

# DERRY CITY AND STRABANE DISTRICT COUNCIL

## LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (LDP) 2032



### EVIDENCE BASE EVB 9

#### Countryside and Landscape Updated May 2017

This Document is one in a series, which builds up to form the 'evidence base' that informs the preparation of the Local Development Plan (LDP).

It comprises initial Workshop Paper(s) on this Planning topic that were presented to Council Members during 2016 / 2017, which have been subject to Member discussion and input, before further discussion at the Planning Committee (LDP) and in turn feeding into the LDP Preferred Options Paper (POP) and then the Plan Strategy (PS) and eventually the Local Policies Plan (LPP) which together form the LDP.

Therefore, the afore-mentioned evidence base will be continually updated, to additionally include the latest information, input from public engagement, statutory consultees, stakeholder groups, Sustainability Appraisal and from other Departments within the Council, including Community Planning.

The Evidence Base is published as a 'supporting document' in accordance with Article 10(a) and 15(a) of the Planning (LDP) Regulations (NI) 2015



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### **Appendix 1 – NILCA Map**

**Paper 3:** Countryside and Landscape Assessment

**Purpose of Workshop:** This Paper presents to Members an assessment of Derry and Strabane District’s Landscape Character Areas and considers how the LDP should seek to protect and enhance them, possibly through LDP designations such as Green Belts and Countryside Policy Areas.

**Content:** The paper provides information on:-

- (i) The legislation and policy in place to protect our countryside and landscape;
- (ii) Landscape Character Areas relevant to our Council area; and
- (iii) The scope of the LDP in the future management, protection and enhancement of our countryside and landscape.

**Conclusion:** That councillors note the contents of this paper in relation to our countryside and landscape and use the Workshop to raise any relevant strategic planning issues in relation to the role of the LDP in terms of planning, landscape and countryside management.

## **1.0 Introduction to Paper**

- 1.1 Derry City and Strabane District comprises a mixture of landscapes which include mountains, river valleys and rolling farm land. These landscapes provide a rich resource of productive agricultural land, habitats for nature conservation, archaeological and historical features and remains which illustrate ways in which the land has provided for human occupation and activity in the past. Our countryside remains the home and livelihood for a considerable part of our population, farmers and non-farming families, living in our many rural communities. Additionally, our countryside provides for many recreational needs including activities such as fishing, photography, walking and festivals and has the potential to become an increasingly important tourist asset.
- 1.2 Landscapes of national importance have merited designations as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The landscapes within the District include part of the Sperrin Mountains, re-designated as an AONB in 2008. The purpose of the designation is to protect and conserve the scenic qualities of the area and promote their enjoyment. The AONB forms a backdrop to much of the district in the centre and east, with the mountain valleys of the Glenelly and Owenkillew rivers lying below an expanse of open moorland.
- 1.3 The other main natural environment designations are the focus of Paper 2, whilst this Paper mainly relates to the wider landscape and countryside.
- 1.4 Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) is the process of identifying and describing variation in the character of the landscape. LCA documents identify and explain the unique combination of elements and features that make landscapes distinctive by mapping and describing character types and areas.
- 1.5 The consideration of landscape character is an integral part of land-use planning, and will be significant in the preparation of the Local Development Plan (LDP). We are bound by the European Landscape Convention (ELC) which came into force in the UK in 2007 and which encourages the protection, management and planning of landscapes. Landscape issues can vary in scale from loss of boundaries or perceived inappropriate rural design associated with housing applications to large scale consideration when developing possible new rural policy as part of the LDP preparation or large solar or wind farm applications in upland areas within a designated AONB.

## **2.0 Background**

- 2.1 The richness of our countryside, in terms of landscape, natural environments and biodiversity is recognised in the significant number of international and regionally designated important sites. (Please refer to Natural Heritage Paper 2 for specific details). We are the custodians of our district and it is our responsibility to protect it for future generations.

2.2 At many levels, development can potentially adversely impact on our environment - both terrestrial and marine. Accordingly it is incumbent on all those involved in the planning process to ensure that any potential environmental impacts, whatever their scale, are identified to enable potential effects to be considered, avoided or mitigated for.

### 3.0 Countryside and Landscape - Policy Context for LDP

3.1 **Regional Development Strategy 2035 (RDS):** The RDS sets out the spatial strategy of the Executive. The RDS 2035 places a statutory duty on the LDP to 'take account' of it. RG11 sets out guidance on the recognition and conservation of local identity and distinctive landscape character. Spatial Framework Guidance (SFG) 9 sets out the key concepts for the protection and enhancement of the quality of the setting of Londonderry City and the North West and its environmental assets. SFG 13 states the aim is to sustain the overall strength of the rural community living in small towns, villages, small rural settlements and the open countryside. It also states that the application of the principles of sustainable development must be at the heart of future rural development.

3.2 Similarly, the LDP must take account of the Sustainable Development Strategy, the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) and any other policies or advice in guidance issued by the DOE such as landscape character assessments.

#### 3.3 **Strategic Planning Policy Statement 2015 (SPPS):**

Within the SPPS the countryside is recognised as one of our greatest assets, with its highly valued landscapes, an outstanding coastline, a complex variety of wildlife, rich built and cultural heritage, for the ecosystem services it provides, and for its sense of place and history. In addition to its role and function as a recreational and tourist asset the countryside also supports our important agricultural industry, offers potential opportunities for sustainable growth in new sectors, and is home to a considerable rural population. For the purpose of this document the countryside is defined as land lying outside of settlement limits as identified in Local Development Plans (LDPs).

3.4 The SPPS recognises the need to maintain and enhance the attractiveness of the countryside as a place to invest, live and work, the countryside requires a sustainable approach to new development, consistent with the Regional Development Strategy 2035 (RDS).

3.5 The policy objectives for development in the countryside are to;

- manage growth to achieve appropriate and sustainable patterns of development which supports a vibrant rural community;
- conserve the landscape and natural resources of the rural area and to protect it from excessive, inappropriate or obtrusive development and from the actual or potential effects of pollution;
- facilitate development which contributes to a sustainable rural economy; and

- promote high standards in the design, siting and landscaping of development.
- 3.6 In producing its Local Development Plan, the SPPS states that the Council should bring forward a strategy for sustainable development in the countryside together with appropriate policies and proposals that must reflect the aims, objectives and policy approach of the SPPS, tailored to the specific circumstances of the plan area.
- 3.7 All development in the countryside must integrate into its setting, respect rural character, and be appropriately designed. Development in the countryside must not mar the distinction between a settlement and the surrounding countryside, or result in urban sprawl.
- 3.8 Some areas of the countryside exhibit exceptional landscapes, such as mountains, stretches of the coast or lough shores, and certain views or vistas, wherein the quality of the landscape and unique amenity value is such that development should only be permitted in exceptional circumstances. Where appropriate these areas should be designated as Special Countryside Areas in LDPs, and appropriate policies brought forward to ensure their protection from unnecessary and inappropriate development. Local policies may also be brought forward to maintain the landscape quality and character of Areas of High Scenic Value.
- 3.9 The LDP process will play an important role in identifying key features and assets of the countryside and balancing the needs of rural areas and communities with the protection of the environment. It will take into account existing Landscape Character Assessments. The LDP will also include an environmental assets appraisal and landscape assessment which will provide the evidence base for the purposes of bringing forward an appropriate policy approach to development in the countryside.
- 3.10 **PPS2 (2013) – Natural Heritage:** This Planning Policy Statement furthers the Executive's commitment to sustainable development and to conserving and where possible enhancing and restoring our natural heritage. The objectives of this Planning Policy Statement are:
- to seek to further the conservation, enhancement and restoration of the abundance, quality, diversity and distinctiveness of the region's natural heritage;
  - to further sustainable development by ensuring that biological and geological diversity are conserved and enhanced as an integral part of social, economic and environmental development;
  - to assist in meeting international (including European), national and local responsibilities and obligations in the protection and enhancement of the natural heritage;
  - to contribute to rural renewal and urban regeneration by ensuring developments take account of the role and value of biodiversity in

supporting economic diversification and contributing to a high quality environment;

- to protect and enhance biodiversity, geodiversity and the environment; and
- to take actions to reduce our carbon footprint and facilitate adaptation to climate change.

3.11 **PPS21 (2010) - Sustainable Development in the Countryside:** sets out planning policies for development in the countryside. The objectives of PPS 21 are:

- to manage growth in the countryside to achieve appropriate and sustainable patterns of development that meet the essential needs of a vibrant rural community;
- to conserve the landscape and natural resources of the rural area and to protect it from excessive, inappropriate or obtrusive development and from the actual or potential effects of pollution;
- to facilitate development necessary to achieve a sustainable rural economy; including appropriate farm diversification and other economic activity; and
- to promote high standards in the design, siting and landscaping of development in the countryside.

3.12 **Derry Area Plan 2011:** Chapter 4 contains the relevant text for the Plan and its natural environment. The plan defines ‘Areas of High Scenic Value’ as well as ‘Areas of Local Nature Conservation and Amenity Importance’ at various locations. Policies regarding landscape requirements and development adjacent to rivers and open water bodies are also included. The Plan designated a Green Belt around Derry and Countryside Policy Areas at Bonds Glen, Ness Woods, Ervey Woods and the Foyle Estuary. The strategic objectives of these Green Belts are:

- to prevent the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- to prevent neighbouring settlements from merging;
- to safeguard the surrounding countryside;
- to protect the setting of settlements; and
- to assist in urban regeneration.

The strategic objectives of Countryside Policy Areas are:

- to protect areas of countryside under pressure from development;
- to protect the visual amenity of areas of landscape quality; and
- to maintain the rural character of the countryside.

*The introduction of PPS 14: Sustainable Development in the Countryside (2007) took precedence over the policy provisions of these designations, which in turn was subsequently superseded by PPS21.*



- 3.13 **Strabane Area Plan 1986-2001:** Section 19.0 contains relevant text for environmental protection and conservation. The SAP 1986-2001 states the conservation of the natural and man-made environments has been a major consideration in the formulation of all policies and proposals. The plan recognises that the rural areas surrounding individual settlements require protection from urban sprawl and ribboning. One of the objectives of the Plan is to prevent urban sprawl, ribbon development and coalescence of settlements and minimise the encroachment of development onto high quality agricultural land.
- 3.14 The Plan designated a green belt around Strabane and Sion Mills. The Plan also identified Highway Policy Areas arterially from Castlederg and between Donemana and Artigarvan. *As before these have been superseded by PPS21 regional policy.* The Plan designates an Area of Mineral Constraint to the east of the District. The Plan (at time of publication) stated that there were 12 quarries actively being worked, the largest concentration is in the lower Burndennett Valley. The Plan states that the Department will support in principle the continued production from areas which are already being exploited however permissions where granted will carry conditions to minimise environmental disturbance.
- 3.15 **Biodiversity Action Plan: Wildlife Action in Derry~Londonderry & Strabane 2008-2013 (Local Biodiversity Action Plan LBAP):** While not planning policy, this Council supported publication highlights our area's wealth of plants, animals and important natural landscapes, many of which are threatened and need protection and seeks an integrated approach to their future management. Biodiversity, landscape and habitat are closely interrelated.
- 3.16 The LBAP has three main aims:
1. To raise awareness and knowledge of biodiversity issues;
  2. To conserve priority habitats and species; and
  3. To work in partnership to address threats to biodiversity.
- 3.17 The Derry City and Strabane District is particularly rich in natural heritage resources and contains important wildlife habitats. All of the habitats are of major importance based on individual habitat and species diversity and rarity.
- 3.18 **Priority Habitats** include the following:
- **Bogs:** lowland raised bog, blanket bog, lowland heathland, upland heathland and montane heath
  - **Coastal:** saline lagoons, sea-grass beds, sub-tidal sands and gravels, coastal saltmarsh and inter-tidal mudflats.
  - **Hedgerows**
  - **Rivers & Streams**
  - **Woodland:** Oak woodlands, wet woodlands, mixed woodlands and non-native woodlands
  - **Urban and garden:** Urban parks, Parkland.



### 3.19 **Priority Species** include the following:

- Atlantic salmon;
- Bats;
- Bumblebee;
- Curlew, Lapwing & Whooper swan;
- Otter;
- Purple moor grass;
- Red Squirrel.

### 4.0 **Main Landscape Designation: Sperrin AONB**

The Sperrin AONB is one of eight AONBs in Northern Ireland and covers a substantial area of the centre and east of the District. It is the largest of the AONBs, with an approximate area of 118,206 hectares. Lying in the heart of Northern Ireland the Sperrin AONB encompasses a largely mountainous area of great geological complexity. Designated first in 1968 under the 1965 Amenity Lands Act, and latterly in 2008 under the 1985 Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands Order (NCALO) with a revised boundary, it covers an area of 118,206 hectares and stretches from the Strule Valley in the west to the perimeter of the Lough Neagh lowlands in the east. The NCALO designation is much more orientated towards positive management. Its aim is to develop and facilitate partnerships that deliver conservation of the natural and built environment and enhanced recreation provision, in an efficient, effective and inclusive manner.

### 5.0 **Landscape Character Assessment**

5.1 The current guidance on NI landscape is set out in the NI Landscape Character Assessment (NI LCA, 2000) published by the DOE. Using accepted, systematic methods of landscape character assessment, the NI countryside was subdivided into 130 different landscape character areas (LCAs), each with a distinctive character, based upon local patterns of geology, land form, land use, cultural and ecological features. For each LCA, the key characteristics were described and an analysis of landscape condition and its sensitivity to change was made. There were 14 of those LCAs identified for the former Derry and Strabane Districts (several overlap namely LCA 27, 29, 30 and 31). See <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/landscape-character-northern-ireland>

5.2 In addition to the above-mentioned regional report, an individual Landscape Character Assessment Research Report was published in 1999 for each of the 26 Local Government Districts. The Derry report detailed its 7 LCAs and the Strabane report had 11 LCAs. See Map at Appendix 1. For each landscape character area, a description of 'key characteristics' and an analysis of 'landscape condition' and 'sensitivity to change' was prepared. An overview of the 14 LCAs relevant to our District is as follows:

### 5.3 Strabane District

#### ***LCA 14. Lough Bradan***

Lough Bradan extends from NE Fermanagh to the Lough Bradan Forest in West Tyrone. The area is characterised by valleys and steep drumlins on the lowlands, with a transition to an undulating sandstone plateau. In lowland areas, there is an alternating pattern of forest and marginal pastures, dissected by small rivers which link the areas of bog, damp woodland and meadow which lie between the drumlins. The patchwork of small, angular field's breaks down to scrub and open grazing on the fringes of the moorland. The upland has a simpler landscape pattern, with rough grazing, peat cutting and large forestry plantations such as that of Lough Bradan Forest. Land quality in the lowlands varies considerably. The well drained land around the Glendarragh Valley is intensively farmed as grassland; however; the sandstone soils are of poorer quality and forestry has become increasingly important, taking over former land uses.

#### ***LCA 19. Killeter Uplands***

The Killeter uplands are found to the far west of Tyrone. The uplands have a broad rounded landform, which seem diminished in scale as they are dominated by exclusive conifer plantations. Peat cutting is an influence in the more accessible areas. The upper reaches of the Mourne Beg River and the Derg flow within broad, shallow valleys. A remote landscape with a few roads and virtually no settlements. Small farms and their associated buildings are scattered along the roads but larger settlements are concentrated at the principal bridges crossing the river.

#### ***LCA 20. Derg Valley***

The river Derg flows eastwards from the Killeter Uplands to join the Strule River near Ardstraw. The market town of Castlederg is at the principal crossing point in the centre of the Derg Valley. The broad valley is enclosed by an undulating landscape of rounded hills many of which are capped with open moorland. The summits to the north of Castlederg have a particularly exposed character and are separated by extensive areas of blanket bog and marginal farmland. Areas of very small geometric pastures divided by stone walls and overgrown hedgerows are found on the steeper slopes and in parts of the valley where drainage is poor. Elsewhere on the valley floor the fields are often large with drainage ditches alongside the hedgerows and embankments enclosing the river. Fields are enclosed by both stone walls and hedgerows and there are many hedgerow trees. Small farms and their associated buildings are scattered along the roads but larger settlements are concentrated at the principal bridges crossing the river. The stone mill buildings at Ardstraw are a distinctive riverside feature.

#### ***LCA 21. Fairy Water Valley***

Only northern tip – the Fairy water flows eastwards from the foot of Bolaght Mountain in West Tyrone to meet the Strule near Omagh. The fairy water valley includes the broad marshy vale of the fairy water and the undulating branching valley of the Drumquin River to the south. Settlement is sparse in

the Fairy Water Valley and there are derelict cottages on some edges of the marsh, surrounded by the remnants of small pastures.

#### ***LCA 24. South Sperrin***

South Sperrin includes the upland river valley of the Owenkillew and Owenreagh Rivers and the broad ridges to the south of the Glenelly valley. The broad upland ridges of the Sperrins in this area form a backdrop to the valley landscapes. The skyline is open with upland grasses and rocky screes on the slopes leading to the summits. There is a linear settlement pattern with small farmsteads strung out at regular intervals along the valley roads. EHS NI LCA Report 2000 considered that this landscape would be sensitive to any large scale development which could be prominent in views from the surrounding ridges.

#### ***LCA 26. Bessy Bell and Gortin***

The Bessy Bell and Gortin landscape is a distinctive, scenic and much visited part of the North West; the twin peaks of Bessy Bell and Mary Gray form a gateway to the south of the Sperrins. These peaks are divided from the principal Sperrins range by the scenic valley of the River Strule which flows northwards from Omagh towards the Foyle. From the confluence with Cappagh Burn to Newtownstewart, the Strule River meanders within a deeply incised wooded channel with the road on a river terrace alongside. The valley to the west of Bessy Bell is dominated by the woodlands and deer park of the Baroncourt Estate. Overall this is a highly accessible and scenic landscape. While the majority of this LCA lie within the Sperrins AONB, Bessy Bell and the adjacent Baronscourt Estate are classified as part of the Sperrins Foothills Area of Scenic Quality

#### ***LCA 27. Foyle Valley (both districts)***

The Foyle Valley follows the border with Co Donegal to the south of Derry before turning eastwards at Strabane to follow the meandering course of the river Mourne and the Strule. It is steeply enclosed to the east by the slopes of the hills to the west of the Sperrins range. It continues to the east of Newtownstewart and includes the lower reaches of the Owenkillew River. The character of the river channel varies from an open sheet of water between agricultural fields to the north of Ballymagorry, to an incised, wooded channel to the south of Strabane. Stone bridges are a feature of the river valley, which is highly accessible as local roads follow the low terraces towards the margins of the valley floor. The valley is well-settled, and the towns of Newtownstewart, Sion Mills and Strabane are on the banks of the Mourne and the Strule. The steep valley slopes of the margins of the Sperrins are also sensitive to change as they form a backdrop to river valley views and are part of the landscape setting for Newtownstewart, Sion Mills and Strabane.

#### ***LCA 28. Glenelly Valley***

The Glenelly Valley is often regarded as one of the most idyllic in Northern Ireland. The Glenelly River flows westwards along a long linear glen to the south of Sawel Mountain. The verdant valley landscape contrasts with the expansive windswept moorland above and has a hidden, secretive character.

The valley is relatively narrow and enclosed by steep ridges. The slopes are gently undulating and divided into pastures and oak woodlands by stone walls and hedgerows. Settlements are typically small; buildings are clustered in traditional ‘clachans’ and in more scattered farmsteads. They nestle in sheltered locations and are connected by steep, narrow roads which follow the contours, with sudden sharp bends and small stone bridges where they cross the narrow valleys and gullies on the side of the slopes. Overall the Glenelly valley is highly valued for its heritage and scenic beauty and is designated as part of the Sperrins AONB. It is an extremely sensitive landscape with significant archaeological sites and a historic field pattern.

***LCA 29. Sperrin Mountains (both districts)***

The Sperrin Mountains form a spine across the North West and a backdrop to views. The steeper summits average 500m, while the highest peak, Sawel Mountain rises to 678m. The Sperrins have a dramatic mountainous appearance, the ridges have a broad rounded profile, leading to summits with a rocky pointed silhouette. Summits have extensive areas of bog supporting acres of heather and rushes. The bogs are punctuated by small, rounded loughs, the source of many streams. This open mountain AONB landscape is extremely sensitive to change since even relatively small elements in the landscape are visible over long distances. The most significant pressures for change are from conifer plantations, mineral / quarrying extraction and windfarms on the upper slopes, and built development on the valley slopes.

***LCA 30. Sperrin Foothills (both districts)***

The Sperrin Foothills lie to the north and west of the Sperrins and include the rounded summits of Slievekirk, Eglisish and Crookdooish and the river valley systems of the Burn Dennet and Faughan rivers. At the centre of the valleys of Burn Dennet and parts of the River Faughan, where the river flows within a pronounced cutting, the valley sides and riverbanks are clothed in dense woodland. Fast-flowing streams have eroded deep, winding valleys, carving the landscape into rounded, dome-shaped hills. It is a dynamic landscape, with neat, rolling farmland, steep wooded valleys and rounded caps of moorland on the summits of the higher hills. Angular branching roads often form a dense network with farms and houses scattered alongside. Donemana is the largest settlement in the area, but there are numerous small settlements on the mid slopes of valleys; most are at junctions related to stone bridges over rivers. The EHS LCA (2000) considered there was significant pressure for development within this LCA and cited inappropriate modern bungalows of non-rural design. Sand and gravel pits are common on the edges of the valleys, where glacial moraine provides an available source. There are many examples of such quarries which form visual scars in the landscape.

***LCA 31. Burngibbagh and Drumahoe (both districts)***

The Burngibbagh and Drumahoe LCA includes the long, linear valley system of the Burngibbagh and the lower Faughan River and its enclosing ridges. The valley lies to the east of Derry and is parallel to the River Foyle. The northern part of the valley which contains the lower Faughan River, has a more open character, with larger fields and a relatively wide, unenclosed valley floor. The

southern part to the valley, which contains the relatively small Burngibbagh River, has a more secluded character. The fields here are smaller and there are numerous trees, which increase in density towards the valley floor. The valley landscape is relatively sensitive because it is in a highly accessible area; the ridgetops to the west also form part of the wider landscape setting of Derry City. The Burngibbagh section of the valley, to the south, is particularly sensitive as it is relatively undeveloped.

## **Derry District**

### ***LCA 32. Derry Slopes***

The West Derry Slopes LCA lies between the River Foyle and the border with Co Donegal. They encompass the northern and eastern slopes of Minkey Hill and the southern ridge of Scalp Mountain in Donegal. The area is dominated by the city centre and the built up areas on the western banks of the Foyle. The area is highly influenced by the city, with a relatively fragmented landscape character; fields and farms are surrounded by housing estates and commercial units. The urban fringe is relatively devoid of tree cover and the larger industrial buildings are prominent. The banks of the River Foyle are the most scenic and sensitive parts of this landscape, together with the steep eastern slopes of Minkey Hill which plummet down to the river. These slopes and the river corridor are prominent in views to the city from the east bank of the Foyle and contribute to the landscape setting of the city.

### ***LCA 33. Lough Foyle Alluvial Plain***

The Lough Foyle Alluvial Plain stretches along the shores of Lough Foyle from Enagh, on the eastern fringes of Derry, to the mouth of the River Roe. The sand and gravels of the alluvial plain originated as glacial outwash from the melting glaciers inland. The pattern of the landscape on the alluvial plains varies from a geometric, large scale arable mosaic to a small-scale patchwork of rough pastures. Generally the area has an open character, particularly when overlooked from higher terrain. The coastal plain is backed by a low ridge, the recently upgraded A2 and the coastal railway raised on a steep embankment. The InVista plant at Maydown is very visible for miles around and the City of Derry Airport at Longfield is also a major local land use. The area is therefore extremely accessible and has been under considerable pressure for industrial and residential development. It is visually sensitive as it is overlooked from the coastal road.

### ***LCA 34. Loughermore Hills***

The Loughermore Hills are bounded to the west and south by the Rivers Faughan and Foreglen and to the east, by the River Roe. They overlook Lough Foyle to the north. The Loughermore Hills rise to 396m (Loughermore) with the surrounding hills averaging 280m. They are broad rounded ridges with shallow valleys and gently undulating slopes. This is a relatively homogenous landscape with a simple large scale pattern of moorland, bog and the conifer plantations of Loughermore Forest on the upper slopes. Peat cutting is an influence in the more accessible areas. The open moorland has an exposed, windswept character, but there are abrupt contrasts in the dark, enclosed landscape of the conifer plantations which cover extensive areas.



The shapes of the plantations, and in particular the character of their edges, have a strong visual influence. There are tracts of deciduous woodland in the gullies and steeper valleys on the margins of the Hills – those within the steep valley of the Burntollet River are particularly attractive and are managed as the Ness Wood and Ervey Wood Country Parks respectively. Overall, much of the landscape is inaccessible and the most significant pressure for change is from conifer plantations, transmission masts and windfarms. The open character and scale of the summits therefore makes them sensitive to change.

- Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment (NIRLCA)**
- 5.4 The purpose of the Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment (NIRLCA) is to provide an evidence base which can be used by planners, developers and the public. It will enable people to make informed, decisions concerning the management of Northern Ireland’s landscapes. The NIRLCA provides a strategic view of the landscape, which can be complemented by more detailed local studies in future. It aims to draw together information on people and place, and the combinations of nature, culture and perception which make each part of Northern Ireland unique. This draft report from April 2015 comprises 26 Regional LCAs covering all of NI. Whereas the former Derry and Strabane council areas would have contained (in part or in full) 18 LCAs, the new council District now contains 5 (in part or in full) Regional LCAs. These are discussed in detail below. See <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/landscape-character-northern-ireland>

#### **RLCA 5: West Tyrone Hills and Valleys**

A distinct upland ridge extends into Northern Ireland from Donegal, from Killeter Forest to Pollnalaght. The broad upland valleys of the Derg and Fairy Water are closely associated with these hills, forming a rural and relatively remote landscape of marginal farming. The ridge and the associated valleys are increasingly becoming the focus of wind turbine development.



**MAP: RLCA 5 West Tyrone Hills and Valleys:** The northern half of this RLCA is with the District

*Key Characteristics*

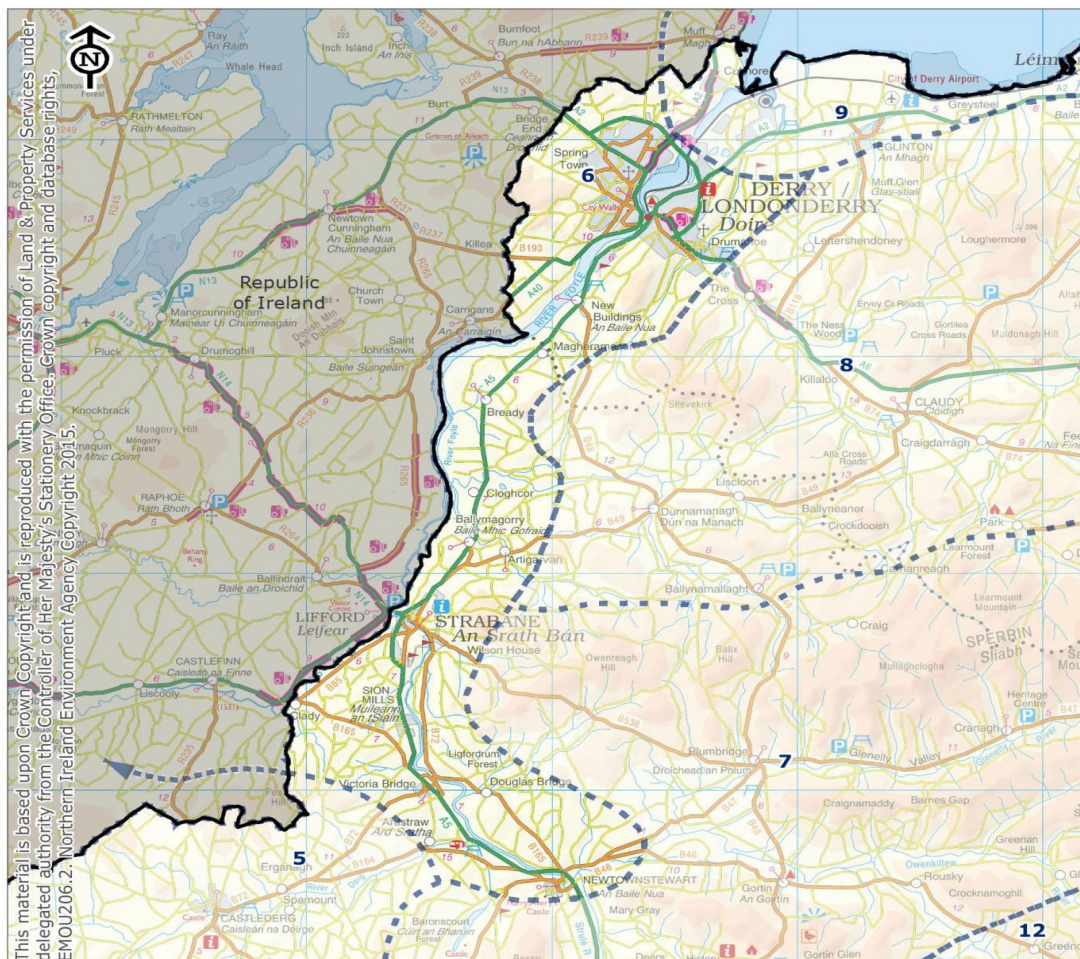
- Low, broad and rounded moorland covered and afforested hills, occasionally merging into plateaux, with associated river valleys draining to the east.
- Occasionally more prominent hills adjoin lowland areas, such as Doish, Mullyfa and Pollnalaght.
- A sparsely populated rural area, though with farmed and settled valleys.
- Exposed upland grazing and peat bogs.
- The most extensive coniferous plantations in Northern Ireland at Killeter and Lough Bradan Forests.
- A gold mining operation is active at Cavanacaw on the slopes of Pollnalaght.



- Remote and somewhat isolated western region of County Tyrone, associated with the pilgrimage to Lough Derg, where there are picnic and parking facilities in the commercial forest, within the Republic of Ireland.
- Wind farms and commercial forests reduce the sense of tranquillity in this otherwise undeveloped landscape.
- Extends across the border into the Republic.

### RLCA6: Foyle Valley

The Foyle forms the Northern Ireland border, but flows through a broad valley which extends both sides of this boundary. The city of Derry/Londonderry has an essential setting in the wooded river valley. South of Strabane the valley narrows to Newtownstewart where its character changes to an upland valley in the Sperrins. The Foyle system unites these landscapes, well known as a salmon river, and a key transport route.



**MAP: RLCA6 Foyle Valley** – This LCA is wholly located within the north western corner of the District

#### *Location and Setting*

The Foyle Valley is located on the north-west edge of Northern Ireland and is bordered along its east boundary by the Sperrins and lower hills to the south. The valley continues southwards to Newtownstewart where the River Strule emerges from the Sperrins, and south-west along the River Derg. The

western part of the valley extends into the County of Donegal in the Republic of Ireland. The Foyle Valley follows the course of the Foyle River upstream from Derry/Londonderry to Strabane where it branches into the River Finn and Mourne River: the former flows from Donegal, the latter splits again to form the Derg flowing towards Castlederg, and the Strule through Newtown Stewart with the slopes of Sperrins enclosing the valley to the east.

#### *Key Characteristics*

- Mainly flat valley floor with gently undulating side slopes, bounded by the Sperrin Hills and River Foyle on either side, becoming more markedly steeper to the east.
- Areas of conifer forests are found on the higher slopes particularly on Bessy Bell and Owenreagh Hill to the south and east respectively.
- On the lower lands towards the valley floor there are important mixed and broadleaf forests including oak woods such as Prehen Wood.
- Widespread regular field pattern which becomes more enclosed extending towards the lower hills of the Sperrins to the east.
- Embanked course of the Foyle, forming broad alluvial areas of high-quality farmland.
- The main transport routes follow the course of the river valley south from the city of Derry/Londonderry to Strabane and beyond.
- A settled landscape with increasing rurality further south but limited tranquillity due to transport routes, gravel quarrying and a series of riverside villages and towns.
- Derry has a multi-layered history and an essential landscape setting on the banks of the Foyle. The city is arranged around the river, and flanked by deciduous woodland.

In recent years several wind farms have been built on the hills to the east of the Foyle, including Bessy Bell, which can be viewed from many locations in the valley. Extraction of glacial sands and gravels is ongoing at several quarries near Artigarvan.

The Foyle has long been Northern Ireland's most important salmon river. It remains an important salmon fishery, though salmon numbers are reported to be declining.

Embankments line the lower sections of the Foyle, which is tidal as far as Strabane, holding back the river from flooding the low-lying meadows which form some of the best farmland in this area.

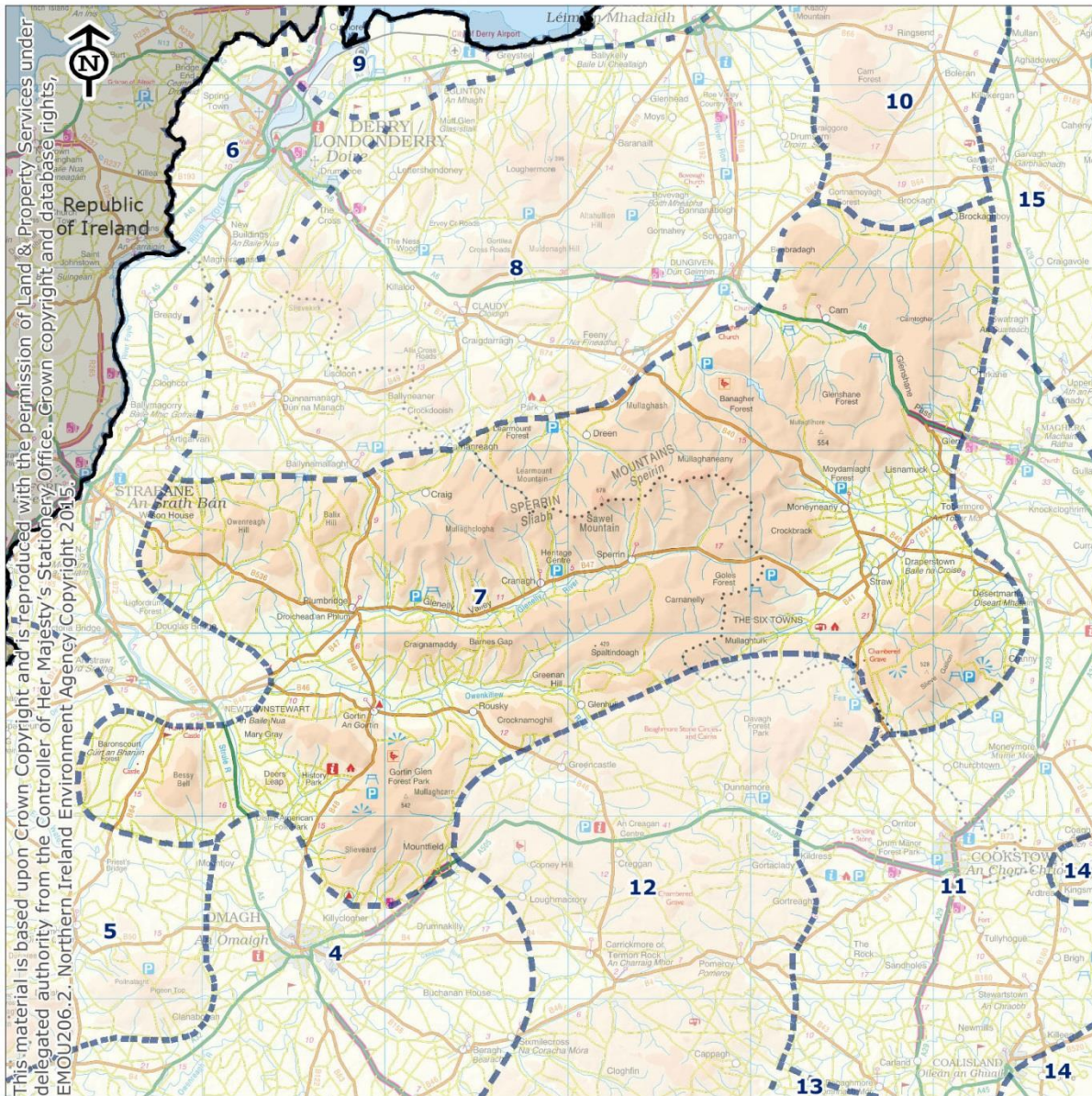
Development pressure is a feature of large settlements, with likely demand for future commercial and residential development on the outer edges of Derry/Londonderry.

#### **RLCA7: Sperrins**

The principal mountain range of the north-west, the Sperrins comprise some of the wildest and most rugged terrain in Northern Ireland. The main ridges, divided by the scenic Glenelly valley, are surrounded by a series of outliers



including Bessy Bell and Mullaghcarn above the River Strule, Slieve Gallion in the east, and Benbradagh across the Glenshane Pass. The boundaries follow the main east-west ridges of the Sperrins, separating them from the lower hills to north and south.



**MAP: RLCA7 Sperrins**– The entire LCA apart from the south western corner is within the District

The Sperrins are the principal mountain range of the north west of Northern Ireland. The RLCA covers the uplands and valleys focused on the spine of the Sperrin Mountains which runs from west to east. The mountains begin at the detached hill of Bessy Bell above Newtown Stewart, and continue to the east and north east through the area surrounding Mount Sawel, the highest peak in the range, and across the Glenshane Pass to Benbradagh and Carrtogether. The RLCA also covers the westward outlying peak of Slieve Gallion and the valley around Draperstown.

The Sperrins are characterised by a spine of mountains which runs from Owenreagh Hill in the west to Carntogher in the north-east, along with outlying hills. Many of the peaks of the range are over 500m with the more dramatic summits towards the north including the highest, Sawel Mountain (678m) and Mullaghaneany (627m). The broad rounded ridges surrounding these higher peaks are prevalent throughout the entire RLCA with moorland features and bog land also found extensively. Gortin Glen and the surrounding upland area towards Mary Gray and the outlying Bessy Bell act as a gateway to the Sperrins to the south west with the A5 the key route to the north west from Omagh to the south. The Strule cuts between these projections forming a scenic valley with Bessy Bell particularly prominent in the landscape despite its relatively diminutive stature (420m).

To the north east of Mullaghaneany the Sperrins join with the bold basalt escarpment of Benbradagh dominating the head of the Roe Valley. The conifer plantations at Banagher and along the Glenshane Pass contrast with the surrounding open moorland. The Glenshane Pass provides the main corridor of access from the north-west towards Belfast and the east. The screes of Mullaghmore are a prominent feature above Draperstown, within the farmed upper Moyola valley. Slieve Gallion is the most easterly peak of the Sperrins, with distinctive ladder fields on its flanks, and provides views from its eastern slope over the surrounding area to Lough Neagh to the east and beyond to Mount Slemish in the north east.

There are multiple fast running streams throughout the slopes and gullies have resulted in places sometimes becoming deep and branching. The Glenelly Valley cuts through the RLCA from east to west from Mullaghaneany to Plumbridge. The river has cut deep into the softer deposits and meanders between steep ridges which combine with to give the area a hidden quality which is at odds with the expansive nature of the uplands area surrounding on either side. Glenelly is recognised as a scenic route of particular quality. To the south beyond the broad rounded ridge of Caignamaddy the Owenkillew River has formed another upland valley to the north of Crocknamoghil which in comparison is much more open. There are many areas of ancient woodland, though most of these are very small in extent.

#### *Key Characteristics*

- The more elevated Sperrin mountains are characterised by expansive swathes of moorland with coniferous forest plantations contrasting harshly with the windswept broad summits which give an open character to these areas. Hedgerows and stone walls become more prevalent moving away from the higher grounds giving a more interconnected feeling at these locations.
- The higher peaks to the northern part of the RLCA where the main ridge is formed are distinctively more mountainous with knife-like projections and rocky summits beyond broad ridges. These mountains provide the backdrop for many of the views from the lower hills in the area. Given the elevated position of the landform and the low-lying nature of much of the surrounding

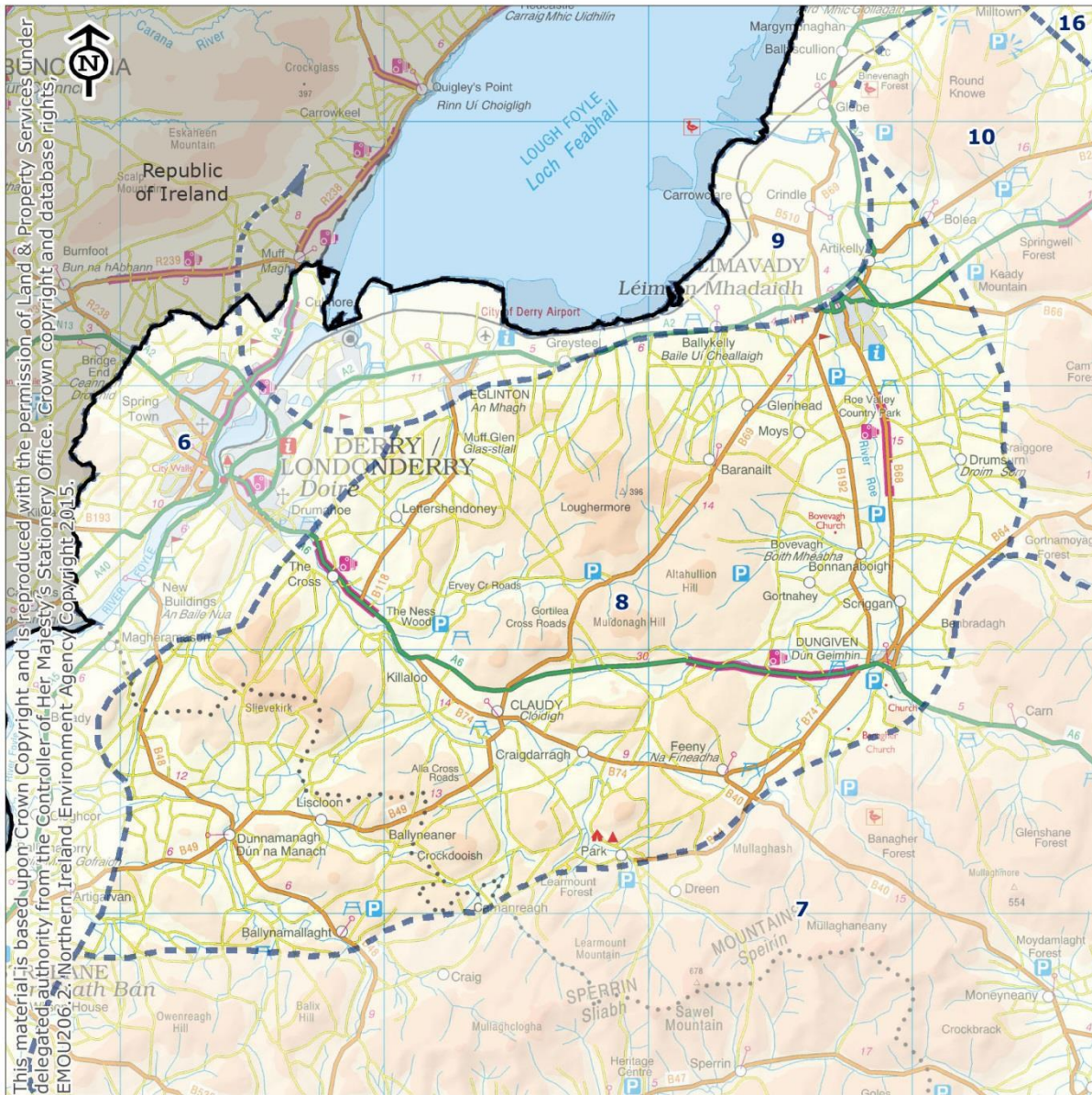
area particularly to the east and west expansive are provided over the Moyola Valley towards Lough Neagh and beyond the River Foyle into Donegal.

- Fast flowing streams throughout the RLCA have resulted in the formation of deep steeply sided gullies and valleys in places with tree cover becoming much denser along the floors of valleys.
- Main transport routes and settlements are confined to the valleys surrounding the mountains, including the Strule, Glenelly, Owenkillew, Douglas and Moyola Rivers and their tributaries. The Glenshane Pass is the main crossing of the Sperrins itself and is an extremely busy route.
- Bessy Bell the westward outlier of the Sperrins range is a distinctive landmark in the area given its isolated position beyond the main ridge and the deep wooded Strule Valley which separates it from Slieveard. Similarly Slieve Gallion is a major presence from the lowlands to the east.
- The Sperrins are a sparsely settled area with a high degree of remoteness and tranquillity. The mountains and upper glens have significant wildness character arising from their inaccessibility, and are a dark sky resource.

#### **RLCA8: North Sperrin Hills and Valleys**

This complex series of hills, plateaux and valleys occupies the area between the Sperrins and Lough Foyle. The broad Roe Valley lies below the basalt ridge to the east, and gives access to the smaller and more intricate valleys around Claudy and Dunnamanagh. To north and west the hills overlook the Foyle with Donegal beyond.





**MAP: RLCA8 North Sperrin Hills and Valleys – The western half of this LCA is with the District**

The North Sperrin Hills and Valleys RLCA is located in the north west of Northern Ireland beginning in the east towards the settlement of Limavady and the Roe Valley progressing westerly over the lower hills of the Sperrins towards the edge Foyle Valley. The RLCA falls mainly within County Londonderry with the south westerly corner passing into County Tyrone. The central area of the area is defined by the hills surrounding Loughermore which is bounded to the west and south by the Rivers Faughan and Foreglen respectively and to the east, by the River Roe. To the north the hills overlook the low lying flood plain of Lough Foyle.

The North Sperrins Hills and Valleys is characterised by the series of varied hills and valleys which cover the area between the Foyle Valley in the west and the Binevenagh Ridge to the east. The landscape is interspersed with

streams flow from the Sperrins through steep, narrow valleys that become broader to the north. Many of the upper valleys are wooded, with limited settlement. Small villages are located lower down, with an increase in settlement towards the north. A patchwork of small fields and dense broadleaf tree cover lines these valleys. To the east, the broader valley of the River Roe is shallow, and dominated by the basalt hills to its east. This more open settled landscape moves gradually from upland character to an open pastoral valley with limited tree cover and man-made embankments.

The River Faughan and its tributaries have been designated as an ASSI and SAC. Other important ASSIs within the RLCA include Ness and Ervy Woods, Lisnaragh and Loughermore Mountain.

### *Key Characteristics*

Southern part of the RLCA is defined by lower foothills of the Sperrins where steeper narrower valleys have been formed by the fast running streams in the area.

- In the north the upland areas of the Loughermore Hills convey a sense of isolated moorland interspersed intermittently with coniferous plantations and bog land.
- In contrast to the higher number of small settlements nestled in the valleys to the south, these upland areas display little evidence of being populated with small holdings limited towards the margins.
- The summits of the hills throughout the RLCA are for the most part rounded, becoming slightly broader and plateau-like across the Loughermore area.
- The meandering River Roe flows through a broad flattish valley where the floodplain field pattern changes from small marginal plots in the upper valley to large, geometric fields downstream. Hedgerows are prevalent throughout the valley though few trees and little enclosure.
- Other valleys are narrower and more wooded, such as the Burntollet and River Faughan, which have an intimate character.
- Country parks in the area provide recreational access to the countryside, though more frequented by locals than visitors.

### **RLCA9: Lough Foyle Coast and Dunes**

The unique coastal flats fronting Lough Foyle include Magilligan Point and the reclaimed 'polders' around the lough shore. This area is defined by the lough and the backdrop of the Inishowen peninsula to the north, and by the Binevenagh Ridge which rises to the east forming an essential relationship recognised by AONB designation. A predominance of arable land makes this area stand out, as well as its use as a key route along the north coast.





- The dramatic cliff edge of Binevenagh dominates the landscape above the low lying coastal plains, being prominent in views across the lough from the Foyle. The relationship between Magilligan and Binevenagh is essential to the perception of both areas.
- To the north, the backdrop of the Inishowen uplands is less distinctive but remains ever-present in views, containing and sheltering the lough.

### *Location and Setting*

Lough Foyle Coast and Dunes RLCA is located on the north-west coast of Northern Ireland beginning at the edge of the city of Derry/Londonderry in the west and taking in the coastal area which surrounds Lough Foyle up to the extremely flat alluvial plain around Magilligan Point. The area is bounded to the south by the Loughermore Hills extending between Derry/Londonderry and Limavady, and by the cliff edge of Binevenagh further to the east. The Roe Estuary divides the Magilligan Strand area in the east from rest of the coastline around Lough Foyle.

The River Faughan is of importance to salmon and trout and the estuaries and Lough Foyle have been designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA) given the areas importance to Whooper swan, Light-Bellied Brent goose and Bar-Tailed Godwit.

The Lough Foyle Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) has been designated within the RLCA due to interest in the intertidal and upper beach functions of the shore and river around the lough, as well as the network of sand dunes in the area.

The floodplain north of Derry/Londonderry is a key area of commercial development, with large-scale buildings located between Strathfoyle and Eglinton. City of Derry Airport is also in this area, and has aspirations for growth.

## **6.0 Marine Consideration**

6.1 In recent years, legislation has been introduced to ensure that for the first time marine activities and resources within our marine waters are planned and managed in a coherent manner. The following three interlocking pieces of legislation have been introduced to help deliver the UK vision of having “clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas”:

- UK Marine and Coastal Access Act (MCAA) 2009
- UK Marine Strategy Regulations 2010
- The Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013

6.2 In addition, the UK Marine Policy Statement (MPS) 2011 is the framework for preparing Marine Plans and taking decisions affecting the marine environment. Of particular relevance, is the legislative requirement that all public authorities taking authorisation or enforcement decisions that affect or might affect the UK marine area to do so in accordance with the MPS unless relevant considerations indicate otherwise. Accordingly, in future, Council will

not only have those legal implications in relation to terrestrial planning but also for marine matters as well.

## **7.0 Areas of Development Pressure**

7.1 The Development Pressure Analysis Evidence Paper seeks to identify areas where significant development pressure has occurred and/or where local rural character is under threat of significant change. An outcome of the Development Pressure Analysis will be to allow council to consider its options regarding countryside policy in the LDP. The options for controlling development pressure in the countryside could include introducing Greenbelts or Countryside Policy Area in sensitive areas experiencing development pressure. It is important to note that other forms of development such as agriculture, mineral extraction and industrial type development can have an impact upon the visual amenity and character of the countryside as well. A broad over view of the development pressure from both single rural dwellings and wind energy development indicates that in general areas which were designated as AONB, ASSI, RAMSAR, Greenbelt, CPA have experienced less development pressure. As a consequence areas without any designation were put under more pressure.

## **8.0 Implications of Landscape Character for our LDP**

8.1 As for Paper 2 on Natural Heritage designations, it is necessary in preparing the LDP, for the Council to consider how our landscape character can affect our settlement development limits, LDP designations, zonings, proposals and policies. Members' input is invited.

8.2 Members may want to consider:

- Where are the concentrated areas of development pressure in our district?
- What are the main forms?
  - Single rural housing?
  - Quarrying?
  - Wind farms?
- Is there a need for Green Belts and/or Countryside Policy Areas?
  - Are the Green Belts in the DAP 2011 and SAP 2001 still appropriate?
  - Should new Green Belts be introduced?
  - Should new Countryside Policy Areas be introduced?
  - Where should they be?
- How do these relate to landscape and biodiversity?
- Are we happy in planning terms with our current countryside/landscape protection?
  - If not, why not?
- What landscapes should we be protecting?
- What should be our priority?

- How would additional rural housing, renewable energy proposals, etc. impact on our landscape character?

## 9.0 Conclusions / Feedback

- 9.1 It is recommended that members note the contents of this paper and we would welcome Members’ input / feedback at the Workshop.
- 9.2 The discussion and input from Council Members at Workshop 3 will then feed into a forthcoming ‘options’ Paper on these matters to the Planning Committee (LDP - for decision, which will in turn feed into the LDP Preferred Options Paper (POP) which is due out in Spring 2017.
- 9.3 The research findings contained in this paper together with Members views and advice from the relevant parties/consultees have informed the following options which have been taken forward and subjected to Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating the Strategic Environmental Appraisal) as part of the Preferred Options Paper (POP) process.

**Three strategic planning options have been identified below to address those issues.**

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
<b>B - Landscape Character</b>	Informed by the existing NI / Regional Landscape Character Area Assessments and their associated Sensitivity Considerations, permit further sustainable development accordingly on a case by case basis	Informed by LDP Development Pressure Analysis and relevant Landscape Character Assessments, identify those areas of our landscape with higher sensitivity or ‘at capacity’ and identify development that may be inappropriate in these areas	Accommodate growth / development wherever possible, utilising the minimal number of protected landscape designations in the LDP

- **Option 1**

The LDP will be informed by the existing Landscape Character Assessments. Planning applications for development will be considered individually in light of the Landscape Character Assessments and other relevant planning policy and will be permitted, on a case by case basis, where such development is considered appropriate.

- **Option 2**

As well as using the existing Landscape Character Assessments, Development Pressure Analysis will also be used to identify areas that would be sensitive to development, or are ‘at capacity’ in terms of existing development and its ‘ability to absorb’ further, and hence where certain types of future development may be restricted. This could apply to parts of our



countryside, that are particularly scenic, have limited capacity to absorb development, highway-based development hot-spots or areas surrounding our settlements. Particular types of development that are considered inappropriate in these specific areas may also be identified in the LDP.

• **Option 3**

This Option approach seeks to permit development across our landscape, utilising its ability to absorb development with the minimal use of constraining designations

Appendix 1 – NILCA map

