



Topic Paper: Development in the Countryside

# Local Development Plan 2020-2035



Belfast  
City Council

# Executive Summary

## Context

Whilst Belfast City Council area is predominantly urban, it contains a portion of open countryside outside the Metropolitan Development Limit which comprises a small area of upland landscape at Craigantlet to the east of the City, 'the Belfast Hills', which frame the city to the north and west and part of the Lagan Valley Regional Park to the south. Belfast rural area accounts for 30% (or 40.75 km<sup>2</sup>) of the total Belfast Council area. 'Rural' is defined as land outside the settlement development limits.

The Belfast Hills' are a striking landscape feature which provides Belfast City with its unique natural setting. While the Hills have suffered a substantial degree of degradation over the years, the rich historic landscape, natural diversity and scenic attractions make them a valuable resource which needs to be carefully managed.

Northern Ireland's rural area is a unique resource with significant long term potential as places to live and work. Its diverse ecosystems and biodiversity propound the need to retain the sensitive landscape character of our rural resource for future generations. Planning Policy 21 'Sustainable Development in the Countryside' complements the Regional Development Strategy in sustainably managing the growth in the countryside, conserve the landscape and natural resources of the rural area and protect it from excessive or obtrusive development. Through the use of the precautionary principle, the balancing act between facilitating development necessary to achieve a sustainable rural economy through farm diversification and the environment is challenging. The new LDP will be responsible for protecting the environment as a sustainable asset for future generations. Recognition of the precautionary principle will be vital when plan making in particular when outlining proposed land use policy and settlement limits.

To sustain rural communities, new development and employment opportunities which respect local, social and environmental circumstances are required. This means facilitating the development of rural industries, businesses and enterprises in appropriate locations, and ensuring they are integrated appropriately within the settlement or rural landscape. The expansion of rural tourism and associated development that is both sustainable and environmentally sensitive should be encouraged. Rural and urban areas are recognised as interdependent e.g. rural areas depend on urban areas for a range of services and jobs while providing quality recreational and leisure experiences for the urban population. Appropriate rural diversification should be embraced to support businesses, land managers and farmers expand or start new enterprises in appropriate circumstances and at an appropriate scale.



<p><b>Evidence base</b></p> <p>In implementing the policy for the LDP the following areas should be addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental Assets &amp; landscape assessment will provide the evidence base for bringing forward policy for the countryside.</li> <li>• Proposals for development in the countryside must be sited &amp; designed to integrate sympathetically, must not have an adverse impact on the rural character of the area, and meet other planning and environmental considerations.</li> <li>• ‘Building on Tradition’: A Sustainable Design Guide for the Northern Ireland Countryside’ must be taken into account in assessing all development proposals in the countryside.</li> </ul> <p><b>Key areas: Rural Settlement</b> BMAP identified 3 small settlements located in Rural Belfast:</p> <p><b>Hannahstown</b> is situated 4km west of Belfast City Centre, it is sited on the steeply rising Hannahstown Hill Road and the elevated Upper Springfield Road on the slopes of the Belfast Hills, within the Belfast Basalt Escarpment Area of High Scenic Value. Designations include settlement development limits, Local Landscape Policy Area &amp; Rural Landscape Wedge.</p> <p><b>Edenderry</b> lies north east to the River Lagan and within Lagan Valley Regional Park. Designations include Site of Local Nature Conservation Importance, Local Landscape Policy Area. It is an Area of Village Character and has a settlement development limit in place to retain its compact form.</p> <p><b>Loughview</b> is located 6.5km south east of Belfast City centre. Loughview falls within the Area of High Scenic Value within the Castlereagh Escarpment to protect the quality and character of the landscape. A Settlement Development Limit is designated for Loughview to reflect the linear built form and provide development opportunities in line with the scale, character and role of the settlement</p>	<p><b>Rural Proofing</b></p> <p>The NI Programme for Government recognised that all departments have a responsibility for rural areas and was pivotal in raising the profile of rural policy and through the recent introduction of Rural Needs Bill (2016) NI. The purpose of Rural Proofing is to ensure fair and equitable treatment of rural communities.</p> <p>The Council will ensure the needs and any potential for differential impacts on the rural community have been considered from the early stages of the LDP preparation process.</p> <p><b>Social, Economic &amp; Environmental Factors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The preservation of Belfast’s countryside is paramount to conserving its natural assets.</li> <li>• Precautionary principle when zoning land</li> <li>• How do we strike the balance between protecting the rural environment and its suite of environmental designations against the desire to promote city growth?</li> <li>• Can we use a more proactive approach to managing land for development and promotion of access?</li> <li>• How can we best harness the potential of the use of renewable energy in the countryside?</li> <li>• Further exploratory work on the capacity of the countryside to act a viable tourism and economic product for the city whilst protecting habitats and biodiversity.</li> </ul> <p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying creative ways in developing countryside recreation as a tourist destination in Belfast</li> <li>• More accessible connections from the city to the countryside by developing joined up linkages via the greenway network throughout the city</li> <li>• Re-use of existing buildings/houses (sites) in the countryside to help sustain rural economies/ settlements.</li> </ul>
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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION – SETTING THE SCENE

### Purpose of this Document

- 1.1 This is one of a series of 17 topic papers which have been put together to inform the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report for the Belfast Local Development Plan (LDP).
- 1.2 Each topic paper provides a summary of the evidence base required for the Sustainability Appraisal, Preferred Options Paper and Local Development Plan. They establish a baseline position and identify the key issues that need to be addressed.
- 1.3 By combining the evidence gathering stages for both the Sustainability Appraisal and Local Development Plan, we aim to streamline the documentation produced and avoid duplication. It will also help to ensure that sustainable development is embedded in the planning process and that sustainability appraisal is one of the main drivers informing the preparation of the Local Development Plan.
- 1.4 Each topic paper can be read separately but, inevitably, there are important related matters in other topic papers and background evidence.

### Background

- 1.5 Across Northern Ireland around 40% of people live in rural areas. It is thought that the majority of people live within 15 miles of a Hub and within 8 miles of a cluster<sup>1</sup> or village. For the purposes of this paper, 'rural' is defined as land outside the settlement development limits.
- 1.6 Whilst Belfast City Council area is predominantly urban, it contains a portion of open countryside outside the Metropolitan Development Limit which comprises a small area of upland landscape at Craigtantlet to the east of the City, 'the Belfast Hills', which frame the city to the north and west and part of the Lagan Valley Regional Park to the south. Belfast Countryside accounts for 30% (or 40.75 km<sup>2</sup>) of the total Belfast Council area.
- 1.7 'The Belfast Hills' are a striking landscape feature which provides Belfast City with its unique natural setting. While the Hills have suffered a substantial degree of degradation over the years, the rich historic landscape, natural diversity and scenic attractions make them a valuable resource which needs to be carefully managed.
- 1.8 Northern Ireland's rural area is a unique resource with significant long term potential as places to live and work. Its diverse ecosystems and biodiversity propound the need to retain the sensitive landscape character of our rural resource for future generations. The new LDP will be responsible for protecting the environment as a sustainable asset for future generations. Recognition of the precautionary principle will be vital when plan making in particular when outlining proposed land use policy and settlement limits.

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<sup>1</sup> RDS 2035

- 1.9 To sustain rural communities, new development and employment opportunities which respect local, social and environmental circumstances are required. This means facilitating the development of rural industries, businesses and enterprises in appropriate locations, and ensuring they are integrated appropriately within the settlement or rural landscape. The expansion of rural tourism and associated development that is both sustainable and environmentally sensitive should be encouraged.
- 1.10 Rural and urban areas are recognised as interdependent e.g. rural areas depend on urban areas for a range of services and jobs while providing quality recreational and leisure experiences for the urban population. Appropriate rural diversification should be embraced to support businesses, land managers and farmers expand or start new enterprises in appropriate circumstances and at an appropriate scale.
- 1.11 The report reviews the regional policy context of Development in the Countryside, the planning policy guidance and looks at the role of the Local Development Plan (LDP). It presents the foundation of an evidence base of Rural Belfast and its settlements located within it.
- 1.12 It is important for members to note, that in compiling the position paper the best information available has been used however, it will need revised in light any new data. The paper will provide a foundation on which work can commence on a preferred option paper as part of introducing the new planned strategy for Belfast City Council to replace that contained in the exiting BMAP.

### **The Role of the Development Plan**

- 1.13 The LDP process will play an important role for councils in identifying key features and assets of the countryside and balancing the needs of rural areas and communities with the protection of the environment.
- 1.14 In preparing LDPs councils shall 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.
- 1.15 The policy approach must be to cluster, consolidate, and group new development with existing established buildings, and promote the re-use of previously used buildings. This sustainable approach facilitates essential new development, which can benefit from the utilisation of existing services such as access and drainage, whilst simultaneously mitigating the potential adverse impacts upon rural amenity and scenic landscapes arising from the cumulative effect of one-off, sporadic development upon rural amenity and landscape character.
- 1.16 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. The policy approach for development in the countryside will also reflect and complement the overall approach to housing growth across a plan area.

- 1.17 In implementing the policy for the LDP the following areas should be addressed:
- Environmental Assets and landscape assessment will provide the evidence base for the purposes of bring forward an appropriate policy approach for the countryside. This should take into account Landscape Character Assessments
  - In all circumstances proposals for development in the countryside must be sited and designed to integrate sympathetically with their surroundings, must not have an adverse impact on the rural character of the area, and meet other planning and environmental considerations including those for drainage, sewerage, access and road safety. Access arrangements must be in accordance with the DoE's published guidance.<sup>2</sup>
- 1.18 Supplementary planning guidance contained within 'Building on Tradition': A Sustainable Design Guide for the Northern Ireland Countryside' must be taken into account in assessing all development proposals in the countryside

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<sup>2</sup> *Development Control Advice Note 15 'Vehicular Access Standards' (Second Edition) August 1999.*

## 2.0 POLICY CONTEXT

### Regional Policy

- 2.1 The Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035 highlights the link between the overarching environmental benefits of our green infrastructure with health and well-being. Our green infrastructure maintains air and water quality, provides drainage, absorbs carbon and other harmful gases as well as provides social benefits of exercise, recreational activities which supports a healthy lifestyle.

### Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035

- 2.2 The Regional Development Strategy (RDS) sets the context for the sustainable development of Northern Ireland to 2035. The RDS acts as the spatial strategy of the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government. The RDS was revised in 2010 to reflect the changing development of Northern Ireland and continues to set the overarching planning framework for the region. The RDS offers two types of strategic guidance; Regional Guidance (RG) which applied to the entire region which relates to the three themes of sustainable development – Economy, Society and Environment; and; Spatial Framework (SFG) which is additional regional guidance which is shaped specifically to address the 5 elements of the Spatial Framework<sup>3</sup>.
- 2.3 The 8 aims of the RDS encourage sustainable and balanced development in the countryside through:
- Support strong, sustainable growth for the benefit of all parts of Northern Ireland. A growing regional economy will benefit from strong urban and rural areas. Balanced regional growth Building a Better Future and tackling regional imbalance are critical issues for the region.
  - Strengthen Belfast as the regional economic driver and Londonderry as the principal city of the North West
  - Support our towns, villages and rural communities to maximise their potential. Our rural areas including our towns and villages have a key role in supporting economic growth. They offer opportunities in terms of their potential for growth in new sectors, the provision of rural recreation and tourism, their attractiveness as places to invest, live and work, and their role as a reservoir of natural resources and highly valued landscapes.
  - Promote development which improves the health and well-being of communities.
  - Improve connectivity to enhance the movement of people, goods, energy and information between places. Improved connectivity will support the network of towns and their associated hinterlands. Neighbouring towns support each other and

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<sup>3 3</sup> *The Spatial Framework enables coherent strategic decisions to be made in response to developmental and infrastructural investment challenges. It sets out priorities to achieve sustainable development and is focused on the main hubs and clusters of the region. The five areas are, the metropolitan area of Belfast, Derry – principle city of the North West, hubs and clusters of hubs, the rural area and gateways and corridors.*



their hinterlands in the provision of services. Good linkages between towns and rural areas for access to services and business opportunities are vital.

- Protect and enhance the environment for its own sake. Protecting the environment is essential for enhancing the quality of life of current and future generations. Northern Ireland's environment is one of its greatest assets, with its stunning landscapes, an outstanding coastline, a complex variety of wildlife and a rich built and cultural heritage for the ecosystem services it provides, and its sense of place and history for all.
- Take actions to reduce our carbon footprint and facilitate adaptation to climate change. Everyone should contribute to reducing the Region's carbon footprint.
- Strengthen links between north and south, east and west, with Europe and the rest of the world.

### **Strategic Guidance**

- 2.4 Throughout the Strategic Guidance of the RDS, the Rural Area is featured widely and this recognition has extracted these references:
- 2.5 RG 2: Deliver a balanced approach to transport infrastructure  
Improve connectivity – management of our regional infrastructure, attractive transport choices will improve access to cities, towns and rural areas.
- 2.6 RG 3: Implement a balanced approach to telecommunications infrastructure that will give a competitive advantage  
Improve telecom services in smaller rural areas to minimise the urban/rural divide.
- 2.7 RG 6: Strengthen Community Cohesion  
The village concept is important for both rural and suburban areas as it can bring people together and strengthen communities by sharing a sense of place and identity.
- 2.8 RG 7: Support Urban and Rural Renaissance  
Rural renaissance likewise is about revitalising the centres of small towns and villages so that they meet the immediate needs of the communities they serve. Redevelopment can include the reuse of both Listed Buildings and of locally important buildings, particularly the reuse of vernacular buildings and industrial heritage buildings/structures.
- 2.9 It is important to promote a joined up approach to support urban and rural renaissance to ensure all stakeholders are involved.
- 2.10 RG 8: Manage housing growth to achieve sustainable patterns of residential development  
Housing is a key driver of physical, economic and social change in both urban and rural areas. Strategic planning places emphasis on the importance of the relationship between the location of housing, jobs, facilities and services and infrastructure. This includes the need for development patterns that do not have an adverse impact on environmental resources and the built heritage and which mitigate the risk of flooding by avoiding those areas known to be at risk.

- 2.11 Use a broad evaluation framework to assist judgements on the allocation of housing growth i.e. Urban and Rural Character Test – assessment should be made of the potential to maintain a sense of place, and to integrate new development in a way that does not detract from the character and identity of the settlement.
- 2.12 The allocation of housing growth to specific locations in a district is a matter for decision through the development plan process. In the allocation process due weight needs to be given to reinforcing the leading role of the Hubs and the clusters of Hubs. Another important step in this allocation process is making judgements to achieve a complementary urban/rural balance to meet the need for housing in the towns of the district and to meet the needs of the rural community living in smaller settlements and countryside.

### **Spatial Framework**

One of the five components of the Spatial Framework is the Rural Area. It recognises not only its stand alone function but also that the rural hinterland can also support services in the urban centres.

- 2.13 SFG 10: Identify and consolidate the roles and functions of settlements within the clusters. Assess the roles and function of settlements. When development plans are being prepared an assessment of settlements and surrounding rural areas will assist in identifying their roles and functions. The work of the Settlement Information Classification Analysis Group (SICAG) on settlement service classification (Appendix A) will be an important reference in the preparation of these assessments.

### **The Rural Area**

- 2.14 SFG 13: Sustain rural communities living in smaller settlements and the open countryside  
A strong network of smaller towns supported by villages helps to sustain and service the rural community. A sustainable approach to further development will be important to ensure that growth does not exceed the capacity of the environment or the essential infrastructure expected for modern living.
- Establish the role of multi-functional town centres. These should be the prime locations for business, housing, administration, leisure and cultural facilities both for urban and rural communities.
  - Connect rural and urban areas. This is necessary to widen the economic base of town, village and countryside. Provide support and networking opportunities to encourage the formation of local alliances to exploit complementary resources and facilities.
  - Revitalise small towns and villages. This is particularly relevant to those towns and villages which have been static or declining and contain areas of social need. Deprivation happens in different ways in different places. An integrated approach between government departments, agencies and communities will ensure that regeneration plans reflect the specific needs of each community.
  - Facilitate the development of rural industries, businesses and enterprises in appropriate locations. Farming plays a major part in sustaining rural community networks, as employers, consumers and producers. Forestry and fishing also contribute to communities, in employment and commercial terms, as well as in terms of recreation opportunities.

Other industries such as tourism and renewable energy can provide further jobs and opportunities in rural areas as long they are integrated appropriately within the settlement or rural landscape.

- Encourage sustainable and sensitive development. The expansion of rural tourism and development which is both sustainable and sensitive to the environment should be encouraged. This includes the ability of settlements and landscapes to absorb development.

#### **SFG 14: Improve Accessibility for Rural Communities**

Rural communities can be disadvantaged by virtue of their remote location from a range of facilities and essential services. This disadvantage can be lessened by innovative use of existing services and the application of new and developing technologies.

- 2.15 Improve the overall connectivity of rural communities to services and other parts of the Region by exploring innovative ways of bringing these services to the communities. Using the community hall, local school or church hall for visiting service providers will help keep people living in rural areas connected. Different service delivery approaches could include outreach and mobile services or increased use of Information Communication Technology.
- 2.16 Integrate local transport. Promoting integrated rural transport initiatives which meet the needs of those living in isolated areas and in particular elderly and disabled people.

#### **Belfast Metropolitan Area**

- 2.17 Belfast has a small rural hinterland. Whilst the focus of the Spatial Framework Guidance for Belfast is largely urban, the rural policy aspect is interwoven within the guidance. Within SPG2: Grow the population of the City of Belfast, references the internationally important conservation sites that could be affected by the expansion of Belfast's population. Housing growth must be appropriately managed to avoid adverse effects on these sites. Increased recreational use could put pressure on nearby sites e.g. Belfast Lough. There could also be increased demands on water resources and waste water disposal. It will be necessary when planning the location and phasing of development that there is sufficient capacity in the existing water supply and waste-water treatment infrastructure or that this can be provided ahead of development without harming the environment.<sup>4</sup>
- 2.18 The protection of the environment is further discussed in SPG 5: Protect and Enhance the quality of the setting of the BMUA and its environmental assets. The policy recognises the natural setting of the city surrounded by the hills and outlines the importance of existing environmental assets and protected areas of high scenic value:
- Protect areas of high scenic value, undeveloped coastline, Belfast Lough, the Lagan Valley Regional Park and the hills around the BMUA from development.
  - Protect and enhance the network of open spaces in the BMUA
  - Make use of green space to help manage access to important wildlife sites and minimise the potential for damage due to visitor pressure.

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<sup>4</sup> RDS 2035

## **Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) ‘Planning Sustainable Development’**

- 2.19 The Department of the Environment’s Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) sets out strategic subject planning policy for a wide range of planning matters. It also provides the core planning principles to underpin delivery of the two-tier planning system with the aim of furthering sustainable development. It sets the strategic direction for the new councils to bring forward detailed operational policies within future local development plans.
- 2.20 The SPPS recognises the countryside as being one of our greatest assets and the multitude of functions it hosts including its amenity value, supports agriculture, offers opportunities for sustainable growth and is home to 40% of Northern Ireland’s population.
- 2.21 In line with the RDS 2035, SPPS propounds the need to sustain rural communities, new development and employment opportunities which respect local, social and environmental circumstances. Facilitating development in appropriate locations is considered necessary to ensure proposals are integrated appropriately within rural settlements or in the case of countryside locations, within the rural landscape.
- 2.22 The aim of the SPPS with regard to the countryside is to manage development in a manner which strikes a balance between protection of the environment from inappropriate development, while supporting and sustaining rural communities consistent with the RDS.
- 2.23 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.

### **Call for Evidence**

- 2.24 The Minister of the Environment committed to undertake a review of regional strategic planning policy for development in the countryside following the publication of SPPS in its final form in 2015. The ‘Call for Evidence’ aimed to improve the Department of Environment’s (DoE) understanding of the operation and impact of the existing strategic policy and provide up-to-date evidence on the social, environmental and economic impacts of development in the countryside. The DoE was particularly keen for views on how strategic planning policy should assist with achieving sustainable development to support vibrant rural communities, without compromising our natural and built environment, and other assets of acknowledged importance.
- 2.25 The Council agreed the response to the Call for Evidence which is attached in Appendix 2.

- 2.26 In September 2016, the Infrastructure Minister announced a review of planning policies on renewable energy and countryside development. It is expected to be completed in 2018. Stakeholder engagement and public consultation is expected in 2017.

### **Planning Policy Statements**

- 2.27 Planning Policy 21 ‘Sustainable Development in the Countryside’ was published on 01st June 2010. PPS 21 replaces PPS 14, relating to suitable and sustainable development of the rural environment in Northern Ireland.
- 2.28 The RDS is complemented by the Department of Environment’s suite of Planning Policy Statements (PPS), in particular PPS 21 “Sustainable Development in the Countryside” which has been retained under SPPS. The Policy 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.

### **Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland (1993)**

- 2.29 The purpose of the Strategy is to contribute to the quality of life in Northern Ireland, it is an attempt to meet rural society’s development needs and aspirations, to protect the environment and to encourage environmentally sustainable development. The strategy establishes the objectives and the policies for land use and development appropriate to the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland and which need to be considered on a scale wider than the individual District Council Area. The strategic objectives of the strategy are<sup>5</sup>:
- to protect and enhance the natural and man-made environment;
  - to meet the future development needs of the rural community;
  - to facilitate regeneration of the rural economy;
  - to accommodate change, while maintaining the character of the countryside;
  - to revitalise rural towns and villages in order to make them more attractive places in which to live and work; and
  - to promote a high quality of design new development.
- 2.30 The majority of Strategic Policies contained within the Strategy have now been superseded by various Planning Policy Statements (PPS). Following a review of Planning Policy Statements the following Strategic Policies contained within the Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland will be retained:
- DES 10: Landscaping
  - IC 15: Roadside Service Facilities
  - MIN 6: Safety and Amenity

<sup>5</sup> A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland [http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/policy/rural\\_strategy.htm](http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/policy/rural_strategy.htm)

- PSU1: Community Needs
- PSU 11: Overhead Cables
- TOU 5: Advance Direction Signs

2.31 The remaining policy that has not been superseded is either no longer required or will be updated by the Local Development Plan.

### **Northern Ireland Sustainability Strategy**

2.32 The NI Executive's 'Everyone's Involved – Sustainable Development Strategy' includes six priority areas for action; the most relevant of which is "striking an appropriate balance between the responsible use and protection of natural resources in support of a better quality of life and better quality environment". This priority action contains the following strategic objectives.

- Ensure an appropriate policy and legislative framework is in place supported by a regulatory regime which will deliver statutory environmental standards in respect of air, water and other environmental pollution.
- Promote sustainable land management.
- Promote sustainable marine management.
- Ensure our built heritage is used in a sustainable way.
- Improve the quality of life of our people by planning and managing development in ways which are sustainable and which contribute to creating a better environment.
- Take action to reduce biodiversity loss.

2.33 Local Development Plans should reflect these strategic aims of the Executive within the plan strategy and local policies plan. These objectives relate to this paper with its focus on the city and its relationship with the countryside in terms of its landscapes, biodiversity, development constraints including flood plains and recreational opportunities.

### **Water Framework Directive (WFD)**

2.34 The WFD is transposed into law through the Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 (Statutory Rule 2003 No. 544). WFD aims to achieve 'Good Ecological Status' or better, for the quality of all water bodies. This means ensuring healthy aquatic ecosystems whilst balancing water/nature protection and the sustainable use of natural resources.

2.35 A key feature of the WFD is the development of River Basin Management Plans which takes an integrated approach to the protection, improvement and sustainable use of water environment. Belfast falls within the North Eastern River Basin District.

2.36 NIEA have formed a NI Water Management Unit River Basin District Group to deliver a series of catchment projects in partnership with government agencies and stakeholders. An example of these catchment programmes includes, the 'Living with Water Programme' is a strategic drainage infrastructure programme that aims to improve water quality within the

Belfast Lough Catchment. This programme will seek to protect against flood risk by determining the level and types of capital infrastructural investment that is necessary to alleviate the problem which will in turn have a multiplier effect for economic and environmental benefit.

### **Habitats and Birds Directive**

2.37 Intensive agricultural practices and development pressures are threatening our natural habitats. In 1992, the European Commission adopted legislation to protect natural habitats called the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of wild fauna and flora Council Directive (92/43/EEC). The Habitats and Birds Directive aims to maintain biodiversity of a range of “rare, threatened or endemic animal and plant species” whilst taking cognisance of the economic, social, cultural and regional requirements. Alongside the Birds Directive, the Habitats Directive sets out the European natural heritage conservation policy and established ‘Natura 2000’ which is a network of nature protection sites.

### **Rural White Paper**

2.38 The Rural White Paper Action Plan was launched in 2012 and is the first cross-departmental initiative to focus entirely on rural issues which provides a framework to guide the work of the Executive in responding to rural challenges until 2022. The vision of the Paper outlines:

- A fair and inclusive rural society
- Improved infrastructure and transport systems to ensure rural dwellers can avail of employment opportunities and key services
- Rural areas that maintain their distinctive features as places of agricultural production, areas of outstanding beauty, places of social, historic and cultural uniqueness
- Continuing development of linkages between rural and urban areas

2.39 From this vision five key themes were identified; 1) Urban/Rural Linkages; 2) Access to Services; 3) Rural Communities; 4) Rural Economies and 5) the Countryside. The key policy priorities are contained in appendix 3.

2.40 This Action Plan provides an opportunity to support growth, jobs and sustainable development in our rural areas. It advocates a strategic approach to improving competitiveness, fostering job creation, maintaining and investing in the region’s natural, cultural and community assets and supporting innovation in rural areas.

### **Rural Needs Bill**

2.41 The first primary legislation in the UK requiring all government departments and agencies to consider rural issues in new and revised policies and strategies. It places a duty on public authorities to have due regard for rural needs when developing, implementing or devising policies, plans or programmes. There is a requirement to inform the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) on how they have fulfilled this duty on an annual basis. DAERA have produced guidance on rural proofing in ‘Thinking Rural: The Essential Guide to Rural Proofing’.

- 2.42 The Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 received Royal Assent in May 2016 and will commence for local Councils on 1st June 2017.

### **Thinking Rural: The Essential Guide to Rural Proofing**

- 2.43 Provides a guide for all government departments and agencies to consider the impact a policy may have in rural areas and its communities. The purpose of Rural Proofing is to ensure fair and equitable treatment of rural communities and that a policy does not indirectly have a detrimental impact on rural dwellers and rural communities. As part of the LDP process due diligence will be paid to an assessment of rural proofing.
- 2.44 Thinking Rural sets out the various stages of the rural proofing process and provides a template for the preparation of a Rural Issues Statement. The council will ensure that the needs and any potential for differential impacts on the rural community have been considered from the early stages of the local development plan preparation process.<sup>6</sup>

### **Sustainable Rural Communities: A Review of the Housing Executive's Rural Housing Policy**

- 2.45 The Housing Executive is reviewing its Rural Homes and People Policy (2007-2015) to refresh the approach to addressing the specific housing needs of rural communities. The policy consultation closed in March 2016.
- 2.46 This consultation document sets out the proposals for a revised rural housing policy - 'Sustainable Rural Communities', taking account of the issues currently facing rural communities, within the wider European and UK context and also building on the achievements of the Housing Executive's 'Rural Homes and People' policy (2007-2015). The review focuses on how the Housing Executive can work in collaboration with housing providers, other government departments and agencies, Councils and the voluntary and community sector to deliver housing and housing services in rural areas which will help to support and sustain rural communities within a Community Planning context.
- 2.47 The Housing Executive's contribution to supporting sustainable rural communities focuses on two key elements: planning, enabling and improving rural homes; and supporting and investing in rural people. Based on this the following five policy objectives are proposed:
- 1) To plan and enable the provision of affordable homes which meet rural housing needs;
  - 2) To improve the condition of rural housing stock and reduce fuel poverty;
  - 3) To provide housing support to vulnerable people in rural areas;
  - 4) To contribute to the development of safe, cohesive and engaged rural neighbourhoods;
  - 5) To work in partnership with others to assist in rural development.
- 2.48 Of the Housing Executive's homes 14% are located in rural areas and, as part of its rural housing policy review, it has proposed action under five key areas which it believes will

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<sup>6</sup> *Development Plan Practice Note: Introduction Context for Local Development Plans. (April 2015) DoE.*



contribute positively to sustaining a vibrant, thriving rural community. According to NIHE figures, only 18 NIHE properties are located within rural Belfast (Hannahstown).

## **Tackling Poverty and Social Isolation**

- 2.49 The Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework is a rural initiative led by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) which aims to tackle poverty and social isolation in rural areas through organisations working in partnership to design and implement measures which target the needs of vulnerable people.
- 2.50 While poverty and social isolation exist in both urban areas and rural areas it is recognised that those living in rural areas often experience poverty and social isolation differently due to issues relating to geographical isolation, lower population density and the dispersed nature of many rural settlements. Living in a rural area can also exacerbate the effects of poverty and social isolation for certain groups. For example additional costs of living in a rural area such as higher fuel or transport costs can have a greater impact on people on low incomes while some groups such as young people or people with disabilities may experience greater difficulties accessing transport services in rural areas than in urban settings.
- 2.51 The TRPSI Framework has been developed to provide a broad Framework within which Departments, other public sector organisations and the rural sector can work in partnership to develop new and innovative ways to help alleviate the effects of poverty and social isolation in rural areas, particularly among vulnerable groups.
- 2.52 The Framework will focus on three Priority Areas for Intervention, namely Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation.

## **Local Policy**

### **Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan**

- 2.53 As outlined in Countryside and Coast strategy of BMAP, the Plan Proposals in line with the RDS, embrace the principles of sustainable development, and seek to improve the quality of life of rural communities, while developing the economy, and protecting the environment in the countryside surrounding the Metropolitan Urban Area. The Countryside and Coast Strategy aims to:
- Encourage vibrant rural communities in the towns, villages and small settlements
  - Sustain and diversify the rural economy by making provision for employment/industrial use in towns and villages
  - Conserve or enhance the rural landscape, ensuring the protection of the metropolitan setting
  - Protect the coastal area
- 2.54 The Plan seeks to protect the distinctive setting of the BMA and the rural character of Belfast Hills, to provide opportunities for recreation and conservation, and to reconcile potential conflicts between various land uses through the combination of the following:

- Designation of Areas of High Scenic Value at Belfast Basalt Escarpment and Craigtantlet Escarpment (Designation COU 5, Plan Proposals); a number of Local Landscape Policy Areas (straddling the City boundary and at Hannahstown); and a Rural Landscape Wedge to conserve the scenic qualities of the area and promote their enjoyment.
- Conservation of the biodiversity and ecological richness of the area through the designation of 10 (additional 3) Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance.
- Designation of 16 (additional 3) access points to Belfast Hills at which appropriate, limited access and small-scale visitor facilities could be accommodated to encourage their responsible public use for recreation.
- Designation of Area of Significant Archaeological Interest The Giants Ring
- Designation of a small settlement at Edenderry, Hannahstown and Loughview.
- Designation of a Village Character at Edenderry

#### 2.55 The Rural Community

The focus of the strategy is to accommodate more housing in the main towns and villages in order to meet local need, maintain a strong network of settlements in the rural area and sustain the rural community. During the past two decade, the small towns and villages in the Belfast 'travel to work' area have experienced a rapid rise of population growth. The Plan Proposals therefore recognise that some settlements in the rural area will require more measured growth in order to protect their identity, character and setting.

### The Rural Economy

2.56 It is recognised that a living and working countryside requires a strong, diversified and competitive rural economy. Although the numbers working in agriculture in the rural area represent only a relatively small proportion of those working in the agriculture industry in Northern Ireland, agriculture remains important to the rural economy, and it is also a significant factor in shaping and maintaining landscapes.

2.57 The Plan Proposal provides new opportunities for business development to facilitate the growth and diversification of the rural economy, by zoning land for business and industry. These zonings will provide employment opportunities for the rural population. Regional planning policies also facilitate business development and farm diversification of a nature and scale appropriate to the open countryside.

### Agriculture

2.58 There are a small number of farms in Belfast with their holdings being defined as small or very small. With increased pressure on the agricultural sector there is a growing need for farmers to diversify into non agricultural activities in order to supplement their farming income.

### Woodland and Forestry

2.59 Belvoir Park Forest covers an area of 94 hectares and is managed by Forest Service (under Department of Agriculture and Environment and Rural Affairs DAERA). The Forest

Service also assists in the planning and management of privately owned woodlands through the payment of grants.

- 2.60 Community Woodlands have been established by the Woodland Trust and manages the following sites:
- Woodland Walkway, Knockmount Gardens
  - Ligoniel Wood, Mill Avenue
  - Old Throne Wood, Antrim Road
  - Mill Dam Wood, Ballygomartin Road
- 2.61 There is a wide variety of Parks including Lagan Valley Regional Park and Cavehill Country Park. NIEA has responsibility for ensuring the management of Colin Glen Linear Park in Suffolk/ Dunmurray. The Colin Glen Trust currently manages the Park under a contract management. Management of the Park focuses on the provision of countryside recreation and environmental education for the people of West Belfast and Lisburn, and has involved restoring areas to semi-natural woodland habitat.

## **Fishing**

- 2.62 Aquaculture is expanding and the shellfish farming industry has gained new sites, including licences in Belfast Lough and Larne Lough. It has a valuable export market and sustains important local employment. A number of companies supplying and processing seafood and fish are based in Belfast.

## **Minerals**

- 2.63 Mineral exploration and development provides employment and necessary materials for construction in localised areas where useful deposits occur. However, extraction and processing can have a significant impact on the countryside. The Plan Proposals recognise the need for a sustainable approach that takes account of the need to protect and conserve environmental resources. Regional planning policies for mineral developments are currently set out in 'A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland'. This contains a range of policies for the control of mineral developments, taking into account environmental protection, visual amenity, public safety and traffic considerations.
- 2.64 Mineral developments also need to respect the environmental policies contained in PPS 2: Natural Heritage and PPS 6: Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage. In May 2012, the Minerals Resource Map of Northern Ireland was launched by the Environment Minister and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. The map will provide planners, industry and local communities with a tool to assist future decisions on a county-to-county basis in relation to the supply of minerals and in the protection of the environment.
- 2.65 In March 2016, the Minister for Environment issued a 'Call for Evidence' to inform the future approach to Permitted Development Rights for Mineral Exploration as set out in Part 16 of the schedule to the Planning (General Development Order) Northern Ireland (2015). The 'Call for Evidence' is to support the forthcoming review of the existing provisions on

permitted development rights for mineral exploration and the balance between operational activity and environmental protection.

## **The Rural Environment**

2.66 The rural environment throughout Northern Ireland is undergoing significant change in response to the restructuring of agriculture and increasing urban dispersal pressures. The countryside in rural Belfast contains a variety of distinctive rural landscapes, including the hills surrounding Belfast, the coast of Belfast Lough and the Lagan Valley Regional Park, which together provide a high quality setting for the urban area. The need to protect this setting forms a central component of the Countryside and Coast Strategy. The challenge throughout the rural area is to accommodate future development while protecting and caring for the environment, and maintaining the rural character of the countryside.

## **Countryside and Coast Policies and Proposals**

2.67 Within the BMA, landscapes which are particularly sensitive because of their quality/ location/ pressures for development are afforded special protection. Those of relevance to Belfast include:

- Rural Landscape Wedges (Policy COU 1)
- BMA Coastal Area (Designation COU 2 and Policy COU 3)
- Areas of High Scenic Value (Designation COU 5 and Policy Cou 6)
- Belfast Hills Access Points (COU 8)
- Lagan Valley Regional Park (Designation COU 9 and Policy COU 10, COU 11 and COU 12)

2.68 Within these areas, development proposals will be assessed in the context of the Plan Proposals, prevailing regional planning policy including the following Planning Policy Statements, PPS 2: Natural Heritage, PPS 6: Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage, PPS 8: Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation, PPS 15: Planning and Flood Risk & PPS 21: Sustainable Development in the Countryside and A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland.

2.69 The above policies have been referred to in previous Position Paper 8: Natural Heritage and can be viewed in appendix 4.

## 3.0 Belfast's Rural Profile

### Hannahstown

#### 3.1 Character

Hannahstown is located on the Belfast Hills, within Belfast Basalt Escarpment Area of High Scenic Value. The settlement is sited on the steeply rising Hannahstown Hill Road and the elevated Upper Springfield Road, 4km west of Belfast City Centre, adjacent to Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council. Hannahstown comprises of 3 nodes and is of a linear form.

#### 3.2 Facilities

- St Joseph's Catholic Church.
- Playground just outside settlement limit.
- Lamh Derg GAA Complex just outside settlement development limit.
- Graveyard and parochial house.
- Community Hall.

#### 3.3 Assets and Constraints

- Area of high landscape quality.
- Two areas considered to be of greater amenity value, landscape quality or local significance, worthy of protection from undesirable or damaging development by Local Landscape Policy area designation.
- Scheduled and unscheduled archaeological sites as well as monuments within the area, including a souterrain.
- Designated Rural Landscape Wedge.
- Lack of footpath from community centre to Lamh Dhearg.
- Linkages with the Belfast Hills, from Divis Mountain through to Colin Glen and Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park.

#### 3.4 Justification of Settlement Development Limit

The Settlement Development Limit is designated:

- To Prevent coalescence of the three nodes;
- To protect the environmental quality, as well as the landscape and visual amenity of the high landscape quality where it is located;
- To prevent ribboning and urban sprawl extending into the surrounding countryside;
- To prevent coalescence with the Belfast urban area.

### Loughview

#### 3.5 Character

Loughview is a small settlement located 6.5km south east of Belfast City Centre. The settlement developed along the Church Road and was encouraged by the opening of Loughview Integrated Primary and Nursery School in 1993.

### **3.6 Facilities**

- Graveyard.
- Castlereagh Presbyterian Church and Hall opposite.
- The Learning Tree pre-school.
- Loughview Integrated Primary School.
- Young Ones Nursery School.
- Henry Jones Playing Fields.

### **3.7 Justification of Settlement Development Limit**

- Settlement limit reflects the linear built form of the settlement along Church Road and provide development opportunities in line with the scale, character and role of the settlement.
- To restrict the ribboning of development along Church Road and prevent the potential coalescence.

### **3.8 Assets and Constraints**

- Loughview is within an area of High Scenic Value.
- An archaeological site and monument lies just outside the settlement development limit.

## **Edenderry**

### **3.9 Character**

Edenderry is a small settlement located approximately 8km south of Belfast City Centre and 8km North East of Lisburn City Centre. The settlement is within the Lagan Valley Regional Park and lies North East of the River Lagan. The mill industries on the River Lagan led to the development of the settlement and it is now a mix of traditional terraced redbrick and newer semi-detached suburban dwellings.

### **3.10 Facilities**

- Playground
- Edenderry Gospel Hall.

### **3.11 Assets and Constraints**

- The settlement has been designated as an area of village character.
- The area surrounding the settlement development limit has been designated as a Local Landscape Policy Area as well as a site of Local Nature Conservation Importance.
- An ASAI and State Care Monument, Giants Ring, is located just outside the settlement development limit to the North West.
- Lack of services and facilities;
- Location within Lagan Valley Regional Park , Set within Lagan Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
- Proximity to River Lagan
- Two Listed Buildings;
- Proximity to Lisburn and Belfast City Centres;
- Quality Landscape Setting; and
- On public transport route.
- No meeting place.

### 3.12 Justification of Settlement Development Limit

The Settlement Development Limit is designated:

- To retain a compact form while including existing development commitments such as the redevelopment of the St. Ellen's Industrial Estate mill buildings;
- To protect the landscape and visual amenity of the Lagan Valley Regional Park and the Lagan Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; and
- To exclude lands of high environmental quality and wildlife value, together with features that are historically and archaeologically important.

**3.13** Within the new BCC boundary, BMAP identified potentially 3 settlements located in Rural Belfast – Hannahstown, Edenderry and Loughview. Appendix 5 Map of Belfast's Rural Area shows the extent of the rural area of Belfast and the settlements located within them.

### 3.14 Development Pressure Analysis

The development pressure analysis seeks to identify where significant pressure has occurred and/or where local rural character is under threat of significant change. PPS 21 sets out the need for a Development Pressure Analysis and refers back to PPS 1 which has been superseded for further detailed information.

## Single Rural Dwellings

**3.15** Following a request by Belfast City Council, the Department for Infrastructure (DFI) have provided records of planning decisions (approvals and refusals) issued for all single rural dwelling and replacement rural dwelling applications within the Belfast City Council Area from 2004 until 2016. This period coincides with the year that BMAP stopped their analysis.

**3.16** This analysis will be based on the impact of PPS 21 which was introduced in 2010, 4 years after draft PPS14 was introduced. During the period from which this analysis covers (2004-2016), proposals for rural dwellings were primarily influenced by 'A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland' (1993), Draft PPS 14 (2006), Draft PPS 21 (2009) and the final version of PPS 21 (2010).

**3.17** Due to the urban nature of the Belfast City Council Area the number of rural single house and replacement applications compared to other councils is minimal. In 2015/2016 there were 2,746 applications in Northern Ireland and of these only 3 were in the Belfast City Council Area. Since 2004 there have been 30 applications for rural single houses with 19 approvals and 11 refusals giving an approval rating of 63%. There were 50 applications for replacement dwellings with 46 approvals and 4 refusals giving an approval rating of 92%.

**3.18** The Analytical Services Branch of the DoE provided records of planning decisions (outline, reserved matters and full planning decisions) in the Belfast City Council area between 2004-2015. Table 1 below, shows the number of new and replacement single dwelling approvals and refusals. Over the 12 year period, 65 single rural dwellings have been approved in Belfast. The location of the 65 dwellings approved between 2004 and 2016 can be viewed in Appendix 9: Single Rural Dwelling Approvals 2004-2016.

Year	Approvals			Refusals			TOTAL
	New	Replacement	Total	New	Replacement	Total	
2004/05	4	4	8	3	0	3	<b>11</b>
2005/06	2	3	5	2	0	2	<b>7</b>
2006/07	0	5	5	0	1	1	<b>6</b>
2007/08	1	7	8	0	0	0	<b>8</b>
2008/09	0	5	5	0	0	0	<b>5</b>
2009/10	0	9	9	0	1	1	<b>10</b>
2010/11	3	3	6	1	0	1	<b>7</b>
2011/12	0	3	3	1	1	2	<b>5</b>
2012/13	1	2	3	2	0	2	<b>5</b>
2013/14	2	2	4	1	1	2	<b>6</b>
2014/15	5	1	6	1	0	1	<b>7</b>
2015/16	1	2	3	0	0	0	<b>3</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>80</b>

**Figure 1: Figure 1: Single Rural Dwelling Approvals 2004-2016 (All Categories)**

Source: Analytical Services Branch, DOE

Note: Withdrawn applications not included

Appeals included.

Reserved Matters applications relating to an Outline application decided within the study period are not included - no new/additional pressure.

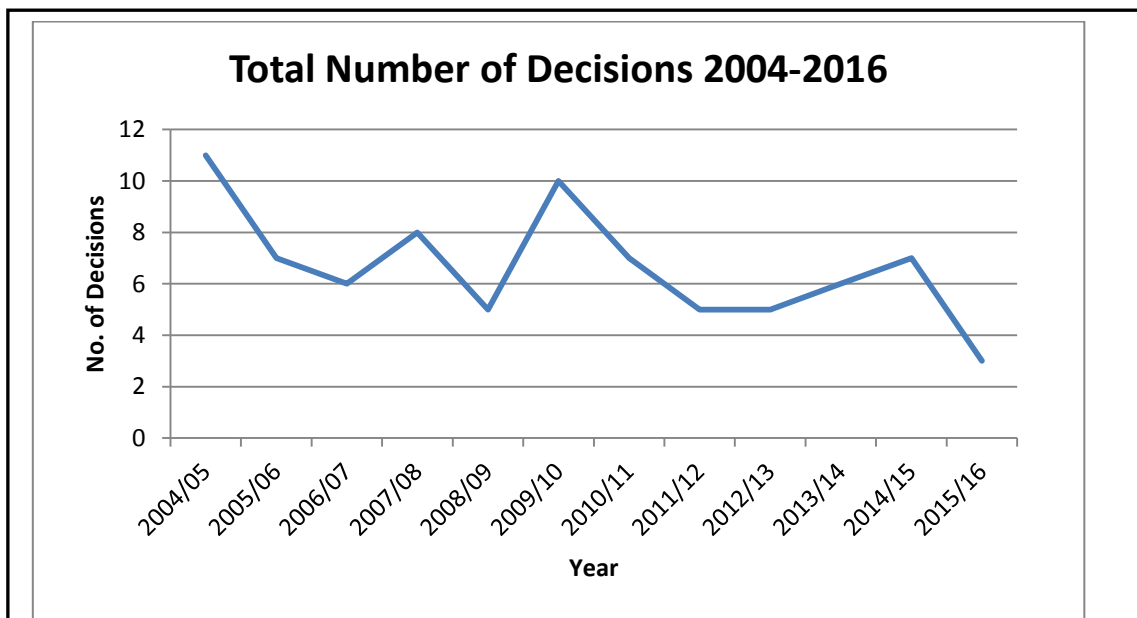
Applications seeking to renew an existing approval previously decided within the study period are not included - no new/additional pressure.

Where there is more than one application/appeal decision relating to the same site within the study period, only one decision is included - no new/additional pressure.

### 3.19 Trends

The number of approvals and refusals of single rural and replacement dwellings since 2004 is shown within Appendix 18e. There has been a general downward trend in the number of planning applications as shown in figure1 below.

Figure 1: Number of rural single and replacement dwelling decisions





**3.20** There was an initial spike of 11 decisions made in 2004/05 before a general downward trend, this was until further spikes in 2007/08 and 2009/10. Since the introduction of PPS 21 there was an initial gradual increase in decisions until 2015/16 when they dropped to their lowest point of 3, accounting for 0.11% of decisions made in Northern Ireland.

### **3.21** Spatial Analysis

The locations of single rural dwellings (2004-2016) that have had planning applications (approved or refused) can be viewed in appendix 20. In order to assess the spatial distribution of development pressure, all new and replacement dwellings with permission have been plotted as green circles and triangles while refusals have been plotted as red circles and triangles. This combined with sensitive areas being mapped such as the Lagan Valley AONB means development pressure on the sensitive areas within the countryside can be effectively assessed.

The map shows that development in the countryside is not uniform and there are small numbers ranging from 3 to 11 houses per annum, reflecting the limited demand, small geographic area and limited opportunities for dwellings in the countryside in the rural part of the city council area

The Lagan Valley AONB has had 12 single housing applications approved within it but the pressure is minimal due to bespoke planning policy. This represents limited development pressure within the AONB.

### **3.22** Renewable Energy

Belfast City Council have utilised the Northern Ireland Planning Renewable Energy Monthly Statistics from April 2004 to March 2016 in analysing renewable energy applications<sup>7</sup>.

In comparison to other councils, Belfast receives very few applications in renewable energy. Of the 329 renewable energy applications received in 2015/2016 in Northern Ireland, Belfast received 3. This represents the fewest applications within any council in Northern Ireland. The graph below shows the trend for renewable energy applications in Belfast City Council.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-planning-renewable-energy-monthly-statistics-april-2015>

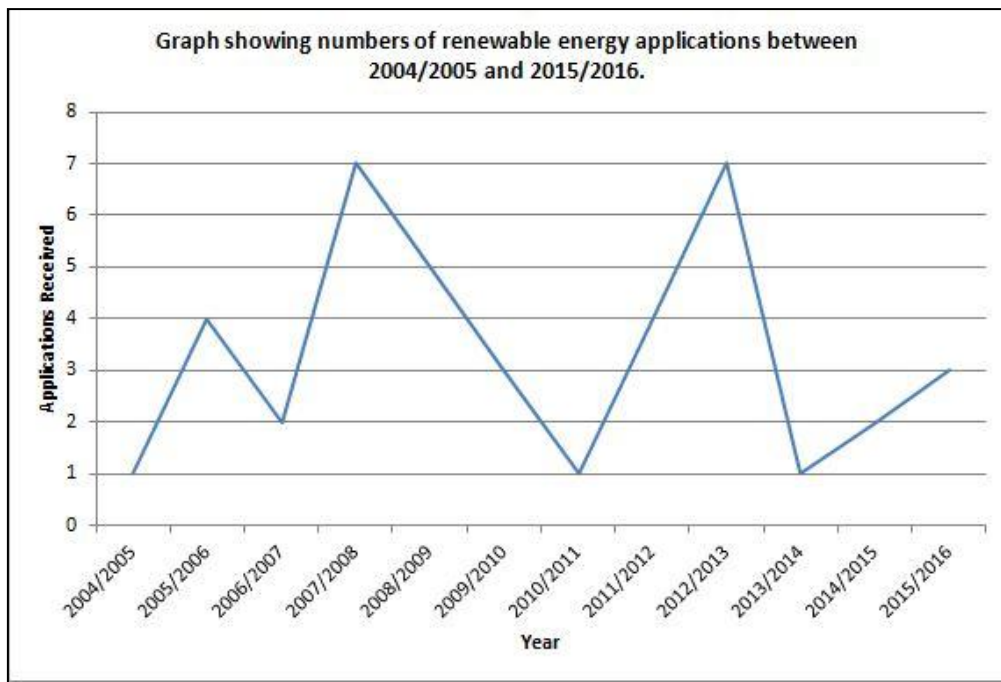


Figure 2: Renewable Energy Applications Received between 2005/2005 and 2015/2016

### 3.23 Trends

The graph shows there has been no discernible pattern regarding renewable energy applications. The number of applications increased steadily until post April 2008 when applications decreased quickly, it wasn't until post April 2011 that the number of applications began to rise again. After another steady increase leading to 7 applications in 2012/2013 there was a steep decrease before applications again began to rise from 2014.

**3.24** The approval rate for renewable energy application is high at 97%, with only one refusal since 2004. This is a reflection of PPS 18, Renewable Energy which sets a target of 15% of all energy from renewable sources and PPS 21, Sustainable Development in the Countryside which encourages the use of renewable energy.

**3.25** There have been very few applications for single wind turbines and there have been no applications for a wind farm. Since 2004, there have been only 14 applications compared to 3,714 of Northern Ireland as a whole. This would be expected due to Belfast being predominately an urban area.

**3.26** The applications for single wind turbines are located in the north, south and west of the city, there have been no applications in the east. There have only been three applications for large wind turbines with heights over 30 metres. Of these three applications, two have been approved and constructed. The remainder of applications are for micro turbines.

**3.27** There has been only one single wind turbine application (Z/2011/0937/F) located within a sensitively designated area. The application is situated south west of the Ballyutoag Road is within an Area of High Scenic Value. This is a sensitive area and has been protected due to its particular landscape merit.

- 3.28** There have been more applications within Belfast for solar panels than any other type of renewable energy. Since 2004, there have been 21 applications. Solar power is arguably the least intrusive of the renewable energy types and therefore there is much less development pressure.

## 4.0 Issues and Approaches

- 4.1 The rural area of Belfast accounts for almost a third of its land. As we move forward with plans to develop the city and grow the population, the importance of managing the use of land for future uses will be a challenge. The use of the precautionary principle will be crucial when outlining proposed land use zonings, locations for development and settlement limits where it must take full account for implications on natural heritage features and landscape character. Through effective planning practices, the potential for adverse environmental impact can be minimised and enhancement features secured.
- 4.2 It is important to recognise the value of Northern Ireland's unique natural resource, its diverse ecosystems and biodiversity and the need to retain its sensitive landscape character of our rural resource for future generations. The LDP will intend to maintain sustainable rural communities. But consideration should be given to a more proactive approach to managing land for development and to ensure planning policies are put in place to accommodate selective, modest growth based on rural settlements.
- 4.3 As part of the Call for Evidence in May 2016, the Council has requested from DoE, further detail on Special Countryside Areas i.e. how to define, manage and monitor the designation as well as its proposed implications to the planning system. The Council also requested further clarity on the scope to control pressures of urban sprawl and less sustainable development in rural areas immediately adjacent to towns and cities under the Special Countryside Areas and if additional protection could be afforded to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the wider countryside
- 4.4 This information contained within this topic paper has been used to inform the next stage of the LDP process, the Preferred Options Paper.

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**APPENDIX 1: SETTLEMENT SERVICE CLASSIFICATION<sup>8</sup>**  
 Source: RDS 2035

Service Centre	Settlement Band	Service Class
BMUA	A	5
Derry Urban Area	B	5
Craigavon Urban Area	C	4
Ballymena	C	4
Newry*	C	4
Coleraine	C	4
Newtownards	C	4
Omagh	C	4
Antrim	C	4
Larne	C	4
Enniskillen	D	4
Armagh City	D	4
Banbridge	D	4
Dungannon	D	4
Downpatrick	D	4
Limavady	D	4
Cookstown	D	3
Strabane	D	3
Ballymoney	E	4
Magherafelt	E	4
Ballycastle	E	4
Newcastle	E	4
Kilkeel	E	3
Portrush	E	3
Ballyclare	E	3
Lisnaskea	F	3

\* Warrenpoint is included in the Newry cluster as a Local Hub in line with its Port function.

<sup>8</sup> The November 2006 **Settlement Information Classification and Analysis Group (SICAG) Report** published by NISRA determined that the level of services provided by a settlement cannot always be judged from its population size. It attempted to group settlements on the basis of their service provision. SICAG collated data to determine a hierarchy of service provision and to identify locations which would constitute as 'service centres' for Northern Ireland. The report identifies 26 service centres here and the service classification is listed as 1-5, with 5 being the highest levels of service provision and 1 the lowest.

## **APPENDIX 2: DOE CALL FOR EVIDENCE: DEVELOPMENT IN THE COUNTRYSIDE**

### **Belfast City Council response to Call for Evidence: Strategic Planning Policy for Development in the Countryside**

The Council welcome the opportunity to comment on the strategic planning policy for development in the countryside; and how strategic planning policy should assist with achieving sustainable development to support a vibrant rural community, without compromising our natural and built environment, and other assets of acknowledged importance.

The Council would support in principle the intention is to have sustainable rural communities, ranging from small towns and villages. There is an appreciable goal of sustainably maintaining the viability of existing communities, services, infrastructure and bring new life to many places which have been in decline.

It should be recognised that Northern Ireland's rural area is a unique resource with significant long term potential as places to live and work. Its diverse ecosystems and biodiversity propound the need to retain the sensitive landscape character of our rural resource for future generations.

Whilst future lifestyle changes and technological development may increase the potential for living and working in rural areas, however, this needs to be carefully and sustainably managed and to consider the longer term potential impacts of incremental development

The DoE should ensure that all planning authorities are sensitive to the demand for new types of development in rural areas and adopt a proactive approach to addressing the management of development. The new LDP will be responsible for protecting the environment as a sustainable asset for future generations and the precautionary principle is vital when plan making in particular when outlining proposed land use policy and settlement limits. The DoE should ensure full account is taken of the implications for natural heritage features and landscape character. Only through careful planning practices can the potential for environmental adversity be minimised and enhancement features secured.

The Council considers the planning system should assist in ensuring a sustainable rural economy, with a stable population by adopting a more welcoming approach to sustainable development in rural areas including the further refinement of the approach to diversification. The aim should not be to see small settlements increase in size to the extent that they lose their identity, nor to suburbanise the countryside and erode the high quality of its environment. Rather, it is critical that planning policies are put in place to accommodate selective, modest and sustainable growth. Most

development should be foreseen, agreed and programmed to reflect the local circumstances, in the context of the need to address sustainability and these protections of the countryside environment.

The DoE should be clear on the role of planning in advancing the vision through which to enable and support opportunities for development in sustainable locations wherever appropriate e.g. where infrastructure capacity and good access exist, or can be provided at reasonable cost, or to meet justifiable social and economic objectives. Rural and urban areas are recognised as interdependent e.g. rural areas depend on urban areas for a range of services and jobs while providing quality recreational and leisure experiences for the urban population. Appropriate rural diversification should be embraced to support businesses, land managers and farmers expand or start new enterprises in appropriate circumstances and at an appropriate scale. Any new development must be carefully planned if the character and quality of the countryside is not to be undermined and substantially eroded.

In the more accessible and densely populated rural areas most new development will continue to be in, or adjacent to, existing settlements. The SPPS states

*“Some areas of the countryside exhibit exceptional landscapes....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.”*

The would welcome further guidance on Special Countryside Areas i.e. how to define/designate, manage and monitor the designation as well as its proposed implications for the planning system. It should be clarified if there is proposed to be scope for their use to control pressures of urban sprawl in rural areas immediately adjacent to towns and cities. In addition, further clarity is sought in relation to whether if additional protection could be afforded to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The DoE should be aware that there is considerable evidence of urban sprawl happening around the Belfast urban area. The Council would seek assurances that any proposals to release land for development should be part of a longer term strategic settlement policy and set out in development plans.

The natural and historic environment also has to be protected through development plans and identify opportunities, appropriate in scale, kind and location. In the more densely populated areas there may be potential to accommodate small-scale housing development and businesses may be able to diversify further into new activities as part of a broader strategy that provides the context for any growth.

The DoE should ensure the protection of our natural and built environment by recognising the LDP will be the vehicle to protect the environment as a sustainable asset for future generations. Recognition of the precautionary principle should be vital when plan making in particular when outlining proposed land uses, locations for development and settlement limits all of which must take full account of the policy implications on natural heritage features and landscape character. In accordance with the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035, careful planning practices should, through the DoE, ensure the potential for environmental adversity can be minimised and enhancement secured.

The key aim of rural policy should be to improve the quality of new developments irrespective of size, both within settlements and elsewhere in the countryside.

The DoE should seek to consider an approach that ensures small towns are sustainable and able to maintain their function in the local/regional economy. They have a key role in providing services to the wider catchment population. Agriculture (and forestry) will continue to be important defining elements of rural life as part of the settlement hierarchy. Prime quality agricultural land should continue to be protected and should not be eroded in a piecemeal way but only used to meet strategic development objectives. The term 'active farm' should be defined in the SPSS along with additional clear guidance on farm diversification, agriculture, forestry development, and monitoring of such proposals.

The DoE need to consider the scope for enabling planning policy in respect of small scale rural housing developments including clusters and groups in close proximity to settlements as a means of supporting their sustainability and potential. Any proposals for more housing developments of this nature should be expressed in development plans in the context of broader policy objectives and sustainability. In many rural areas there may be small sites which cease to be required for their original purpose where conversion to residential use would bring about a net environmental benefit.

Development plans should allocate sufficient land to meet housing requirements including affordable housing and identify where innovative and flexible approaches may be required to

deliver affordable houses in suitable numbers, with the focus on existing settlements rather than new clusters in the open countryside.

The monitoring of development will be critical and the DoE should consider the approach to this through development plans. The amount and location of housing that can be developed in rural areas is determined by a number of factors. These include: proximity to services e.g. schools, shops (ideally within walking or cycling distance); ease of access (from an existing road and footpath and to a rail station or bus route); drainage and sewerage capacity (e.g. from combined septic tanks or potential link to public systems). Fit in the landscape and design will also be important planning considerations. The impact of badly designed and sited houses is often particularly important in rural areas because of their visibility over large distances. Design standards should comply with published advice, use sustainable materials where appropriate and be energy efficient. These criteria should be monitored consistently applied in planning policy and development control with greater weight should be attached to the provisions of the 'Building on Tradition' rural design guide.

Belfast City Council seeks assurances that clarification on monitoring arrangements to ensure the criteria to allow dwellings outside existing settlements is robust and it has addressed the trend for high levels of approvals for single dwellings in the countryside. The effects of natural and built heritage including the suite of environmental protections in the countryside should be closely monitored to mitigate loss of our natural habitats, ecosystems, biodiversity and indeed the amenity value and character of our unique rural countryside.



## **APPENDIX 3: RURAL WHITE PAPER ACTION PLAN: POLICY PRIORITIES**

Source: Rural White Paper Action Plan 2012 Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

### **1) Urban/Rural Linkages**

- Policy Priority - To support the development of an efficient transport and infrastructure system that facilitates effective rural - urban inter-linkages;

### **2) Access to Services**

- Policy Priority - To promote fair and equitable access to key services for all rural dwellers;

### **3) Rural Communities**

- Policy Priority - To promote tolerance, health, well-being and inclusion for rural dwellers;
- Policy Priority - Seek to minimise, where it exists, disadvantage, poverty, social exclusion and inequality amongst those living in rural areas and in particularly amongst vulnerable groups;
- Policy Priority - To maintain a viable economic, social, cultural and physical infrastructure in rural areas and seek to ensure that regional infrastructure disparities are minimised;
- Policy Priority - To preserve the cultural and social uniqueness of rural community life linked to its smaller population settlement;
- Policy Priority - To promote the development of effective and inclusive rural governance structures and sufficient community capacity to engage in these structures;
- Policy Priority - To enhance and refine the Rural Development Programme to ensure the maximum benefit from future Programmes for rural communities;

### **4) Rural Economies**

- Policy Priority - To provide rural businesses with appropriate support to ensure the development of dynamic and innovative rural economies;
- Policy Priority - To seek to maximise employment opportunities for rural dwellers;

### **5) The Countryside**

- Policy Priority - To support the development of a more sustainable agricultural sector, a more competitive agri-food sector and enhanced agri-environmental links;
- Policy Priority - To safeguard the beauty and fabric of our rural areas and increase opportunities for all to enjoy the benefits of the countryside.

## **APPENDIX 4: BMAP COUNTRYSIDE DESIGNATIONS AND POLICIES**

### **Rural Landscape Wedges**

Rural Landscape Wedges consist of buffer landscapes and open areas that can fulfil any of the following objectives set out in Policy COU 1:

- distinguish and maintain the separate identities of the component parts of the Metropolitan Area;
- prevent the merging of the component parts of the Metropolitan Area;
- provide an important element in defining and protecting the setting of settlements; and
- maintain the rural character of the countryside.

There are four 'Rural Landscape Wedges' within the Belfast City Council area:

- Hannahstown
- Glencreagh, Castlereagh Countryside (43.88 of 62.80ha (69.9%))
- Mosside (rural), Lisburn Countryside (15.57 of 162.54ha (9.6%))
- Holywood, North Down Countryside (9.98 of 82.61ha (12.1%))

It is essential that Rural Landscape Wedges are protected from inappropriate development. Within the Rural Landscape Wedges identified above, all proposals will be assessed against prevailing regional planning policies for development in the countryside. In addition, proposals will be required to demonstrate how they will maintain the open nature of the wedge to ensure visual separation and protect the identities of the component areas. It will therefore be important to consider the impact of any proposed development on the integrity of the wedge, and on the need to retain separation between settlements.

Policy COU 1 is primarily intended to prevent coalescence and maintain visual separation between settlements. This distinguishes it from Policy CTY 15 of PPS 21: 'The Setting of Settlements', which relates to urban sprawl and development that mars the distinction between a settlement and the surrounding countryside.

### **BMA Coastal Area**

The designated BMA Coastal Area follows the coastline of Belfast Lough and extends to the Low Water Mark, including the narrow strips of coast between the High Water Mark and the Low Water Mark with the exception of the designated urban included in the BMA Coastal Area, it contains many environmentally sensitive areas, and also listed buildings and scheduled monuments with an industrial heritage value. Any development for employment and port related activities within the harbour area will need to take these factors into account.

Policy COU 3 - *BMA Coastal Area* states that within the BMA Coastal Area, planning permission will only be granted to development proposals which meet the following criteria:

- the proposed development is of such national or regional importance as to outweigh any detrimental impact on the coastal environment; or
- it can be demonstrated that any proposal will not harm the qualities of the coastal landscape, while still protecting nature conservation value.

### **Areas of High Scenic Value**

Areas of High Scenic Value (AOHSV) are designated to protect the setting of the Metropolitan Urban Area and other areas of particular landscape merit. Policy COU 6 – 'Areas of High Scenic Value' states that planning permission will not be granted for development proposals that would be likely to have a significant adverse effect on the quality, character and features of interest in Areas of High Scenic Value.

Any assessment of quality and character in the Area of High Scenic Value shall include consideration of:

- Location of the site within the landscape & positioning of the proposal within the landscape;
- undue prominence, particularly in more open and exposed landscapes;
- integration of development into the landscape including degree of natural enclosure and relationship with surrounding buildings; and
- design, including form, scale and massing.

There are portions of three AOHSV in Belfast:

- Belfast Basalt Escarpment (191.73 of 3012.79ha (6%))
- Castlereagh Slopes (2.48 of 1257.64ha (0.2%))
- Castlereagh Escarpment (275.30 of 904.73ha (30.4%))

A Landscape Analysis must accompany development proposals in these areas to indicate the likely effects of the proposal on the landscape.

### **Belfast Hills Access Points**

Emulating SFG5 of the RDS, BMAP 2015 recognises that the “Belfast Hills make a particularly important contribution to the setting of the Metropolitan Area, and extend for over 16 km from Lisburn, through Belfast, to Carnmoney Hill in Newtownabbey. They are regarded as one of Northern Ireland’s finest assets, and include a variety of landscapes, ranging from the pastoral farmland of the western slopes to the dramatic cliffs of Cavehill on the eastern side, together with the open expanses of the upland moors”.

Policy COU 8 – ‘Belfast Hills Access Points’ allows for development of limited access and small-scale interpretative/visitor facilities dependent upon proposals: improving access to the Belfast Hills; being small scale and integrating with the landscape; and having no adverse impact no adverse impact on the quality or character of the landscape.

### **Lagan Valley Regional Park**

The Lagan Valley Regional Park AONB was designated in 1965 and most of which falls within the Lagan Valley Regional Park. The legislation under which the LVRP AONB was designated has since been superseded by the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (NI) Order 1985 (as amended), however Lagan Valley AONB is yet to be reviewed or designated under this legislation. It is the only Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in the Belfast Council Area.

The river valley of the Lagan outside the urban areas of Belfast and Lisburn is predominantly natural in character and is characterised by a concentration of woodland which provides the undulating canopies and vast mixture of texture and tones which highlight the rolling countryside. Much of the Parks amenity landscapes are within the Historic Park, Gardens and Demesnes such as Barnett Demesne that have their own distinctive character. These areas have a historic designed landscape with a variable urban and recreational character, mature woodlands and grassland diversity. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that the landscape of the Park and the character of its constituent areas are not damaged by inappropriate development.

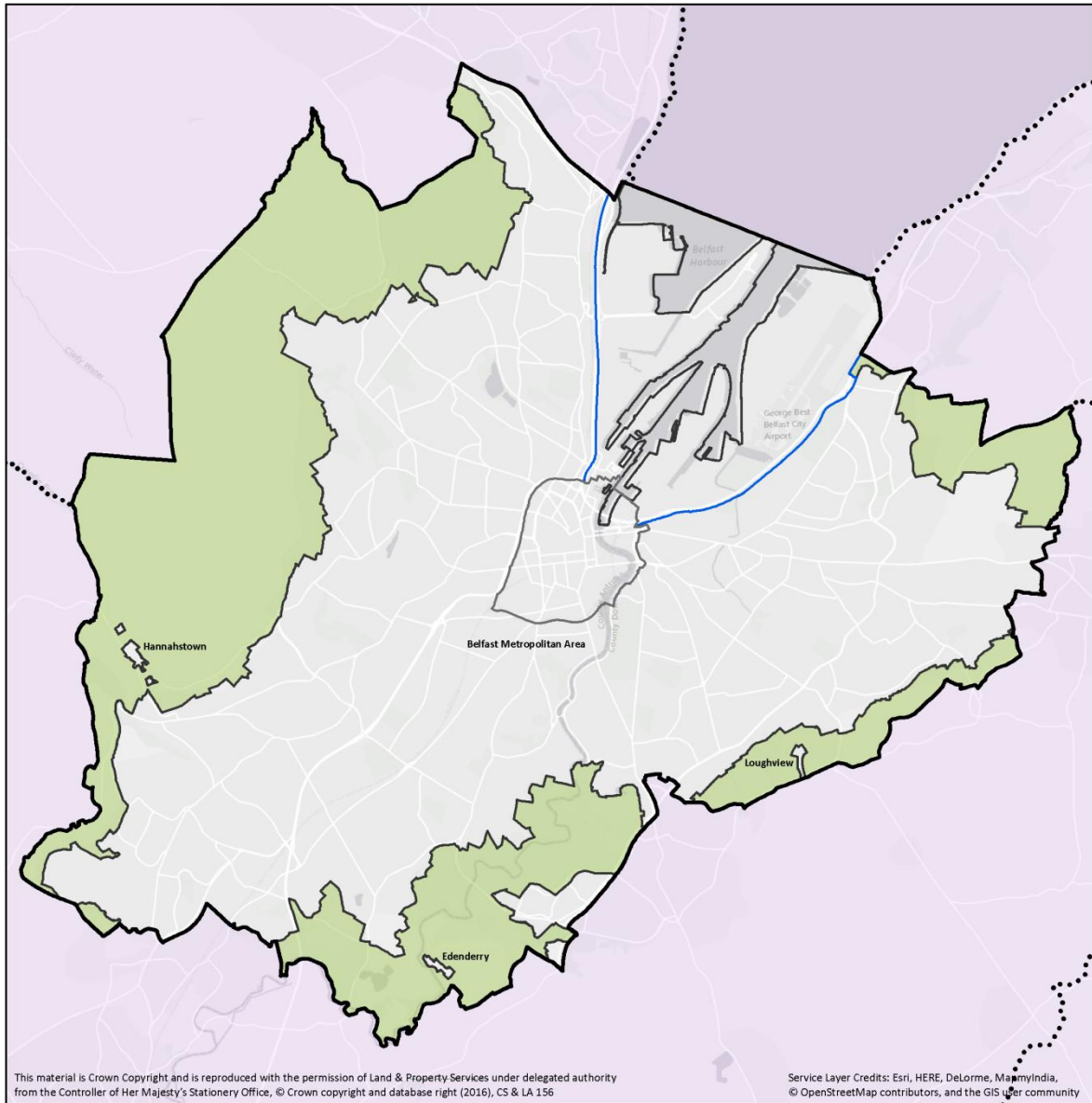
BMAP 2015 contains three policies to limit inappropriate development within the Lagan Valley Regional Park:

- **Policy COU 10** - Development Proposals outside the Metropolitan Development Limit and Settlement Development Limits in the Lagan Valley Regional Park;
- **Policy COU 11** - Lagan Valley Regional Park Nodes (planning permission will be granted to development proposals for appropriate and sensitively designed recreational, tourist, interpretative and educational facilities); and
- **Policy COU 12** - Development Proposals in the Lagan Valley Regional Park within the Metropolitan Development Limit and Settlement Development Limits.



**Belfast**  
City Council

DEVELOPMENT IN THE COUNTRYSIDE



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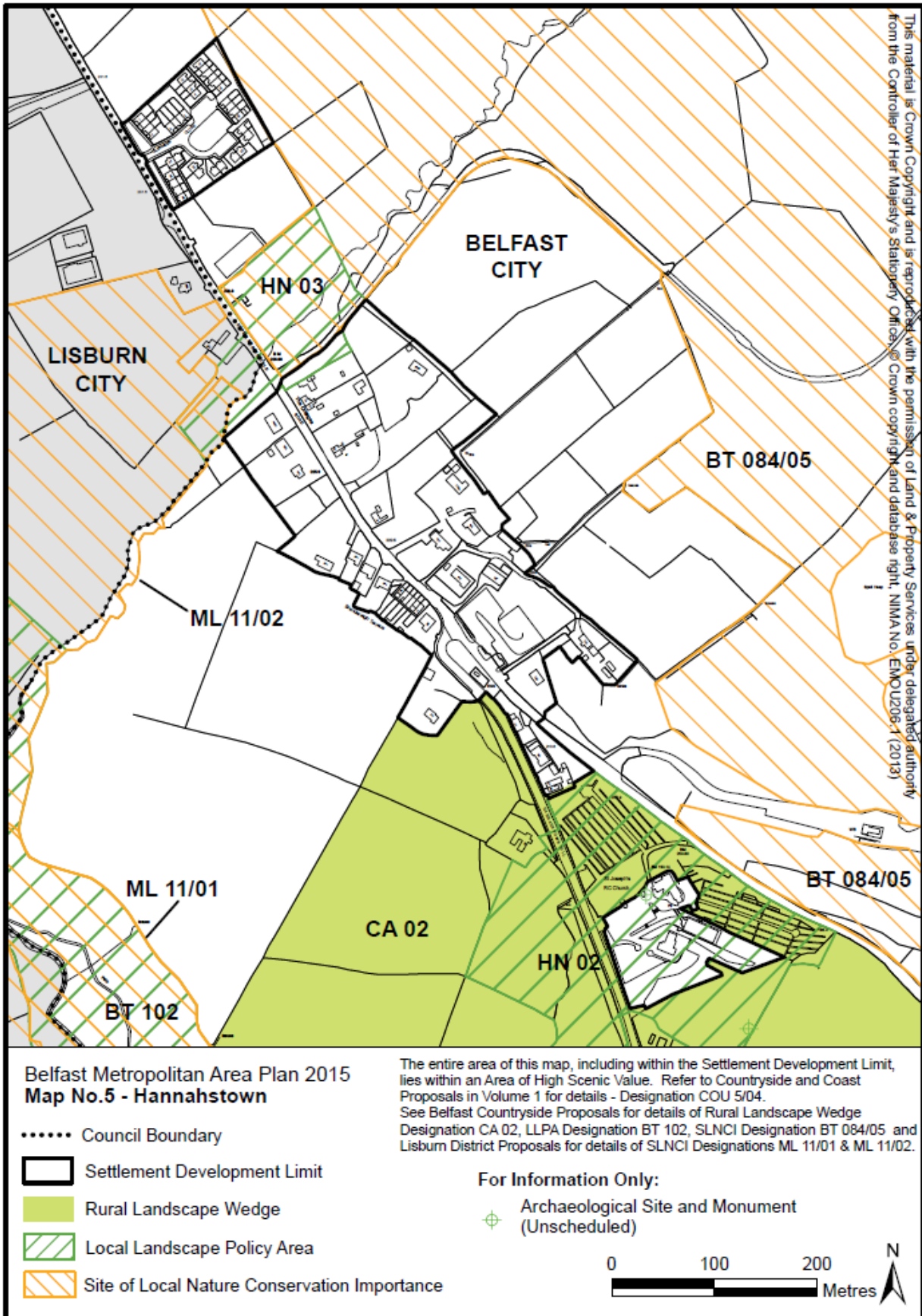
**Belfast Countryside**

- Countryside
- Council Area
- Metropolitan/Settlement Development Limit
- Belfast City Centre
- Belfast Harbour Area

Source: Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015  
(Adopted September 2014)

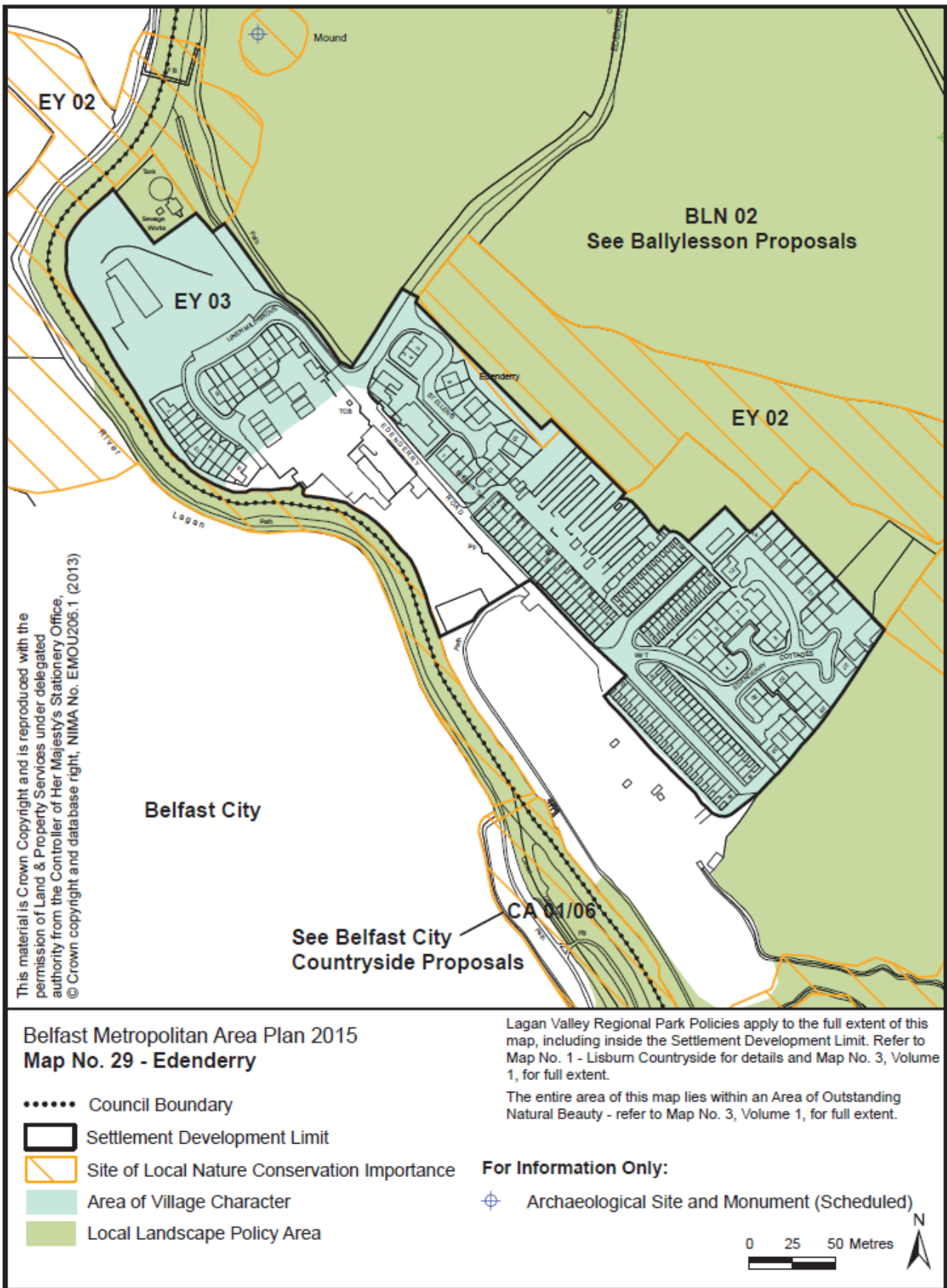


**APPENDIX 6: MAP OF HANNAHSTOWN**

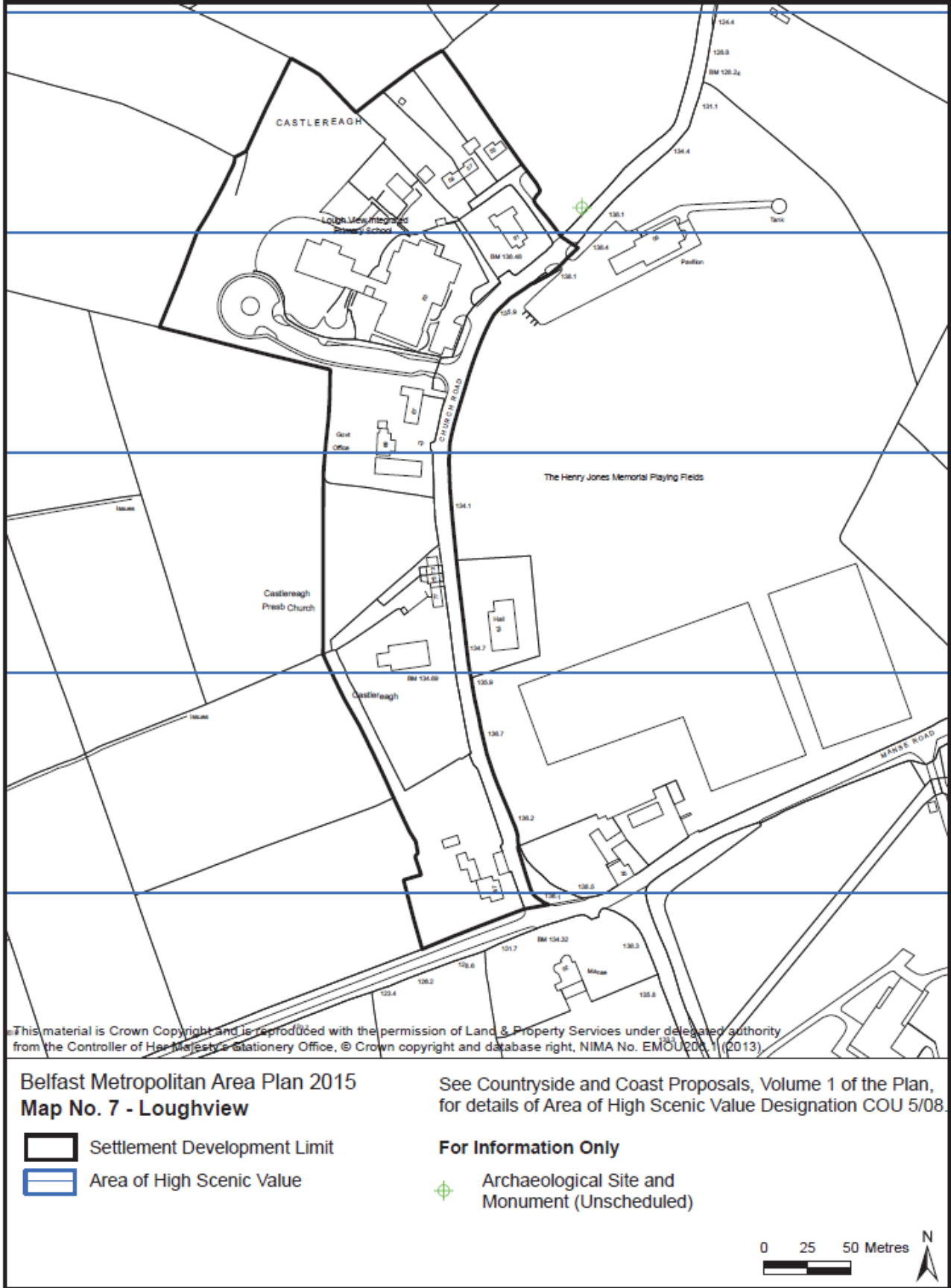




**APPENDIX 7: MAP OF EDENDERRY**



**APPENDIX 8: MAP OF LOUGHVIEW**



## APPENDIX 9: MAP OF SINGLE RURAL DWELLING APPROVALS 2004-2016

Note: This map will be updated to single rural dwelling approvals 2004-2016 as per the Development Pressure Analysis within the Countryside Assessment.

