim towards Kells/Connor (Mid and East Antrim Council Area).
- The Carrickfergus Escarpment and the Belfast Basalt Escarpment.
- Areas around Big Collin and the Tildarg Road.
- Areas between the Seven Mile Straight and Metropolitan Newtownabbey.

### **Summary of Analysis – Rural Single Dwellings**

- 4.5 Until 2006 when it was superseded by draft PPS 14: Sustainable Development in the Countryside, the entire countryside of the legacy Newtownabbey Council area was covered by greenbelt designation. The effect of this historic policy context can be seen in generally lower pressure growth for rural single dwellings within the Newtownabbey side of the Borough. There is a slight medium pressure outside of Ballyrobert.
- 4.6 The legacy Antrim Council area has significantly more rural development pressure areas compared to the Newtownabbey area, due to the more limited historic protection afforded by the policy provisions of the Antrim Area Plan.
- 4.7 Key pressure points for rural single dwellings include west of Crumlin, Nutts Corner towards the airport, northwest of Randalstown and towards the shores of Lough Neagh outside Toome. There are evident pressures north of the Six Mile Water corridor between Antrim and Ballyclare and around the fringes of settlements, located on key transport corridors.
- 4.8 Along the main transport corridor between Randalstown and Ballymena, the area shows high pressure from rural single dwellings located in clusters off the dual carriageway.
- 4.9 The historic rural policy areas identified within the Antrim Area Plan, although withdrawn through PPS 21, have provided historical protection to sensitive areas of Antrim around the shores of Lough Neagh and in the upland areas of Tardree and Drumadarragh Hill. Since this policy was withdrawn, there has been no major increase in rural single dwellings in these areas. This may be due to the remoteness of these locations, as well as the influence of the out workings of PPS 21.
- 4.10 It should be noted that the identification of a high pressure area does not necessarily mean that there is excessive or inappropriate rural development. Some of the pressure points identified in Figure 2 may not represent true pressures, as the Plan Strategy will bring forward some of these areas as new hamlets.

## 5 Wind Energy Development Pressure

- 5.1 In order to assess the impact of wind energy development and its spatial distribution throughout the Borough, a similar time period was used to assess application data, as that for single dwelling applications. By their very nature, wind energy developments, including both single turbines and windfarms, have potential for visual impact, both individual and cumulative, within the countryside.
- 5.2 Ambitious government targets, reflected in the Programme for Government 2011-2015, required Northern Ireland to seek to achieve 40% of its electricity generation from renewable resources and a 10% renewable heat market by 2020. Electricity generated from onshore wind farms was identified as the most established, large-scale renewable source in Northern Ireland and the main source in helping to achieve this target.
- 5.3 The former Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (now Department for the Economy), closed the grants available for new onshore wind energy development in 2016, with the impact of this closure likely to have a negative impact on the Renewable Energy sector of Northern Ireland, as financial incentives are withdrawn. This will result in an overall reduction in the number of planning applications for Wind Energy Development.
- 5.4 As shown in Table 2, data produced by DfI in relation to wind energy applications for single wind turbines and windfarms details the numbers of wind energy applications for the Borough for the years 2003 to 2017.

**Table 2: Applications received for single wind turbines and wind farms**

| Year  | Single Wind Turbines | Windfarm | Total |
|---|----------------------|----------|-------|
| 2003-2004   | 4                    | 0        | 4     |
| 2004-2005   | N/A                  | 1        | N/A   |
| 2005-2006   | 5                    | 0        | 5     |
| 2006-2007   | 12                   | 0        | 12    |
| 2007-2008   | 12                   | 0        | 12    |
| 2008-2009   | 13                   | 0        | 13    |
| 2009-2010   | 9                    | 1        | 10    |
| 2010-2011   | 7                    | 1        | 8     |
| 2011-2012   | 22                   | 0        | 22    |
| 2012-2013   | 9                    | 0        | 9     |
| 2013-2014   | 17                   | 0        | 17    |
| 2014-2015   | 9                    | 0        | 9     |
| 2015-2016   | 7                    | 0        | 7     |
| 2016-2017   | 7                    | 1        | 8     |
| N/A = Limited available on single wind turbines, not included in analysis |                      |          |       |

Source DfI Planning, 2017

- 5.5 Table 3 shows the outcome of planning decisions for wind energy development across the Borough from 2003 to 2017. Tables 2 and 3 demonstrate an increase in application numbers post 2010 through the implementation of PPS 18 Renewable Energy and the drive to increase renewable energy targets towards the 2020 Northern Ireland Executive goal.
- 5.6 The particularly large increase in the number of planning decisions for single wind turbines from 2011-2012 could also be attributed to a drive by the former Department of the Environment to prioritise the determination of applications for all renewable energy applications.

**Table 3: All Planning Decisions issued for single turbines and wind farms in Antrim and Newtownabbey 2003-2017**

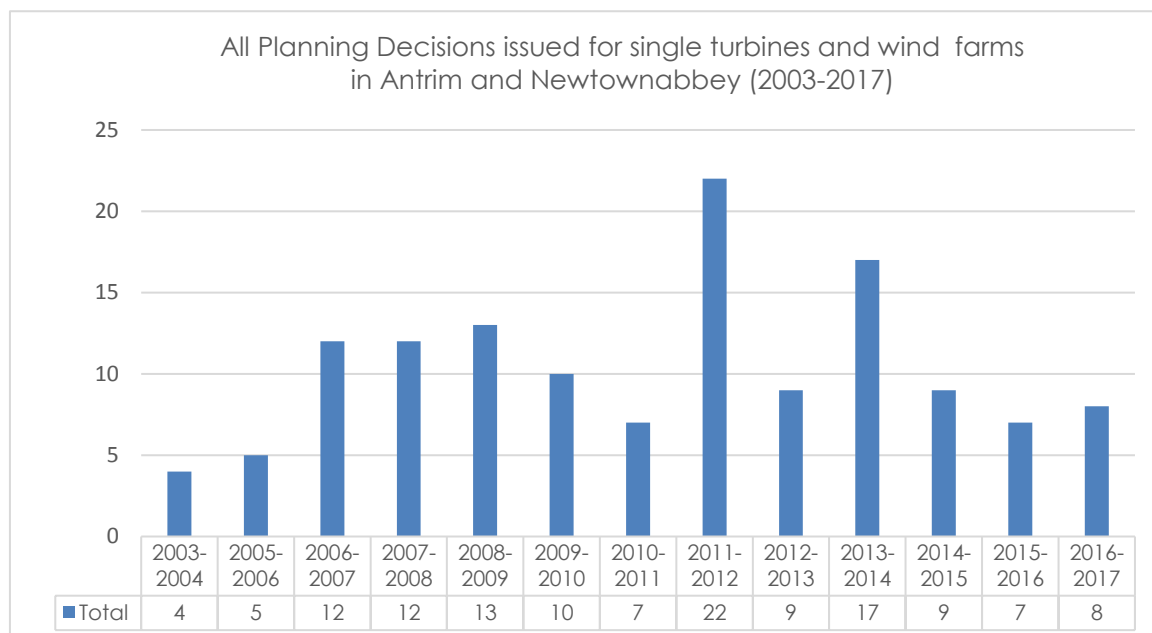
| Year   | Approvals | Refusals | Withdrawn | Total |
|--|-----------|----------|-----------|-------|
| 2003-2004  | 4         | 0        | 0         | 4     |
| 2005-2006  | 3         | 2        | 0         | 5     |
| 2006-2007  | 10        | 2        | 0         | 12    |
| 2007-2008  | 11        | 0        | 1         | 12    |
| 2008-2009  | 12        | 0        | 1         | 13    |
| 2009-2010  | 10        | 0        | 0         | 10    |
| 2010-2011  | 5         | 1        | 1         | 7     |
| 2011-2012  | 18        | 2        | 2         | 22    |
| 2012-2013  | 5         | 3        | 1         | 9     |
| 2013-2014  | 11        | 5        | 1         | 17    |
| 2014-2015  | 4         | 4        | 1         | 9     |
| 2015-2016  | 5         | 1        | 1         | 7     |
| 2016-2017  | 2         | 3        | 3         | 8     |
| Total  | 100       | 23       | 12        | 135   |
| Year 2004-2005- Not included due to limited data for this year |           |          |           |       |

Source: DfI Planning, 2017

- 5.7 Figure 3 shows a consistent level of decisions for wind energy proposals from the financial year of 2006-2007, up until 2009-2010, after which there a decline in 2010-2011. In the period 2011-2012, there was dramatic rise in numbers, to 22 applications with a significant fall in 2012-2013 and a further substantial increase in 2013-2014 with 17 applications. After this period, there is return to a steady number of applications from 2014-2015. The dramatic rises in applications over the 2-year period could be attributed to the increase of renewable energy grants and an effort by the Department for faster determination of renewable energy applications.
- 5.8 Although the number of decisions is clearly visible from the tables and graphs, there is limited information regarding how many schemes have been implemented. It should be noted that a number of historic planning permissions

for wind energy developments may have lapsed, and will be no longer be extant, unless previously commenced on site.

**Figure 3: All Planning Decisions issued for single turbines and wind farms**



### Locations of Wind Energy Applications

- 5.9 As Figure 4 (Appendix 2) illustrates, there is a fairly even spread of single wind turbines across the Borough, between Metropolitan Newtownabbey, Belfast International Airport and Antrim. Single wind turbines represent the majority of applications and are often associated with rural farm enterprises. The spread of these are not prevalent and do not represent a major pressure. Wind farms are more associated with the elevated land north of Randalstown, north of Metropolitan Newtownabbey and east of Belfast International Airport.
- 5.10 The only pressure points that are currently located within the Borough, include an area north east of Ballyclare and to the north of Metropolitan Newtownabbey. The presence of historical windfarms and the growth in single wind turbines shows there is a growing agglomeration in this area, which will have a growing cumulative impact on the natural environment and landscapes of this area. However, it must be noted that currently this cumulative impact is regarded as low to medium pressure.
- 5.11 As Belfast International Airport is located within the rural area of the Borough, the airport is a key consultee for all wind turbine applications. Due to the location of the airport and the danger such developments may pose to inbound and outbound aircraft flight paths, it can be argued that the presence of the airport has a constraining influence on the uptake of wind energy developments in the Borough.

- 5.12 Additionally, ongoing issues with grid connection, in particular the delay in timescales for receipt of quotes for connection to the electricity grid and the high cost of connecting to the grid has resulted in many projects becoming unfeasible.

### **Wind Energy within the Context of the Landscape Character Assessment**

- 5.13 This section examines areas of development pressures within the context of the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Areas (LCAs), drawing from information provided in Evidence Paper 16: Landscape Character Assessment.
- 5.14 The Landscape Character Assessment reviewed the LCAs within the Borough to establish if there were any changes in landscape character or modern development pressures within the local landscape. The results of the assessment provided a robust evidential update of the 16 LCAs and provides working guidance on accommodating modern development, including single dwellings and wind energy within the rural areas of the Borough. The data, analysis and guidance can be viewed within Evidence Paper 16: Landscape Character Assessment.
- 5.15 The low-lying region south of the airport towards Crumlin and spreading west is broadly speaking more capable of absorbing development pressure due to its simple, open and horizontal composition and the presence of extensive human constructed features. This is reflected by both the high level of historic planning decisions in this area and the ability of the landscape to accommodate further development. In addition, it is also linked to its central location along one of the main transport corridors, the A26.
- 5.16 The following 5 LCAs are described in the LCA Update as being vulnerable to change:
- LCA – 52 Lower Bann Valley;
  - LCA – 61 North Lough Neagh Shores;
  - LCA – 62 East Lough Neagh Points;
  - LCA – 111 Divis Summits; and
  - LCA – 130 Carrickfergus Farmed Escarpment.
- 5.17 There are LCAs identified within the Landscape Character Assessment as being of moderate sensitivity to accommodating new development. However, these areas offer High Sensitivity to wind energy development due to their prominent upland locations and the cumulative impact that these developments would have on the scenic quality of these landscapes. These are:
- LCA 115 Tardree and Six Mile Water Slopes; and
  - LCA 125- Tardree Upland Pastures.
- 5.18 The remainder of the LCAs are classed as being of 'medium to low' or 'low' sensitivity to change. It is important to note the identification of landscape with

a reduced capacity to absorb development does not preclude appropriate forms of development within those areas.

- 5.19 Overall, those landscapes which have been identified as being vulnerable have not experienced a significant amount of development pressure from wind energy development. Both wind farms and single wind turbines have the potential to individually, as well as cumulatively, significantly influence the character of all landscapes, particularly those deemed vulnerable to change.
- 5.20 Given the increasing prevalence of wind energy development, in particular wind farms and concerns regarding their impacts on more sensitive areas, proposals of this nature should be carefully considered within the context of the countryside.

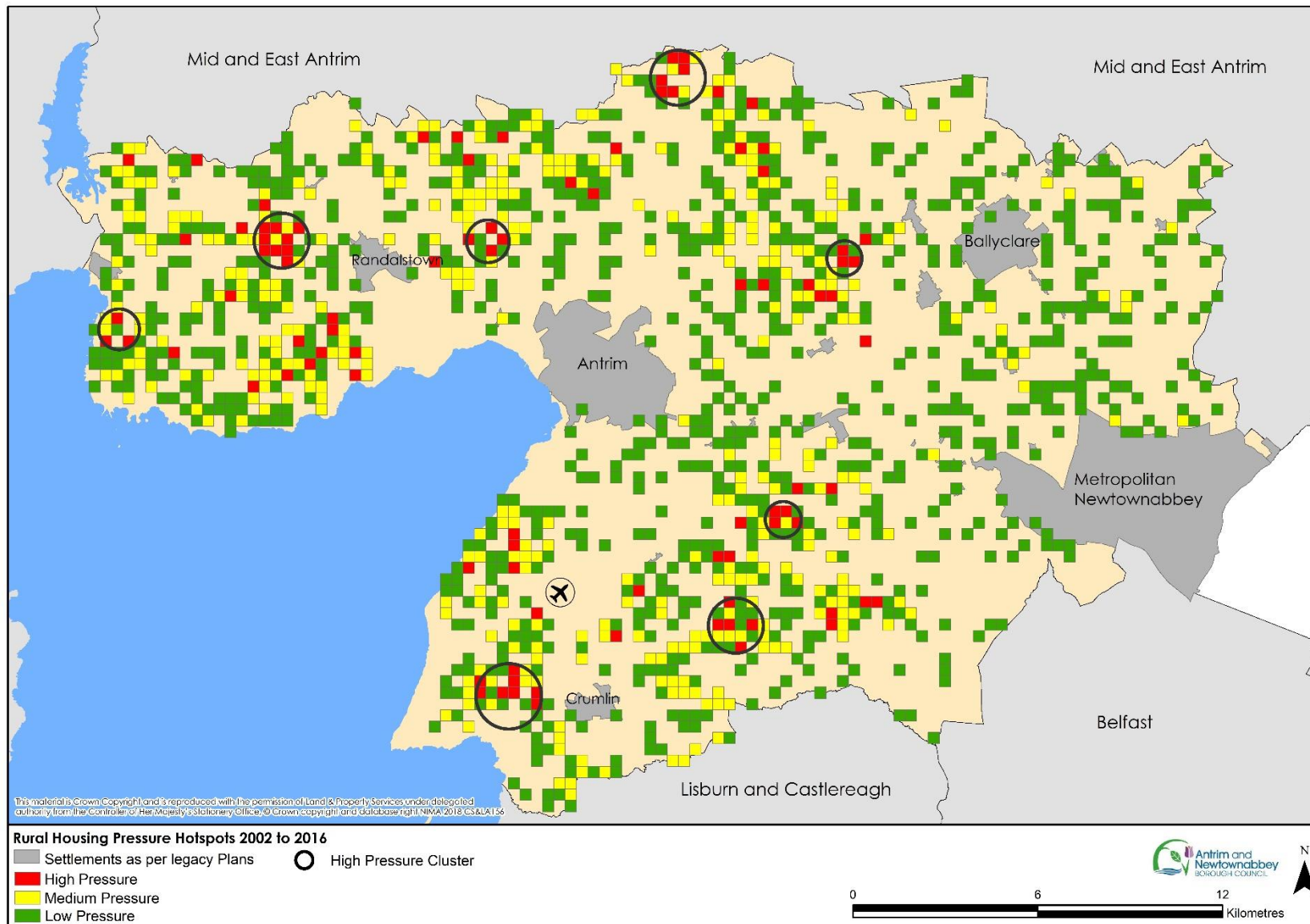
## **6 Key Findings**

- 6.1 It is evident that the rate of rural housing approvals under PPS 21 is notably reduced when compared to approvals under historic rural planning policies. Furthermore, since its final adoption in June 2010 the rate of rural approvals has reduced by 48%. Overall, the development pressure analysis shows little evidence of significant pressure across the Borough, apart from some exceptions including northwest of Randalstown and towards the shores of Lough Neagh outside Toome, west of Crumlin, Nutts Corner and towards Kells/Connor. These locations are generally within the legacy Antrim area of the Borough.
- 6.2 A broad overview of the development pressure from both single rural dwellings and wind energy development indicates that in general, upland areas and the more scenic areas which coincide with historic restrictive policy designations, have experienced less pressure for development.
- 6.3 The LDP will take forward policies to reflect differences in the ability of landscapes to absorb new development, whilst striking a balance between protection of the environment from inappropriate development and supporting and sustaining rural communities.

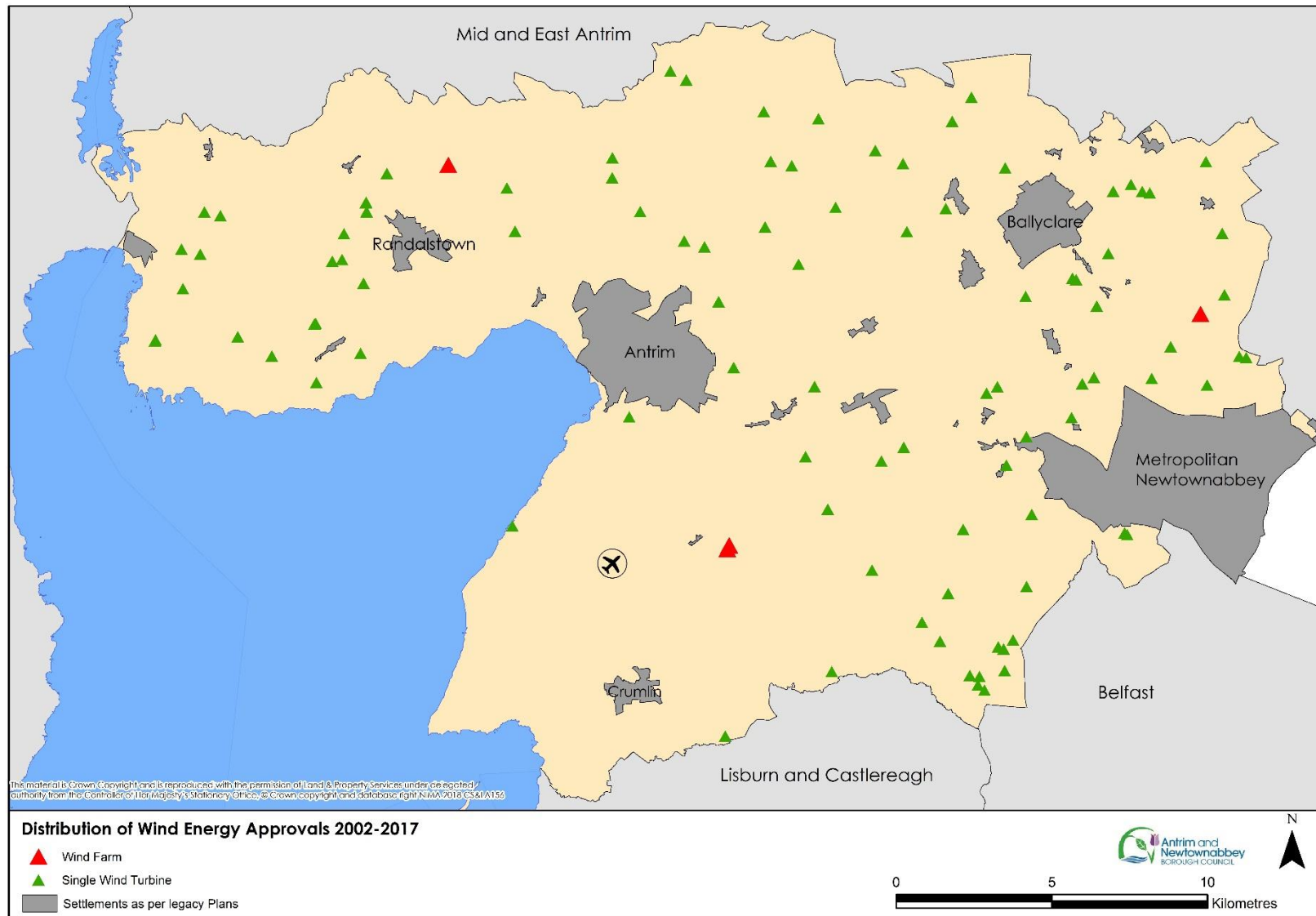


## **Appendices**

## Appendix 1: Figure 2 - Rural Dwelling Hotspots



## Appendix 2: Figure 4 - Wind Energy Approvals Distrib





Mossley Mill  
Carnmoney Road North,  
Newtownabbey  
BT36 5QA

Antrim Antrim Civic Centre  
50 Stiles Way,  
Antrim,  
BT41 2UB

[www.antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk](http://www.antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk)