

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council Local Development Plan



PAPER 11: ACBCBC LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA REPORT (AUGUST 2016)

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PURPOSE:

To provide Members with a Landscape Character Assessment for Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council to highlight those areas of landscape most vulnerable to change within the Borough.

CONTENTS:

The paper forms part of the Countryside Assessment for ACBCBC and is to be read in conjunction with the Environmental Assets Paper, the Strategic Settlement Appraisal Paper and Development Pressure Analysis Paper.

It provides information on:

- (i) The Regional Planning Policy Context;**
- (ii) The Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment (NILCA) for ACBCBC Borough and its key elements;**
- (iii) The Draft Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment (NIRLCA) 2015;**
- (iv) Development Plan Designations;**
- (v) Methodology and Considerations; and**
- (vi) Conclusion and Summary.**

Introduction

1.1 Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) is the process of identifying and describing variation in character of the landscape. LCA documents, identifies and explains the unique combination of elements and features that make landscapes distinctive by mapping and describing character types and areas.

LCAs can be used to inform a wide range of activities, including ¹:

- planning policies and decisions
- sensitivity and capacity studies
- land management plans
- landscape and visual impact assessments
- local council studies

1.2 Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council (ACBCBC) comprises a diverse mix of landscapes including orchards, the Lough Neagh basin, bog lands, drumlins, localised hills and important river valleys. Recognition of landscapes and habitat of international and national importance is given through the various nature conservation designations (eg Ramsar, SACs & SPA).

1.3 These Borough 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. It also provides for many recreational needs and has the potential to become an increasingly important tourist asset.

1.4 The Landscape Character Assessment will form part of the Countryside Assessment and will be taken into account when formulating the LDP. It will also form part of the **Sustainability Appraisal** and should be used to inform the **Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)**.

1.5 The appraisal of sustainability must be carried out for the Plan Strategy and Local Policies Plan respectively (Sections 8 (6) and 9 (7) of the Planning Act 2011). As the sustainability appraisal (SA) for each of these development plan documents will incorporate an assessment of environmental effects, it must also comply with the requirements of the European Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of effects of certain plans and programmes of the environment (the SEA Directive).

1.6 The purpose of SA is to promote sustainable development through integration of social, environmental and economic considerations into the preparation of plans and programmes such as local development plans. It must be carried out in conjunction with, and parallel to, the development of the LDP and integrated with the plan process and will involve an iterative process of collecting information, appraising reasonable alternatives and identifying likely significant effects on the environment.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/landscape-and-seascape-character-assessments>

2.0 Regional Planning Policy Context

2.1 The Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035 states that the natural environment directly supports all life and is essential to well-being. Human impacts on landscapes over the last century, as the result of increased development, have adversely affected biodiversity. There has been a substantial reduction in the total area of semi-natural habitats due to ongoing land use intensification from agriculture and urbanisation.

2.2 The RDS 2035 states the following:-

- ***recognise and promote the conservation of local identity and distinctive landscape character.*** Landscape character is what makes an area unique. It is defined as “a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements, be it natural (soil, landform) and/or human (for example settlement and development) in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse”. Informed and responsible decisions on the management and planning of sustainable future landscapes can only be made if proper regard is paid to their existing character. By understanding how places differ we can also ensure that future development is well situated, sensitive to its location, and contributes to environmental, social and economic objectives. The Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment 2000 provides valuable guidance on local landscape character and scenic quality.
- ***Conserve, protect and where possible enhance areas recognised for their landscape quality.*** Protected landscapes should continue to be managed through a partnership approach involving central and local government and the local communities.
- ***Protect designated areas of countryside from inappropriate development (either directly or indirectly) and continue to assess areas for designation.*** Designating special areas for protection is an effective way of ensuring our wildlife and natural landscapes retain their individual characteristics. Some areas are deemed of such importance that they are formally designated under various pieces of national and international legislation.

2.3 The Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS) places Sustainable Development at the heart of the planning system. The SPPS defines the three pillars of sustainable development (economy, society & environment). It states that Planning Authorities should deliver on all three pillars in formulating policies and plans. On the environment pillar, the SPPS sets out the need to protect and enhance the built and natural environment, including landscape character.

2.4 The SPPS states that, in formulating policies and plans, planning authorities will be guided by the precautionary approach in that, where there are significant risks of damage to the environment, its protection will generally be paramount, unless there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest. The SPPS further states that our environment must be managed in a sustainable manner in accordance

with the Executive's commitment to preserve and improve the built and natural environment and halt the loss of biodiversity.

- 2.5** At paragraph 5.16, the SPPS states that councils preparing LDPs must take account of the RDS 2035, the Sustainable Development Strategy for Northern Ireland, the SPPS and any other policies or advice in guidance issued by the Department such as landscape character assessments.
- 2.6** In directing 'other types of development' in the countryside, beyond those for which the SPPS sets out specific Regional Strategic Policy, it states that where there are areas of the countryside which exhibit exceptional landscapes, and visual amenity value such as lough shores, and certain views and vistas, development should only be permitted in exceptional circumstances. Where appropriate these areas should be designated as Special Countryside Areas (SCA) in the Local Development Plan (LDP) 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.
- 2.7** The SPPS (paragraph 6.76) states that the LDP process has an important role for councils in identifying key features and assets of the countryside and balancing of the needs of rural areas and communities with the protection of the environment. This should 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. This paper, along with the Environmental Assets Paper (February 2016: Paper 8), the rural pressure analysis paper (to be presented to Council Autumn 2016) and the review of existing planning policy statements will provide the evidence base for this task. This should take into account Landscape Character Assessments.

3.0 NI Landscape Character Assessment (NILCA 2000):

- 3.1** All of the NI landscape has been classified by the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment 2000 (NILCA 2000), which was compiled by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. It used an established systematic methods of landscape character assessment.
- 3.2** Within the NILCA 2000, the NI landscape has been subdivided into 130 different landscape character areas (LCA), each with a distinctive character based on geology, landform, 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. The Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) report indicates for each area, the key characteristics, principal forces for change and the key issues influencing landscape sensitivity. It also suggests specific landscape guidelines for each area based either around landscape management or establishing principles for accommodating development.
- 3.3** The information contained in each section is used as a way of identifying and protecting these areas, so that our natural environment can be sustained and enhanced. ACBCBC area contains twenty-three Landscape Character Areas, of which a number straddle neighbouring districts as detailed below:

ACBCBC Landscape Character Areas (NILCA 2000):

1. LCA 46 – Blackwater Valley
2. LCA 47 – Loughall Orchard Belt
3. LCA 62 - East Lough Neagh Points
4. LCA 63 – Portmore Lough Fringe
5. LCA 64 – Lough Neagh Peatlands
6. LCA 65 – Upper Bann Floodplains
7. LCA 66 - Armagh Drumlins
8. LCA 67 – Armagh / Banbridge Hills
9. LCA 68 – Carrigatuke Hills
10. LCA 69 – Newry Basin
11. LCA 76 – Ballyroney Basin
12. LCA 77 – Iveagh Slopes
13. LCA 78 – North Banbridge Hills
14. LCA 79 – Craigavon Plateau
15. LCA 80 – Donaghcloney Valley
16. LCA 81 – Kilwarlin Plateau
17. LCA 82 – Dromore Lowlands
18. LCA 83 – Lower Slieve Croob Foothills (portion still in ABC)
19. LCA 84 – Mourne Foothills (portion still in ABC)
20. LCA 87 - Slieve Croob Summits (portion still in ABC)
21. LCA 88 – Craggy Dromara Uplands
22. LCA 89 – Hillsborough Slopes
23. LCA 109 – Upper Ballinderry Plateau

Appendix 1 provides a summary of the key characteristics of the ABC LCAs.

- 3.4** The NICLA 2000 report indicate the level of sensitivity to change for most LCAs. In some instances, no indication of LCA sensitivity to change is detailed. Where this

is not detailed, indications of the ability of the LCA to absorb further development may be contained under the heading '*Principles for Accommodating New Development*' and '*Landscape Description*'. If no specific information relating to landscape sensitivity / capacity is provided, it is considered that the LCA has a 'low' level of sensitivity and has capacity for further development.

Each ACBCBC LCA level of sensitivity is detailed within the summary of the key characteristics of each LCA at Appendix 1.

- 3.5** Of the 23 ACBCBC LCAs considered in the NILCA 2000 reports, the following LCAs are considered to present the highest sensitive to change:
- Lough Neagh Peatlands;
 - Blackwater Valley;
 - Mourne Foothills; and
 - Slieve Croob Foothills.

The remaining 19 LCAs are considered as being either low, medium or medium/high sensitivity to change.

Areas of Scenic Quality (ASQ):

- 3.6** The NILCA 2000 document also identifies **Areas of Scenic Quality (ASQ)**. They represent a second tier below Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in the hierarchy of landscape classifications. They are characterised by visually pleasing patterns or combinations of landscape elements, and by their generally unspoilt character, free from major intrusion. In addition they may include significant sites or features of nature conservation, historic or cultural importance. Often they are visually prominent landscapes such as ridge tops, scarp slopes above settlements and open distinct areas such as the Lough Neagh shores, which are particularly sensitive to change. Within the NILCA 2000 report, two ASQ's are highlighted within ACBCBC as summarised below:

The Lough Neagh Shores ASQ:

- 3.7** This distinctive landscape of the Lough Neagh Shores ASQ straddles three Landscape Character Areas of East Lough Neagh Points (No. 62), Portmore Lough Fringe (No. 63) and Lough Neagh Peatlands (No. 64). It is a narrow sensitive landscape area on the fringe of Lough Neagh that extends from the council boundary with Mid-Ulster at Maghery where the Blackwater river meets Lough Neagh to the council boundary with Lisburn / Castlereagh at Tunny Cut which links Portmore Lough to Lough Neagh. This area includes a portion of the Lough Neagh designated Ramsar and other nature conservation designations such as Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Nature Reserves and Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs).
- 3.8** The NILCA 2000 report describes the Lough Neagh Points LCA (No. 62) landscape as extremely sensitive along the shores of Lough Neagh. It describes the Portmore Lough Fringe LCA (No. 63) landscape as a relatively remote area, characterised by marginal, partially waterlogged farmland and fen which is important for nature conservation and sensitive to change. The NILCA report describes the Lough Neagh Peatlands LCA (No. 64) landscape as open, flat areas that are particularly sensitive to the visual impact of vertical elements. The open

character of the Lough is particularly important and should be retained in order to maintain views across the water from local roads.

The Blackwater Valley:

- 3.9** Here, the distinctive landscape of the ASQ follows a narrow portion of land east of the Blackwater River that straddles two Landscape Character Areas Blackwater Valley LCA (No. 46) and Armagh Drumlins LCA (No. 66) and extends from an area west of Tynan Village to north of Artasooly Road. The river marks the boundary between ACBCBC and Mid-Ulster council area.
- 3.10** The NILCA report describes the key characteristics of the Blackwater Valley LCA (No. 46) as flat marshy valley and floodplain of the River Blackwater which flows from the Clogher Valley into Lough Neagh. The small portion of the Armagh Drumlins LCA (No. 66) within the ASQ is described by the NILCA report as having river valleys that are important components of the landscape which should be conserved and appropriate to promote the development of recreational routeways along river valleys and linking into the towns. The report states that 'built development along the roads at the lower edges of the floodplain would be out of character with the existing landscape pattern' and 'large developments could not be integrated into the small scale secluded landscape'. The Blackwater River is often tightly enclosed by drumlins which only offer limited views to the river's edge. Historic wooded designed landscapes, large estate houses, parkland and lakes enjoy an attractive riverside setting. The ASQ includes part of the Ulster Canal and contains Tynan Abbey Estate with its stone walls and acres of mature woodland

NIEA Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) - NI Wind Energy Development in NI Landscapes (2010):

- 3.11** Broad, strategic guidance with regard to the sensitivity of Northern Ireland's landscapes is also contained within NIEA Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG): Wind Energy Development in Northern Ireland's Landscapes (2010). It contains an assessment of each of the 130 LCAs (NILCA 2000) by referencing the characteristics and values associated with each LCA. Although specifically concerned with impact of wind energy development it is considered to be a useful reference for identifying those landscapes within ACBCBC that are particularly vulnerable to change.
- 3.12** Within the guidance report, each LCA is given an overall sensitivity level using a five point scale ranging from high to low. Of the 23 LCA's that fall within or partially within ACBCBC, 9 have been given a high sensitivity rating (Blackwater Valley, Lough Neagh Peatlands, Upper Bann Floodplain, Donaghcloney Valley, Portmore Lough Fringe, Hillsborough Slopes, Craggy Dromara uplands, Slieve Croob Summits & Mourne Foothills).
- 3.13** Of the nine LCAs with a high sensitivity rating, the following two LCAs would appear to be particularly vulnerable to development as they also fall within the NILCA 2000 report ASQs and contain a number of nature conservation designations:
- Lough Neagh Peatlands; and
 - Blackwater Valley LCA.

While the guidance may offer direction on the sensitivity of an area, it is acknowledged that there may be considerable variation in sensitivity level within each LCA, reflecting the fact that the LCAs are broad areas. The overall sensitivity level given is the level that prevails over most of the LCA's geographic area.

NI Regional Landscape Character Assessment (Draft 2015):

- 3.14** A Regional Landscape Character Assessment for Northern Ireland is also currently being prepared by Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). It is currently in draft form and as suggested by the title, adopts a more strategic view of landscape assessment with 26 Strategic landscape Character Areas over the whole region. The purpose of the 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.
- 3.15** At an information event organised by NIEA on 30th April 2015, it was made clear that the 26 NIRLCA would have to be supplemented with local studies and this responsibility would fall to each council. These local studies would be at a more local level similar to the NILCA 2000 series. The resources involved and how this would be consistently applied across the 11 new council areas caused considerable concern amongst councils who stated that any new local studies should be carried out by NIEA. Given the current status and nature of the report, the content and direction has been afforded limited weight as part of this ACBCBC Landscape Assessment. This draft document suggested five strategic landscape character areas. These all straddle other council areas as detailed below:
- 13 – Southern Drumlins & Orchards (ACBCBC & Mid-Ulster);
 - 14 – Lough Neagh Basin (ACBCBC Mid-Ulster, Antrim/N'abbey & Lisburn/Castlereagh);
 - 22 – North Down Drumlins & Hills (ACBCBC, Newry/Mourne & Down, Belfast, North Down & Ards);
 - 23 – Newry Valley & Upper Bann (ACBCBC, Newry/Mourne & Down);
 - 24 – Slieve Gullion & South Armagh Hills (ACBCBC, Newry/Mourne & Down).
- Further details of the five areas are contained in Appendix 2.

4.0 Development Plan Designations

Local Landscape Policy Areas (LLPA's)

- 4.1** Local Landscape Policy areas (LLPAs) are areas considered to be of greatest amenity value or local significance within and adjoining settlements and therefore worthy of protection from undesirable or damaging development. LLPA's consist of those features and areas within and adjoining settlements which are considered to be of greatest amenity value, landscape quality or local significance and therefore worthy of protection from undesirable or damaging development.
- 4.2** The features or combination of features that contribute to the environmental quality, integrity or character of an LLPA are specific to individual settlements and differ from place to place. Within the Boroughs extant area plans (Armagh Area Plan 2004, Banbridge/Newry & Mourne Area Plan 2015 & Craigavon Area Plan 2010), there are 101 Local Landscape Policy Areas (LLPAs) within and adjoining the majority of the settlements. No LLPAs were designated in the Dungannon and South Tyrone Area Plan 2010 within the three villages (Clonmore, Derrylee and part of Tamnamore) that transferred to ACBCBC post-RPA.
- 4.3** The features or combination of features that contribute to the environmental quality, integrity or character of an LLPA are specific to individual settlements and differ from place to place. Details of LLPA's including maps indicating their boundaries and key features are detailed in the relevant extant Area Plans and referenced in the Environmental Assets Preparatory Paper. As part of the plan preparation process, all existing LLPA designations will be reviewed and any additional LLPAs identified.

Archaeological Sites and Monuments

- 4.4** There is one ABC Area of Significant Archaeological Interest (ASAI) designated at the Navan complex. The extent of the ASAI is illustrated in the Armagh Area Plan 2004. Navan Fort (Eamhain Mhacha) is the focus of a group of monuments which together form one of the most important areas of historic landscapes in Ireland. The main monuments identified in the Navan complex at present are:
- Navan Fort ;
 - Loughnashade ;
 - Haughey's Fort ;
 - The King's Stables; and
 - a group of megalithic tombs .
- 4.5** The Navan Fort complex is owned and managed by ACBCBC and is currently listed on the UNESCO Tentative List for World Heritage recognition as part of a group of six unique and iconic ensembles of largely prehistoric unique monuments and sites – 'The Royal Sites of Ireland'.
- 4.6** The ACBCBC area has a rich variety of archaeological sites and monuments, buildings and other structures. The council area also contains a wealth of remains of industrial heritage, all of which are reminders of economic development in the area. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (Department for Communities, NI) is responsible for the identification, recording, updating and protection of all known archaeological and sites of historical importance. A summary of the main ACBCBC Built Heritage designations are:

- 15 State Care Monuments
- 169 Scheduled Monuments
- 1292 Unscheduled Monuments
- 1 Areas of Significant Archaeological Interest (Navan)
- 21 Areas of Archaeological Potential (AAP)
- 1063 Listed Buildings
- 14 Historic Parks, Gardens and Demesnes (Registered Sites)
- 15 Historic Parks, Gardens and Demesnes (Supplementary Sites)
- 5 Conservation Areas
- 16 Areas of Townscape / Village Character (ATC / AVC)
- 101 Local Landscape Policy Areas (LLPAs)

As part of the plan preparation process, all existing LLPA and plan designations will be reviewed and additional LLPAs / ATCs identified as required.

5.0 Methodology & Consideration

Methodology

- 5.1** The 23 LCAs within the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council area identified within the NILCA 2000 were reviewed and analysed to enable the sensitivity of each LCA and its ability to absorb further development to be determined. In doing so it was recognised that some types of landscapes have a greater ability to absorb development than others. For instance, a rolling, drumlin landscape with small field patterns and strong boundary vegetation will generally make new development less intrusive in the landscape compared to a flat, open landscape with minimal boundary landscape and large field patterns. Some areas will also be more sensitive due to their high quality or scenic landscape such as in an Area of Scenic Quality (ASQ).
- 5.2** Following consideration of the information contained within Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment (NILCA) 2000, the Supplementary Planning Guidance on Wind Energy Development in NI Landscapes, environmental designations (built & natural) within the Borough and areas susceptible to flooding, focussed site visits were carried out to determine a broad strategic picture of those parts of the district that are considered to be particularly vulnerable to change. Planning history of the sensitive areas was also compiled and existing developed areas noted to help inform the exercise (See Environmental Designation Maps at Appendix 3 & Area of Scenic Quality Map at Appendix 4 in relation to ACBCBC vulnerable landscapes).
- 5.3** It is considered that this approach offered a means of determining which landscapes in our Borough are particularly vulnerable or sensitive to change and which areas should be considered further for greater policy control.

Consideration

Below are the main issues considered in the determination of ACBCBC vulnerable landscape areas /landscape areas sensitive to change.

- 5.4** Both Areas of Scenic Quality (ASQ) identified within NILCA 2000 and summarised above under paragraphs 3.6-3.10 i.e. the Lough Neagh Shores and the Blackwater Valley were considered. The shores of Lough Neagh are considered particularly sensitive to all types of development given its wealth of natural heritage features, as identified in the Environmental Assets Paper, and its high scenic quality. In relation to the Blackwater Valley, the report states that 'built development along the roads at the lower edges of the floodplain would be out of character with the existing landscape pattern' and 'large developments could not be integrated into the small scale secluded landscape'.
- 5.5** The NILCA 2000 report highlights Lough Neagh Peatlands LCA 'wetland and shoreline landscapes on the edge of Lough Neagh as extremely sensitive and highly valued for their scenic quality and wildlife interest. A significant portion of the Lough Neagh Shores Area of Scenic Quality (ASQ) falls within this LCA and the report states that 'open flat areas are particularly sensitive to the visual impact of vertical elements'.
- 5.6** The NILCA 2000 report includes the Lough Neagh Shore portions of both East Lough Neagh Points and Portmore Lough Fringe LCAs as ASQs. In relation to

East Lough Neagh Points LCA, the report states that the fringes of Lough Neagh are renowned for their wildlife and habitat value. Furthermore it states that 'the shores of Lough Neagh are also extremely sensitive'. In relation to Portmore Lough Fringe LCA, the report highlights the areas importance in relation to nature conservation and that it falls within the 'Portmore Lough and Derrymore Area of Scenic Quality'. It states that the area 'is of particular value for birds and is sensitive to changes such as drainage and agricultural improvements which may lead to a reduction in fen'. The nature conservation importance of both LCAs is recognised through the international and national nature conservation designations around Lough Neagh and Portmore Lough.

- 5.7** The NILCA 2000 report refers to the Blackwater Valley LCA and states that the 'small-scale enclosed character of the valley ensures that large scale or extensive development would be intrusive'. A significant portion of the Blackwater Valley Area of Scenic Quality (ASQ) falls within this LCA and the report states in its principles for landscape management that 'the management of river channel and corridor to ensure the conservation of its ecological and landscape value would be of benefit'.
- 5.8** Small elements of both the Slieve Croob Summits & Mourne Foothills LCAs are within the ACBCBC area. Although they are both highlighted as highly sensitive in the NILCA report, the vast majority are now within Newry/Mourne & Down (NMD) Council Area, post RPA. These two areas are already protected through the Mourne & Slieve Croob AONB designations, the Special Countryside Area (SCA) policy designations and numerous Natura 2000 nature conservation designations. Therefore, it is not considered necessary to suggest any further landscape protection to the small peripheral areas of the two LCAs that fall within ACBCBC beyond the uplands of the Mourne / Slieve Croob.
- 5.9** In relation to the NIEA Supplementary Planning Guidance (NI Wind Energy Development in NI Landscapes, 2010), nine ACBCBC LCAs have been highlighted as having a high sensitivity rating. Of the nine, two LCAs (Lough Neagh Peatlands & Blackwater Valley) would appear to be particularly vulnerable to development as they also fall within the NILCA 2000 report ASQs and contain a number of nature conservation designations.
- 5.10** The Borough has a number of international and national nature conservation designations as detailed below and identified within the Environmental Assets Paper. These higher designations are concentrated around the southern shores of Lough Neagh and the NILCA 2000 report Area of Scenic Quality; i.e. Lough Neagh & Islands, Portmore Lough, Brackagh Bog, Peatlands Park and Montiaghs Moss).

International Designations:

- 1 RAMSAR sites (Lough Neagh & Lough Beg)
- 2 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs: Peatlands Park & Montiaghs Moss)
- 1 Special Protected Areas (SPAs: Lough Neagh)

National Designations:

- 21 Areas of Special Scientific interest (ASSI's)
- 1 National Nature Reserve (Lough Neagh)
- 4 Nature Reserves (Annagarriff, Brackagh Bog, Lough Neagh Islands & Mullenakill).

These designations are safeguarded by various wildlife (habitat / species) legislation and planning policy (in particular Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 2: Nature Conservation) which protect them from inappropriate development.

- 5.11** The Borough also has significant areas that are susceptible to flooding as guided by NI Strategic Flood Map (Q 1:100 year Climate Change Data). These areas are highlighted in Map (Appendix 6) and further information is contained in the Public Utilities Paper. Those areas within the floodplain are directed by the Planning Policy statement (PPS) 15: Planning & Flood Risk to 'adopt a precautionary approach to the identification of land for development through the development plan process' and Policy FLD 1 which restricts development within the 1 in 100 year fluvial flood plain unless the applicant can demonstrate that the proposal constitutes an exception to the policy.
- 5.12** The adjoining Councils of Mid-Ulster and Lisburn/Castlereagh contain elements of two ASQs that overlap from ACBCBC. Mid-Ulster contains an element of the Blackwater Valley ASQ to the west of our Borough and an element of the Lough Neagh Shores ASQ west of ACBCBC. Lisburn/Castlereagh contains an element of the Lough Neagh shores ASQ to the east of ACBCBC at Portmore Lough.
- 5.13** Mid-Ulster have suggested that their Lough Shore ASQ is a vulnerable landscape and should be considered further for a landscape designation / policy. This is consistent with the Lisburn / Castlereagh area, where the ASQ was designated as an Area of High Scenic Value designation / policy (Portmore Lough AoHSV: COU 05/06) under the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015.
- 5.14** In relation to the Blackwater Valley ASQ, Mid-Ulster did not consider this area as a vulnerable landscape, based on the methodology detailed in their Landscape Character Assessment Paper. Considering the NILCA 2000 report direction, site visits and the importance of cross boundary consistency, it is similarly recommended that the Blackwater Valley ASQ area not be considered as a vulnerable landscape within ACBCBC requiring further landscape policy protection.
- 5.15** Focussed site visits were carried out in line with landscape considerations detailed above within the ASQs to determine a broad strategic picture of those parts of the district that are considered to be particularly vulnerable to change. These site visits considered the character and nature of the landscape, environmental designations, existing settlements, planning history and existing developed areas.
- 5.16** Other areas within the Borough have been excluded due to their relatively low landscape/visual sensitivity in terms of the NILCA 2000 and the SPG wind energy development guidance reports, developed areas, site visits or where they are considered sufficiently protected by existing nature conservation / built heritage designations.

6.0 Conclusion and Summary

- 6.1** This paper reflects the current position of Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council area as of August 2016.
- 6.2** From the information detailed above, it is evident that Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council area has a variety of contrasting landscapes, some of which are particularly sensitive to change due to the quality and nature of their landscape features. Therefore these areas have a low capacity to absorb new development and should be considered further for greater policy control through the preparation of the Local Development Plan.
- 6.3** Of the landscape areas considered, it is suggested that:
- the Area of Scenic Quality along the Shores of Lough Neagh & Portmore Lough as detailed in the NILCA 2000 report are considered for greater protection from development to sustain its sensitive landscape setting and natural environment.
- 6.4** Thus, options for greater policy control should be explored in consultation with NIEA to establish whether this approach is consistent with the NILCA 2000 report and if the forthcoming Regional Landscape Character Assessment NI would raise any further factors that would require consideration as part of the LDP process.
- 6.5** If NIEA accept that the Shores of Lough Neagh and Portmore Lough are vulnerable landscapes, then further localised site visits will be required to detail an appropriate designation boundary. This is particularly important, considering that there are existing uses within the search area and significant localised variation in the level of landscape vulnerability within the identified area.
- 6.6** This Landscape Assessment forms part of the Countryside Assessment and will be taken into account when formulating the LDP. It will also form part of the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and should be used to inform the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT REPORT APPENDICES:

1. ACBCBC Landscape Character Areas (NILCA 2000);
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Appendix 1: ACBCBC Landscape Character Areas (NILCA 2000).

Below is a summary of the key characteristics of the 23 ACBCBC NILCA 2000 Report Landscape Character Areas (LCA) and their sensitivity to change (low-high).

LCA 46 – Blackwater Valley:

Key Characteristics

- Large scale, smooth rolling hills and deep wooded valleys. Flat marshy valley band floodplain of the River Blackwater.
- Wet meadows, pasture and bog.
- Secluded, secret landscape enclosed by drumlins, which extend as isolated rounded hills across the floodplain.
- Attractive historic designed landscapes, with woodland, lakes and grand houses; picturesque riverside settings.
- Fields separated by bushy hedgerows and trees creating an enclosed wooded character.
- Inaccessible, with few settlements; winding banked lanes give few views.
- Rural, peaceful and unspoilt landscape.

NILCA 2000 Report Sensitivity to Change: Medium / High.

LCA 47 – Loughgall Orchard Belt:

Key Characteristics

- Low rolling drumlins falling towards Lough Neagh crossed by numerous small river valleys and streams and separated by low lying areas of moss.
- Varied rural landscape pattern, with mixed farmland and horticulture; extensive orchards on sheltered drumlin slopes.
- Wooded designed estate landscapes, parklands and attractive loughs, hilltop copses, mature trees and neat clipped hedges.
- Numerous scattered dwellings connected by hedge lined winding roads.
- Many traditional buildings including parish churches.
- Long views to Lough Neagh and Portadown area from hill tops.

NILCA 2000 Report Sensitivity to Change: Low/Medium.

LCA 62 - East Lough Neagh Points:

Key Characteristics

- Rolling, relatively small-scale farmland landscape on the fringes of Lough Neagh.
- Linear development along straight roads on higher land.
- Overgrown, dense hedgerows, containing stands of willow.
- Larger-scale farmland with arable fields and a more open character on the flatter land towards the shores of the Lough.
- Rushes, partially abandoned pastures and marshy areas on the shoreline
- Sand and gravel extraction on or near the Lough shore.

NILCA 2000 Report Sensitivity to Change: Not stated but considered High, particularly around the ASQ where the report describes the 'Lough Neagh Shores as extremely sensitive'.

LCA 63 – Portmore Lough Fringe:

Key Characteristics

- Flat fenland landscape on the fringes of Portmore Lough.
- Gradual transition from pastures to patches of scrubby fen and carr on the margins of the Lough.
- Scattered small-holdings and small houses along narrow, straight tracks which usually lead to dead-ends on the edge of the fen.
- Mature, prominent hedgerow oak trees along roads.
- Numerous straight drainage channels.
- Straight, narrow roads, often raised on steep embankments across marshy areas.
- Extensive areas of rushes, willow and marsh.

NILCA 2000 Report Sensitivity to Change: Not stated but considered overall Medium with High sensitivity around the 'Portmore Lough & Derrymore Point ASQ area'. The area is important for nature conservation with a number of nature conservation designations and is sensitive to changes such as drainage and agricultural improvements.

LCA 64 – Lough Neagh Peatlands:

Key Characteristics

- A low lying marshy landscape with small, protruding drumlins.
- The old canal, river channels and drainage patterns have a strong visual influence.
- Extensive, varied patchwork of pasture, plantations, regenerating bog areas and small settlements.
- Many scattered smallholdings, villages and new residential areas on higher ground linked by embanked roads.
- High quality water edge landscape and wildlife habitats.

NILCA 2000 Report Sensitivity to Change: High.

LCA 65 – Upper Bann Floodplains:

Key Characteristics

- River terraces and floodplain of the River Bann.
- Extensive areas of flat pasture and moss with scattered, irregular tree cover.
- Long river landscape views.
- Steep embankments contain the river valley to the south.
- The river itself is often remote and inconspicuous.

NILCA 2000 Report Sensitivity to Change: Medium.

LCA 66 - Armagh Drumlins:

Key Characteristics

- Extensive area of rolling drumlins overlooked by the Carrigatuke
- Hills to the south and crossed by numerous, small winding river valleys. Improved pasture separated by bushy hedgerows and tree belts.
- Numerous scattered dwellings and farms connected by network of winding, hedge-lined roads.
- Wooded historic estate and park landscapes.
- Open views across landscape from higher points; intimate enclosed landscapes between hills.
- Significant archaeological sites.

NILCA 2000 Report Sensitivity to Change: Low.

LCA 67 – Armagh / Banbridge Hills:

Key Characteristics

- Rolling hills and ridges, with variations in scale; broad shallow slopes to the west and rocky outcrops to the south east on the margins of Knockiveagh.
- Varied patchwork of fields, woodlands, hedgerow trees and patches of regenerating scrub, with a diverse texture and pattern.
- Valleys have flat pastures with drainage ditches, areas of damp woodland and patches of bog.
- Large farmsteads and their stone outbuildings are prominent landscape elements.
- Relatively open landscape, with long views from local ridges.
- Traditional stone gateposts.

NILCA 2000 Report Sensitivity to Change: Medium/High.

LCA 68 – Carrigatuke Hills:

Key Characteristics

- Large scale, smooth rolling hills and deep wooded valleys.
- Extensive conifer plantations and residual peaty moorland create a series of geometric blocks on the highest and wildest hills.
- Many mature trees, tree-belts, and small woodlands on lower hills.
- Large houses, farms and buildings amongst rolling hills are linked by numerous winding roads.
- Long panoramic views over the surrounding lowlands.

NILCA 2000 Report Sensitivity to Change: Medium/High.

LCA 69 – Newry Basin:

Key Characteristics

- Large scale drumlin landscape drained by tributaries of the Newry River.
- Rolling, improved pastures in good condition, becoming increasingly rough on the fringes of the Mourne foothills.
- Well-trimmed, low gorse hedges and tree belts separate fields, creating an intact and unified landscape.
- Scattered individual bungalows and large farms, with many new bungalows located on drumlin tops.
- Network of narrow hedged and hedge-banked roads within the drumlins.
- Occasional panoramic views of the Mourne Mountains.

NILCA 2000 Report Sensitivity to Change: Medium.

LCA 76 – Ballyroney Basin:

Key Characteristics

- Lowland basin containing the courses of the Rivers Bann and Drumadonnell.
- Flat waterlogged areas of birch moss, marshy pasture and loughs.
- Distinct drumlin landforms supporting improved farmland.
- Prominent hill is the site for the striking hill top town of Rathfriland.
- Roads cross the basin on embankments and settlement is restricted to drumlins.
- River Bann winds inconspicuously around between drumlins and under distinctive stone bridges.
- Views are enclosed by drumlins and dense birch growth on areas of moss.

NILCA 2000 Report Sensitivity to Change: Low.

LCA 77 – Iveagh Slopes:

Key Characteristics

- Steep slopes leading to the summit of Knockiveagh at 230m.
- Distinctive, undulating upland plateau textured with rocky outcrops and patches of bog.
- Marginal pastures, with patches of gorse.
- Strong horizontal field pattern on upper slopes. Sparsely settled. Attractive stone buildings.
- Long views to distant mountains (Sperrins to NW and the Mourne to the SE).

NILCA 2000 Report Sensitivity to Change: Medium / High.

LCA 78 – North Banbridge Hills:

Key Characteristics

- Smooth, rounded hills, ridges and drumlins.
- Diverse landscape pattern with many contrasts in texture.
- Attractive field pattern with hedgerows often running down slopes and along ridgelines.
- Patches of marsh, wet pasture and damp woodland between hills.
- Mixed woodlands and small blocks of conifers.
- Settlement dispersed along ridgetop roads.
- Long views from ridgetops.
- Historic mill buildings are important local landmarks, particularly along the River Bann.

NILCA 2000 Report Sensitivity to Change: Medium.

LCA 79 – Craigavon Plateau:

Key Characteristics

- Undulating plateau, with steeper slopes on the edges of the Donaghcloney Valley and the Upper Bann valley.
- Small, winding, steep-sided valleys on the southern slopes of the plateau.
- Varied landscape pattern, with pasture, paddocks and small-holdings, as well as some larger farms and estates.
- Numerous hedgerows and roadside trees.
- Extensive recent urban and infrastructure development, particularly on the periphery of the larger villages and the urban fringe.
- Prominent churches are local landmarks.

NILCA 2000 Report Sensitivity to Change: Medium/High.

LCA 80 – Donaghcloney Valley:

Key Characteristics

- Broad, flat-bottomed valley with a meandering, narrow river channel.
- Large, geometric fields divided by low hedgerows.
- Scattered hedgerow trees and a fairly open character.
- Rural character but with some large-scale industrial and agricultural development.
- Scattered farms and villages along straight rural roads and larger clustered villages.
- Mix of pasture and arable farmland.
- Stone mill buildings and stone bridges are local landmarks.

NILCA 2000 Report Sensitivity to Change: Medium/High.

LCA 81 – Kilwarlin Plateau:

Key Characteristics

- Broad plateau, with rounded summits and an escarpment overlooking the Lagan Valley.
- Neat patchwork of fairly large, geometric fields divided by hedgerows with numerous hedgerow trees.
- Short avenues of mature oak trees along winding roads and farm tracks.
- Mature stands of mixed woodland shelter traditional farmsteads.
- Numerous scattered houses and farms.
- Smooth, consistent landscape pattern, with very few patches of unused land.

NILCA 2000 Report Sensitivity to Change: Medium.

LCA 82 – Dromore Lowlands:

Key Characteristics

- Small rounded drumlins surrounded by extensive, low-lying areas of moss and regenerating scrub.
- Principal roads and farm tracks follow low ridge-lines.
- Numerous small-holdings and cottages along local roads, often concentrated at junctions.
- Hedgerows, blocks of woodland and shelterbelts form strong lines in the landscape.
- Scattered hedgerow trees.
- Contrasts in texture between smooth pastures on low hills and scrubby areas of bog.

NILCA 2000 Report Sensitivity to Change: Low.

LCA 83 – Lower Slieve Croob Foothills (portion still in ABC):

Key Characteristics

- Smooth rolling ridges on the fringes of the Slieve Croob uplands.
- Pattern of gently incised glens and ridges aligned SW-NE.
- Strong geometric field pattern of pastures and hedgerows invaded by gorse.
- Stands of beeches.
- Large stone farmhouses and outbuildings, often painted bright colours.
- Roads follow glen sides and ridge-tops.
- Attractive views across glens and into adjacent landscapes.

NILCA 2000 Report Sensitivity to Change: Medium/High.

LCA 84 – Mourne Foothills (portion still in ABC):

Key Characteristics

- Undulating foothills on the fringes of Slieve Croob and the Mourne Mountains.
- Strong geometric field pattern reinforced by stone walls.
- Sheep grazing dominates.
- Stands of beeches.
- Patches of gorse and stands of wind-sculpted pines.
- Small farms and traditional stone or whitewashed cottages.
- Roads form strong lines in the landscape.

NILCA 2000 Report Sensitivity to Change: High.

LCA 87 - Slieve Croob Summits (portion still in ABC):

Key Characteristics

- Distinctive and prominent rugged summits.
- Open grassland with rocky screes.
- Narrow passes link valleys via tortuous routes.
- Small stone cottages, many derelict.
- Sheep grazing on marginal pastures and grassy summits.
- Conifer plantations, notably the Drumkeeragh Forest.
- Archaeological sites on upland fringes.
- Good panoramic views over the surrounding area.

NILCA 2000 Report Sensitivity to Change: High.

LCA 88 – Craggy Dromara Uplands:

- Rolling, upland drumlin landscape with scattered rocky outcrops.
- Rugged, craggy character.
- Pastures of varied shapes and sizes, many enclosed by stone walls.
- Holly is a characteristic hedgerow species.
- Patches of scrub, clumps of gorse and marshy land provide contrasts in texture and character.
- Stands of Scots pine.
- Derelict farmsteads juxtaposed with recent dispersed development along straight roads on lower slopes.
- Conical gateposts.

NILCA 2000 Report Sensitivity to Change: Medium/High.

LCA 89 – Hillsborough Slopes:

Key Characteristics

- Rounded ridges and hills; lower slopes influenced by drumlin form but dominant ridges have an E-W alignment.
- Windswept ridge-top farmland with a neat, geometric patchwork of fields and hedgerow trees on lower slopes.
- Dense network of winding, narrow roads on lower slopes; straight roads along ridge-tops.
- Small farmsteads are focal points in the landscape.
- Residential development scattered along roads and often visible on skylines.
- Hillsborough Park dominates the highest point of the ridge.
- Long views from ridge-tops.

NILCA 2000 Report Sensitivity to Change: Medium/High.

LCA 109 – Upper Ballinderry Plateau:

Key Characteristics

- Rolling farmland landscape, with numerous hedgerow trees and copses.
- Relatively large farmsteads and many estates.
- Steeper escarpment slope on the southern margin of the plateau, overlooking the Broad Lagan Valley.
- Scattered pattern of farms and houses, with nuclear villages and relatively little linear development.
- Beech avenues and dense stands of mature trees, particularly in estate landscapes.
- Large-scale developments - a prison and poultry farm - are prominent on flatter land to the north of Maghaberry.

NILCA 2000 Report Sensitivity to Change: Medium.

Appendix 2: Draft 2015 NI Regional Landscape Character Areas (NIRLCA)

Draft NIRLCA summary text of 5 ACBCBC LCAs:

13 – Southern Drumlins & Orchards (straddles ACBCBC & Mid-Ulster):

A rolling landscape of drumlins, forming part of the wider drumlin belt which extends both east into County Down and south-west into Monaghan. This is a strongly pastoral landscape, with settlement focused on Dungannon and the ancient town of Armagh, the latter defined by its status in the Church. The River Blackwater flows through the area, and the northern reaches are well known as ‘Orchard County’.

14 – Lough Neagh Basin (straddles ACBCBC, Mid-Ulster, Antrim / N’abbey & Lisburn / Castlereagh):

Ireland’s largest water body; a vast sheet of water surrounded by very low-lying, often boggy land. The area includes the adjacent Lough Beg and Portmore Lough. The lough fringes include high quality farmland as well as development, including the settlements of Lurgan, Craigavon and Portadown, the M1 motorway and the International Airport.

22 – North Down Drumlins & Hills (straddles ACBCBC, Newry/Mourne & Down, Belfast, North Down & Ards):

The eastern section of the wide drumlin belt, defined along its northern edge by igneous geology in contrast to the sedimentary rock of the Lagan valley. Extends from the Castlereagh Hills which frame the Lagan Valley from the south, to the Bann watershed in the south-west and the edge of Slieve Croob in the south. Includes Lurgan, Dromore, Hillsborough and Carryduff, Ballynahinch and Saintfield.

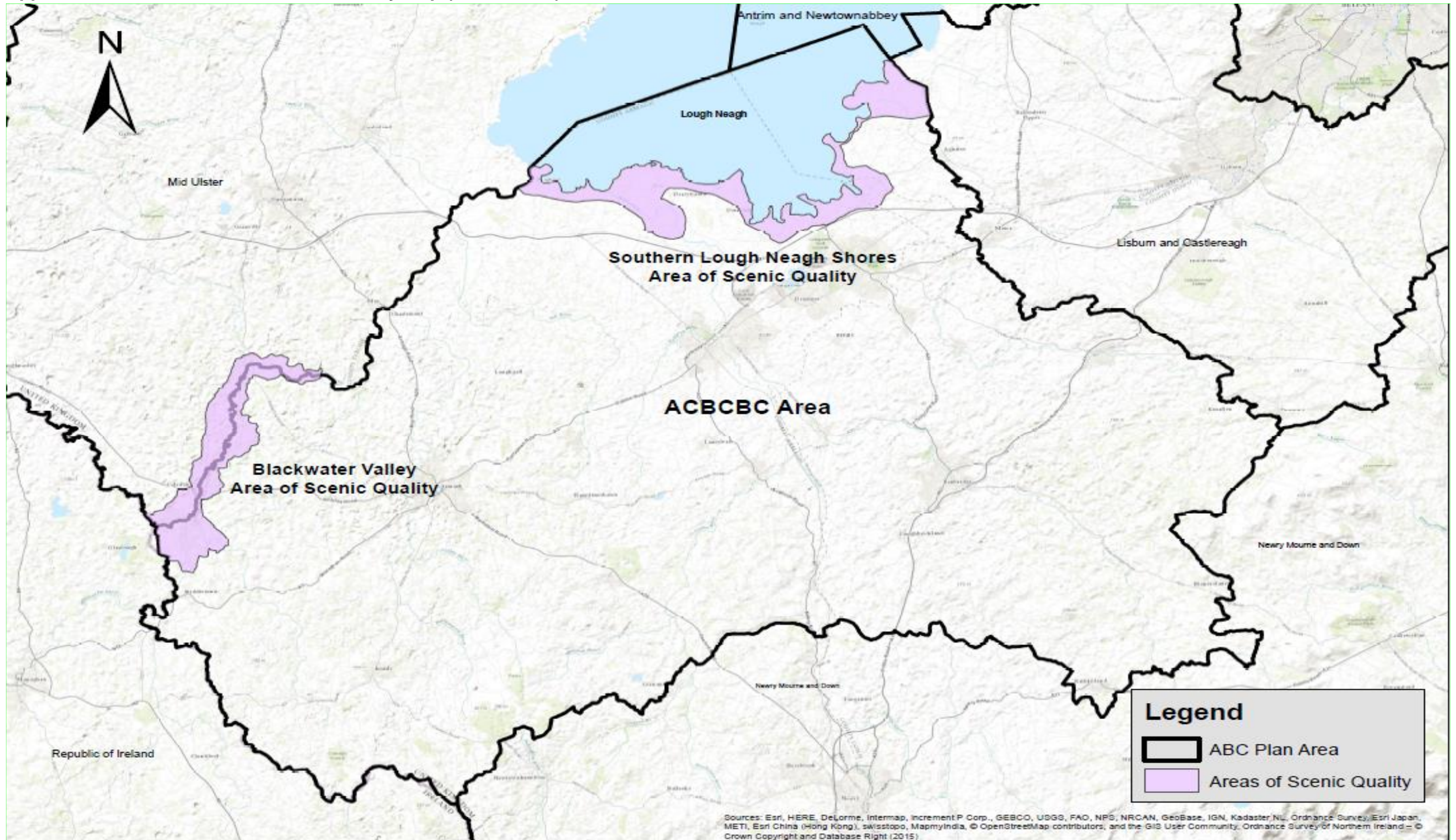
23 – Newry Valley & Upper Bann (straddles ACBCBC, Newry/Mourne & Down):

A marked corridor in the drumlin belt including the distinctive road, rail and canal transport corridor of the Newry Valley, cutting north-south through the area. To the north-east the RLCA is defined by the Upper Bann watershed, and to the south-east by the rising ground of the distinctive Mourne Mountains. Extends south to the port at Warrenpoint and Carlingford Lough.

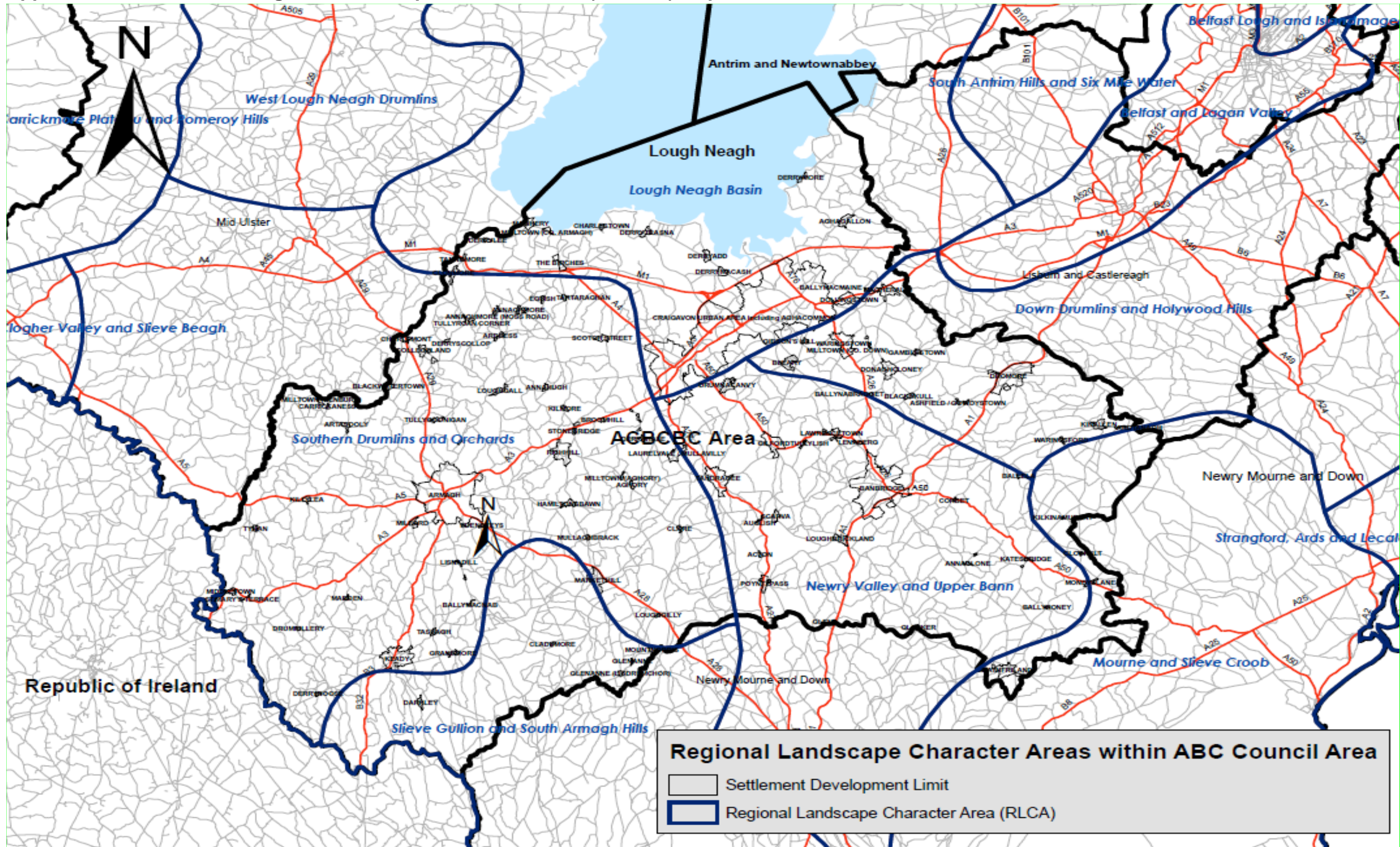
24 – Slieve Gullion & South Armagh Hills (straddles ACBCBC, Newry/Mourne & Down):

Granite Ring of Gullion and the uplands to the north, including Carrigatuke, as distinct from the lower lying drumlins of north Armagh (the Southern Drumlins and Orchards). Includes Crossmaglen and associates and extends into the landscapes of the Republic of Ireland to the south.

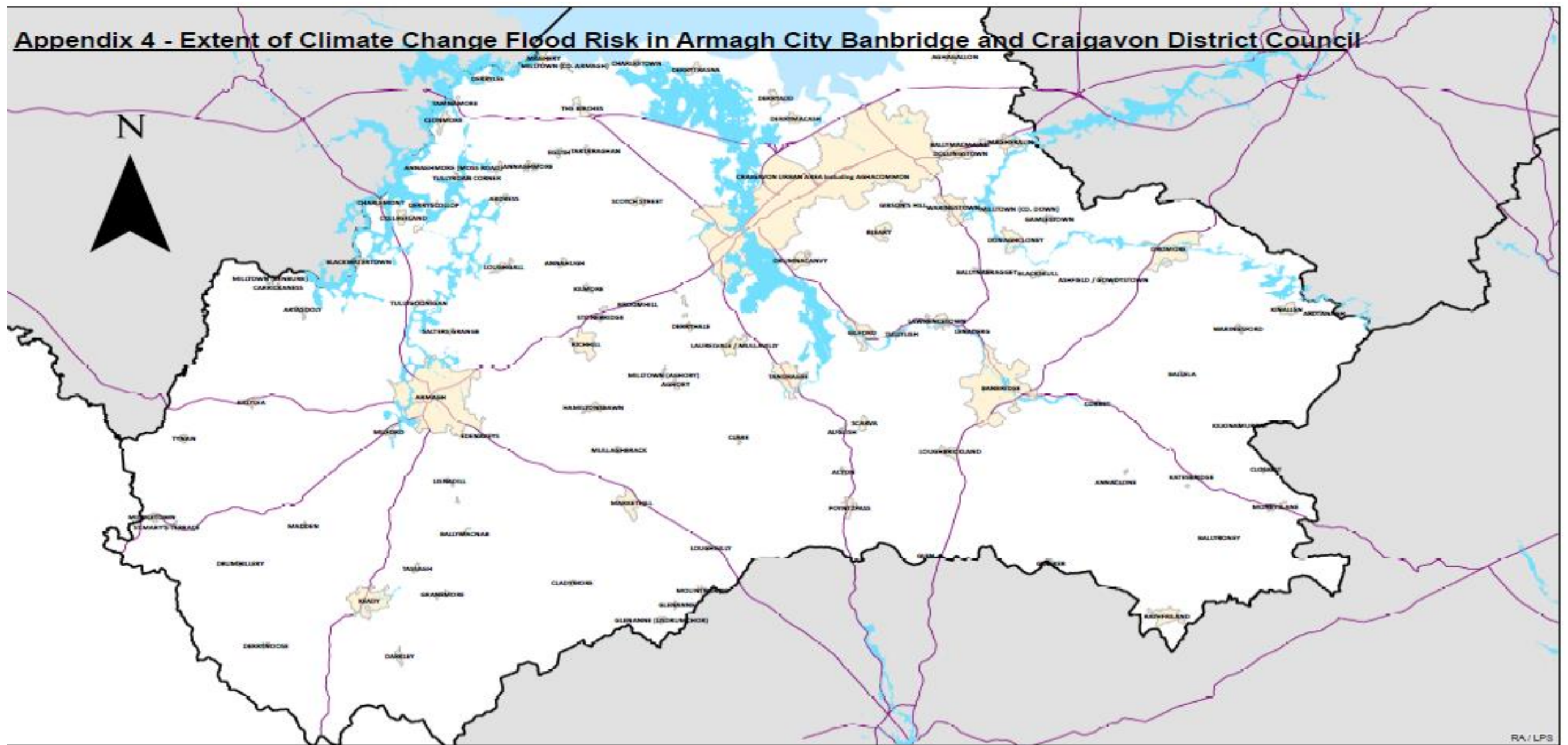
Appendix 4: ACBCBC Area of Scenic Quality Map (NILCA 2000)



Appendix 5: Draft 2015 NI Regional Landscape Character Area (NIRLCA) Map



Appendix 6: ACBCBC Floodplain Maps (1:100 year climate change data)



Legend

- Q100CC Flood Extent Detailed
- Settlement Development Limit

Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon Borough – Planning Department
Marlborough House
Central Way, Craigavon
planning@armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk Tel:03002007830 (NI) or 02838313690