
Ards and Down Area Plan 2015

Appropriate Assessment Report

Executive Summary

This is a record of the Assessment, required by Regulation 64B of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007. It was undertaken by Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) in accordance with the above Regulations on behalf of The Planning Service. The assessment has considered the adopted Ards and Down Area Plan 2015 (hereafter referred to as the Plan).

Thirteen designated European sites and five Ramsar sites were identified that potentially could be affected by the implementation of the Plan. There are eight Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) within or close to the Ards and Down Plan Area:

- Strangford Lough SAC
- Eastern Mourne SAC
- Lecale Fens SAC
- Hollymount SAC
- Murlough SAC
- Aghnadaragh SAC
- Turmennan SAC
- Ballykilbeg SAC

There are five Special Protection Areas (SPA) within or close to the Ards and Down Plan Area as follows:

- Strangford Lough SPA
- Outer Ards SPA
- Killough Bay and Strand Lough SPA
- Belfast Lough SPA
- Belfast Lough Open Water SPA

There are five Ramsar Sites within or close to the Ards and Down Plan Area as follows:

- Turmennan
- Killough Bay and Strand Lough
- Belfast Lough
- Strangford Lough
- Outer Ards

A Test of Likely Significance (TOLS) was carried out on the Plan alone, and in combination with other relevant plans and regional planning policy.

The TOLS did not show any significant adverse effect that would impact on the integrity of any of the European sites, however, due to the strategic nature of the Plan, neither was it possible to conclude beyond reasonable doubt that there would be no adverse effects. A number of areas where there may be the potential for adverse effects were highlighted.

Consequently an Appropriate Assessment of the impacts of the Plan was carried out on eleven sites, namely:

- Strangford Lough SAC/ Ramsar
- Eastern Mourne SAC
- Lecale Fens SAC
- Hollymount SAC
- Murlough SAC
- Aghnadaragh SAC
- Turmennan SAC/ Ramsar
- Ballykilbeg SAC

- Strangford Lough SPA
- Outer Ards SPA/ Ramsar
- Killough Bay and Strand Lough SPA/ Ramsar

The Appropriate Assessment has concluded that the Plan will not adversely affect the integrity of any of the Natura 2000 or Ramsar sites.

NIEA was initially consulted under Regulation 43(1) on April 5th 2006

The recording of this assessment is 12th March 2009.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This statement contains a record of the Assessment, required by Regulation 64B of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007. It has been undertaken by NIEA on behalf of The Planning Service in respect of the adopted Ards and Down Area Plan 2015 (hereinafter known as the Plan), in accordance with the Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC).

1.2 The Assessment has been carried out using the following guidance:

- *Habitats Regulations Guidance Notes* drawn up by English Nature
- *Interim Guidance; Assessing Development Plans in Terms of the Need for Appropriate Assessment* drawn up by the Scottish Executive
- *Planning for the Protection of European Sites: Appropriate Assessment. Guidance for Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Documents* drawn up by the Department for Communities and Local Government and the European Commission document
- *Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites. Methodological Guidance on the Provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC*
- *Appropriate Assessment of plans*. August 2006, Scott Wilson, Levett-Therivel, Treweek Environmental Consultants and Land Use Consultants
- *The Appropriate Assessment of Spatial Plans in England. A guide to why, when and how to do it*. RSPB 2007
- *Guidance document on Article 6(4) of the 'Habitats Directive' 92/43/EEC. Clarification of the concepts of: Alternative Solutions, Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest, Compensatory Measures, Overall Coherence, Opinion of the Commission*. January 2007
- *The Appropriate Assessment of Plans in Northern Ireland. Checklist – do I need to do an appropriate assessment?* RSPB 2008

1.3 The Article 6 Process

The methodology follows an initial 'screening stage' in which the Natura 2000 and Ramsar sites which could potentially be impacted upon by the implementation of the Plan are identified and described. The Plan is described and a Test of Likely Significance (TOLS) is carried out on the likely impact of the proposals on the conservation objectives of designated Natura 2000 sites and on the nature conservation interests of the Ramsar sites (see note on inclusion of Ramsar Sites for assessment in Appendix 6).

1.4 Where one or more likely significant effects are found, or where it cannot be objectively shown that adverse effects will not occur, the

second stage of the process is entered and the Plan becomes subject to an 'Appropriate Assessment' against the conservation objectives of each of those sites.

- 1.5 If it is determined that there are no likely significant effects on the designated sites, a Statement of 'Finding of No Significant Effects' is prepared to explain how the overall conclusion, was arrived at.

1.6 **Area Plan Hierarchy**

Area Plans sit within an overarching hierarchy of Regional Planning Policy which includes the Regional Development Strategy (RDS), A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland and various Planning Policy Statements (PPSs). The Plan cannot be implemented in isolation from regional planning policy and for the purposes of this Article 6 Assessment the Plan is assessed in combination with regional policy. In this instance, PPS2: Planning and Nature Conservation is particularly relevant.

- 1.7 The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007

The Regulations are Northern Ireland's transposition of the Habitats Directive. The Directive obliges member states to identify, designate, manage, enhance and protect a suite of the best representative sites of important habitats, species and assemblages/ communities in each member state and to ensure the coherence of this network of these Natura 2000 sites. The Regulations require that a plan or project, that is not directly connected with, or necessary to the management of any of the Natura 2000 sites and which is likely to have a significant impact, will be subject to an assessment in accordance with Article 6 of the Habitats Directive.

- 1.8 This Appropriate Assessment Report should be read in conjunction with the Plan.

2.0 STAGE ONE - SCREENING AND TEST OF LIKELY SIGNIFICANCE

2.1 Description of the Ards and Down Area Plan 2015

- 2.1.1 The Ards and Down Area Plan 2015 is a local plan prepared under the provisions of Part III of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 by the Planning Service, an agency within the Department of the Environment.
- 2.1.2 The Draft Ards and Down Area Plan 2015 was published on 10th December 2002. The final Plan aims to facilitate sustainable growth throughout the plan area through the release of additional land for housing, industry and commerce, while protecting the specific natural and built assets of the Plan area. Within Ards Borough 317 hectares of land are zoned for housing in the three major towns. In Down District 240 hectares of land are zoned for housing in the three main towns. A total of 32 hectares of land are zoned for industry in the three main towns of Ards Borough. A total of 25 hectares of land are zoned for industry in Down District in addition to existing industrial lands, which are protected throughout the Plan area. The Plan identifies 79 Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance throughout the Plan area and 11 Areas of Townscape Character, 5 in Down District and 6 in Ards Borough. The Plan also designates 152 Local landscape Policy Areas and 2 Areas of High Scenic Value to ensure that development integrates into the landscape. All land use designations are subject to specific Key Design Considerations intended to identify constraints and specific requirements to be fulfilled at detailed planning application stage. All future planning applications throughout the plan area must also comply with the requirements of regional planning policy.
- 2.1.3 Prior to its publication, the Department published an Issues Paper and staged a number of public meetings to engage with all interested parties and to hear views on those issues that should be addressed in the Plan. Representations subsequently received included the potential impact of future development on the natural environment.
- 2.1.4. A statutory period was provided for the receipt of relevant representations following the publication of the Draft Plan. Following its consideration of all objections, the Department requested the Planning Appeals Commission, (PAC), to hold a public inquiry. The Inquiry commenced on 3rd May 2005 and was formally closed by the PAC on Wednesday 17th January 2007. The PAC report on the Inquiry was received by the Department in March 2008.
- 2.1.5. In addition to a large volume of site specific issues, objectors also took the opportunity to raise issues related to the impact of individual proposals on the natural environment, including Natura 2000 sites together with the required mitigation measures. The Inquiry also covered a wide range of strategic issues including: objections to the

proposed policy framework for nature conservation; objections to settlement limits; objections to the draft Plan's provisions for tourism; objections to the draft Plan's provisions for water, sewerage and drainage; objections to the proposed Green Belt and Countryside Policy Area designations. While the PAC highlighted no change to the provisions of the Draft Plan in respect of many of the objections it also recommended a number of changes which have been incorporated into the final Plan, including: additional Key Design Considerations to protect environmental assets; full up-to-date information on the programmed upgrades to sewerage infrastructure and where development of a zoned or designated site is likely to be dependent on the provision of interim sewage disposal measures, this is listed among the Key Design Considerations for that site; and extensions to the extant Green Belt and Countryside Policy Area coverage in Ards and Down;

- 2.1.6. In accordance with the terms of Article 8 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991, the Department, having considered the report of the PAC, is now adopting a final Plan for Ards Borough and Down District. This Assessment has been carried out on the final Plan, which includes those recommendations by the PAC that have been accepted by the Department.

2.2 Identification of the Natura 2000 Sites which could potentially be impacted

- 2.2.1 There are eight SACs, three SPAs and four Ramsar sites wholly or partly within the Plan Area. In addition, there are two sites outside the Plan area but within close proximity which require consideration.

Sites wholly or partly within the Ards and Down Plan area are as follows:

- Strangford Lough SAC, SPA and Ramsar site
- Eastern Mourne SAC (part of)
- Lecale Fens SAC
- Hollymount SAC
- Murlough SAC (part of)
- Aghnadarragh SAC
- Turmennan SAC and Ramsar site
- Ballykilbeg SAC
- Outer Ards SPA and Ramsar site (part of)
- Killough Bay and Strand Lough SPA and Ramsar site

Sites outside the plan area but in close proximity:

- Belfast Lough SPA
- Belfast Lough Open Water SPA

Although Copeland Islands ASSI has been proposed as an SPA, it is not considered in the main body of this report as it currently remains an ASSI (see note on Copeland Islands ASSI in Appendix 7).

2.3 Description of the Natura 2000 Sites upon which a Test of Likely Significance was carried out

2.3.1 Strangford Lough SPA and SAC/ Ramsar

Strangford Lough is a large (150 km²) marine inlet on the east coast of County Down, of which about 50 km² lies between high water mark mean tide (HWMMT) and low water mark mean tide (LWMMT). It is connected to the open sea by the Strangford Narrows, an 8 km long channel with a minimum width of 0.5 km. The Lough is 30 km long from head to mouth and up to 8 km wide. The tidal flats of Strangford Lough form extensive deposits around its northern limits. The Lough supports an impressive range of marine habitats and communities with over 2,000 recorded species. It is important for marine invertebrates, algae and saltmarsh plants, for wintering and breeding wetland birds, and for marine mammals.

The site is recognised as a Ramsar site because it supports a variety of important wetland features including areas of fringing saltmarsh. It supports an important assemblage of vulnerable and endangered wetland plants and animal species. These include a number of marine sponges, marine hydroids, marine mollusc and sea urchins that are restricted to Strangford Lough in Northern Ireland or, in some cases unknown or very rare elsewhere in the British Isles. The mudflats support luxuriant beds of eelgrass. Such extensive 'beds' are rare in the British Isles. The site holds a waterfowl assemblage of international importance with peak counts in winter of 74876 waterfowl (5 year peak mean 1998/99-2002/2003). Finally, the site has several individual species/populations occurring at levels of international importance.

The site's integrity is subject to pressures which include commercial fishing, pollution, aquaculture, bait digging, wildfowling and recreational use.

2.3.2 Eastern Mourne SAC

The Mourne Mountains are a compact range of mountains forming the highest ground in Northern Ireland. Within the Mountain range, twelve peaks extend to over 600m, with Slieve Donard 852m. The area is important geologically representing the largest outcrop of Tertiary granites in the British Isles.

The Eastern Mourne SAC has a unique combination of upland habitats and associated vegetation communities including the largest extent of European dry heaths in Northern Ireland. The heath is mostly of the *Calluna/ Erica cinerea* type, but includes *Ulex gallii/ Erica cinerea* dry heath on the lower slopes. The dominance of *Erica cinerea* is a notable feature of the site and characteristic of dry heath in the oceanic

climate of more western parts of the UK. The site supports a number of other vegetation communities including wet heaths and blanket bog, montane heaths and grasslands on the highest summits and plant communities associated with the cliffs and scree.

The site's integrity is subject to pressures which include: recreation, water abstraction and agriculture.

2.3.3 Lecale Fens SAC

Lecale Fens consists of a group of four fens, namely: Loughkeelan, Ballycam, Corbally and Carrowcarlin. The Lecale is a lowland area typified by low drumlins with wide inter-drumlin hollows that are often poorly draining. The underlying rocks are mainly Silurian sandstones and shales. However, calcium-rich Kearny Siltstones occur locally, and some of the fens in the area are correspondingly fed by base-rich ground waters. The four sub-sites included within the Lecale Fens SAC are separately designated as ASSIs and are considered the best examples of calcium-rich spring water-fed fens remaining in the area. Common reed *Phragmites australis* is an important element in the fen-floristics of all the sub-sites. It is the co-occurring species in places both within the reedbeds and in the usually small areas of open fen, often at reedbed margins, that elevate the conservation importance beyond ASSI status. Ponds, pools and springs add diversity to the sites and at Loughkeelan the fen is associated with an important lake.

2.3.4 Hollymount SAC

Hollymount consists of a low-lying, regularly flooded area of marshland surrounded by drumlins. Significant stands of wet woodland have developed. These are characterised by dense, mature Alder *Alnus glutinosa* and Grey Willow *Salix cinerea*, with Reed Canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea* and the Greater Pond-sedge *Carex riparia* dominating the ground flora. Tussock Sedge *Carex paniculata* is very conspicuous and some of the large, older tussocks form the rooting bases for trees such as Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and Downy Birch *Betula pubescens*. The trees are encrusted with a luxuriant growth of lichens, and bracket fungi are frequent on the many dead branches and trunks.

Drier woodland has developed on the drumlins. Over much of this Oak *Quercus* sp. dominates the canopy, with frequent Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* and Beech *Fagus sylvatica*, and occasional Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*. Hazel *Corylus avellana*, Holly *Ilex aquifolium* and Elder *Sambucus nigra* form the scattered shrub layer and a lush ground flora is dominated by Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, Wild garlic *Allium ursinum* and the ferns *Dryopteris dilatata*, *D. affinis* and *Athyrium filix-femina*.

The rare Water Violet *Hottonia palustris* occurs in fluctuating water-filled ditches. Hollymount represents the only known existing location for the species in Northern Ireland.

The site's integrity is subject to pressures including: drainage, timber removal and invasion by exotics.

2.3.5 Murlough SAC

The site adjoins Dundrum Bay and includes the shallow waters of the Bay itself of importance as the largest area of shallow sub-littoral sandbanks in Northern Ireland. The inter-tidal sands and muds are also extensive, the beach area at Ballykinler is important as a haul-out for Common Seal. The terrestrial element comprises the major dune systems of Murlough and Ballykinler, together with the relatively intact low dunes and ridges within Royal County Down golf club. These host a range of dune communities, but most important, are the dune heath and grey dune grasslands. The site is particularly important for the population of marsh-fritillary butterfly. The Inner Bay supports limited saltmarsh. The site is of international importance for earth science with contemporary coastal processes, including a classic ridge and runnel beach form, and associated dune forms, together with features important to understanding post-glacial sea-level history including the important underlying gravel series.

The site's integrity is subject to pressures which include: disruption to natural sediment regime, recreational pressure, inappropriate grazing levels and changes to surrounding land use.

2.3.6 Aughnadarragh SAC

Aughnadarragh is a complex site of high conservation value, with a variety of wetland habitats.

The area is particularly notable as one of the longest established colonies of the Marsh Fritillary butterfly *Euphydryas aurinia* in Northern Ireland. The species was first recorded in 1984, with records in most years since then, and annually since 1990. In 1999, 48 webs were recorded in August/September.

The area is an inter-drumlin wetland with a mosaic of notable vegetation communities fringing a mesotrophic lake. Of particular importance is the marginal mossy fen, which is extensive to the south and east behind the swamp and tall herb fen that fringes Aughnadarragh Lough. The mossy fen is predominantly base-rich in type, with pockets of poor acid fen around a small remnant pocket of raised bog in the south. Wet woodland and scrub fringe the lough to the east and north. Although not an ASSI qualifying feature, the open water community is also significant, being a reasonable example of a mesotrophic lake (NILS type VIII – open water extent 2.58 ha).

The range of vegetation types associated with the site makes it one of the most diverse wetlands in County Down.

The site's integrity is subject to pressures including: drainage, inappropriate grazing, fly-tipping, changes to surrounding land-use and application of fertiliser/ manure/ slurry.

2.3.7 Turmennan SAC and Ramsar site

This small valley mire, being in a transitional stage between fen and bog, shows a broad range of surface conditions, from slightly base-rich to markedly acidic. These zones reflect the position of the ground water table in the surface peat layer. The main plant community of the mire surface is formed by an extensive species rich mixed sedge sward over a carpet of brown mosses. In more acidic places a carpet of *Sphagnum* mosses is found. Whilst the central area of the site is dominated by Common Reed swamp, other fen communities are more localised. A number of notable plants can be found. The site also supports a range of other habitats, such as small open pools, species rich wet and dry grassland, small pockets of woodland/scrub and wet heath, providing additional diversity. A rich invertebrate community with several uncommon and rare species is present. The land surrounding the mire is generally unimproved rough grazing with rocky outcrops.

Turmennan is recognised as a Ramsar site because it is a lowland valley mire with a range of edaphic conditions.

The site's integrity is subject to pressures including: intensification of agriculture on adjacent lands, fly-tipping and drainage.

2.3.8 Ballykilbeg SAC

This is a large, complex site of high conservation value, with a variety of habitats. The area is particularly notable for its established colonies of Marsh Fritillary butterfly *Euphydryas aurinia*. First recorded in 1996, there have been records of adults and larvae each year since. In 1999, 168 webs were recorded in August/September.

Although the site has been affected by drainage, the fen communities present are still diverse and interesting. In addition, this site contains a good deal of scrub and woodland which, although not extensive in size, provides good wildlife habitat for birds and invertebrates. As well as a large variety of woody species, the physical structure is very diverse, varying from low gorse and bramble, through intermediate size shrubs and trees of willow, rowan and holly, to large trees of ash, beech, wych elm and Scots pine. Additional interest is provided at Lough Falcon, in the extreme north of the site, where there are the remains of an ancient monastery.

The site's integrity is subject to pressures including: intensification of agriculture on adjacent lands, fly-tipping and drainage.

2.3.8 Outer Ards SPA and Ramsar site

This coastal site extends from near Grey Point, Belfast Lough to north of Ballyquintin Point at the southern end of the Ards Peninsula. The site is contiguous with Belfast Lough SPA and Strangford Lough SAC/SPA. It comprises a variety of shoreline types including rock platforms, off-shore islands, boulder, gravel and sand beaches. Coastal relief is low so that no significant cliffs are present. While the wintering waterfowl utilise the open shore, breeding seabirds are only present on the Copeland Islands and on Cockle Island, Groomsport. Limited adjoining habitat is included in the site, principally maritime heath and grassland.

The site is recognised as a Ramsar site because it holds species/populations occurring at levels of international importance, including: Light bellied Brent Goose, Ringed Plover, European Golden Plover and Turnstone.

The site's integrity is subject to pressures including: bait digging, commercial and recreational boating, changes in water quality and sand extraction.

2.3.10 Killough Bay and Strand Lough SPA and Ramsar site

Killough Bay encompasses the inter-tidal areas, and additional adjoining areas of notable habitat. These include mudflats, sand dominated beaches, gravel and cobble units and rocky shore. The principal interest is the wintering population of Light-bellied Brent Goose.

The site is recognised as a Ramsar site because it holds internationally important numbers of Light bellied Brent Geese.

The site's integrity is subject to pressures including: boating activity and bait digging.

2.3.11 Belfast Lough SPA and Ramsar site

Belfast Lough SPA includes the sea lough and a range of inter-tidal habitats including extensive mud and sand flats, mussel beds, boulder shores and rock platforms. Adjoining habitat includes beaches and limited maritime heath and grasslands notably on the outer southern shore. The lagoons at Belfast Harbour and Victoria Park (the latter formally tidal) are also included.

The SPA comprises most of Inner and all of Outer Belfast Lough ASSI and is coincident with the Ramsar boundary. All inter-tidal habitat is included together with any adjoining natural or semi-natural habitat. The outer boundary on the northern shore is the limit of wide sediment dominated shore (east of Kilroot the inter-tidal zone is generally narrow and typically boulder dominated). On the southern shore, it is the general limit of rock platform interspersed with mud and sand

dominated bays (east of Horse Rock typically alternates between broad sand beaches with intervening rock shores). Also included is the important brackish lagoon at the Harbour Estate (D2), together with the tidal channel at Dargan Road. All these areas are utilised by Redshank. Roost sites occurring outside the extent of natural or semi-natural habitat have not been included but their importance must not be underestimated.

The site is recognised as a Ramsar site because it holds internationally important numbers of Redshank.

The site's integrity is subject to pressures including: boating activity and bait digging.

2.3.12 Belfast Lough Open Water SPA

Belfast Lough is a large intertidal sea lough situated at the mouth of the River Lagan on the east coast of Northern Ireland. The inner part of the lough comprises a series of mudflats and lagoons. The outer lough is restricted to mainly rocky shores with some small sandy bays.

The Belfast Lough open water area comprises the marine area below the mean low water mark. Seawards it extends to a notional boundary between the eastern limits on the north and south shores of the Outer Belfast Lough Area of Special Scientific Interest at Kilroot and Horse Rock respectively. The boundary towards the head of the lough is a notional line between Greencastle on the northern shore and Holywood Bank on the southern shore.

Water depths within the site are generally between 1m and 10m. Shallow waters, less than 5m in depth, dominate the area with deeper waters confined to the central area of the lough, east of a line between Greenisland and Cultra.

The site's integrity is subject to pressures such as boating activity and aquaculture.

2.4 Test of Likely Significance (TOLS)

2.4.1 The Plan and the PAC Recommendations have been tested for likely direct, indirect and cumulative impact, alone and in combination on the Natura 2000 and Ramsar sites.

2.4.2 The TOLS was carried out to establish whether the Plan Proposals would have a likely significant impact on the conservation objectives of any of the Natura 2000 sites or the feature criteria of the Ramsar sites.

2.4.3 The individual Plan Proposals were tested in combination with other plans, policies and projects which in combination with the Plan might be likely to affect the Natura 2000 sites. These are referenced for the purposes of the TOLS (Appendix 1). The TOLS is formatted in 'matrix' style (Appendix 2). The Natura 2000 Standard Data Form for SPAs

may be found on the JNCC website at www.jncc.gov.uk/page-1404 and the Standard Data Forms for the SACs may be found at www.jncc.gov.uk/ProtectedSites/SACselection/SAC_list.asp?Country=NI. Ramsar Information Sheet for each of the Ramsar sites considered may be found on the Joint Nature Conservation Committee website at www.jncc.gov.uk/page-1393.

2.4.4 There are two Natura 2000 sites which are in close proximity to, but wholly outside, the Plan Area (Belfast Lough SPA and Belfast Lough Open Water SPA). The Plan is unlikely to have a significant impact on these sites. The 'Net Tidal Flow' is from north to south from Belfast Lough along the County Down coast. On this basis, there are no Plan Proposals that would result in the loss, fragmentation, disruption, disturbance or change to key elements of any of these two Natura 2000/ Ramsar sites. The condition of the sites is monitored on a regular basis by Natural Heritage, Northern Ireland Environment Agency. Furthermore it is deemed that there are no other sites which are likely to be adversely impacted outside of those named above.

2.4.5 **Plan elements likely to directly impact on Natura 2000 sites**

There are no Plan development proposals that directly have a negative impact on any of the Natura 2000 sites. However, a number of individual Plan Proposals have the potential to have an indirect impact, either alone, cumulatively or in combination on one or more of the aforementioned Natura 2000 sites.

2.4.6 **Likely Indirect Impacts on the Natura 2000 sites (alone or in combination)**

- Pollution impacting on water quality caused by industrial or domestic discharges to water courses upstream of, or directly into a site
- pollution from aerial deposition
- Disruption to site hydrology due to possibility of new extractive industry permissions or licences or one-off housing
- Disturbance due to construction of new transportation networks
- Disturbance during development construction phase (timing, duration, noise)
- Increase in disturbance associated with increased recreational activity
- Loss of habitat adjacent to a Natura site

2.4.7 **Likely changes to the Natura 2000 sites**

The physical changes that will flow from the Plan will include development proposals, with associated infrastructure, both within and outside proposed Settlement Limits. This will include potential impact / disruption at construction / implementation phase as well as day to day operational impact / disruption.

Development in close proximity to fen and peatland Natura 2000 has the potential to adversely impact on water quality and the hydrology of the site.

Emissions and waste will include building materials, spoil (earth, stone etc) and potentially chemical emissions during the operational phase and domestic and industrial emissions during the lifetime of the Plan and beyond. Construction / operation / decommissioning will occur over the lifetime of the Plan and on a variety of sites.

The Plan also proposes various restrictions on development on sites of natural heritage, landscape, historical and archaeological heritage value.

Resources required to implement the Plan will include; water abstraction, waste water treatment capacity, stone / aggregates, waste disposal, energy, machinery and manpower (not an exhaustive list).

Likely forces for change to Natura 2000 and Ramsar sites, either as a result of the impact of the Plan alone or in combination with other plans, are as follows:

Strangford Lough SAC/ SPA/ Ramsar: possible waterborne pollution from industry/ housing resulting in eutrophication and change in plant community composition; possible disturbance from development proposals in proximity to the site both during construction period and thereafter; disturbance from increased water based recreational/ boating activities; possible disturbance from land based recreational activities resulting in disruption to feeding birds and subsequent loss to energy/ feeding budget. There are potentially adverse impacts from commercial fishing.

Eastern Mourne SAC: adverse impacts caused by increased recreational pressures; potential for one-off housing development resulting in habitat loss adjacent to the site, and changes to quality of habitats; and possible aerial pollution from industrial emissions causing loss or deterioration to sensitive *Racomitrium* heath.

Lecale Fens SAC: water pollution from new development may result in indirect eutrophication of, and changes to, quality of habitat; potential for damage associated with human activity resulting from new development; extractive permissions on the periphery of the site affecting site hydrology

Hollymount SAC: new development may result in indirect eutrophication of, and changes to, quality of habitat; potential for adverse impacts caused by increased recreational pressures; extractive permissions on the periphery of the site affecting site hydrology.

Murlough SAC: possible eutrophication resulting from waterborne pollution from industry/ housing causing changes to plant communities; adverse impacts caused by increased recreational pressures.

Aughnadarragh SAC: new development may result in indirect eutrophication of, and changes to, quality of habitat; potential for extractive permissions on the periphery of the site affecting site hydrology.

Turmennan SAC/ Ramsar: water pollution from new development may result in indirect eutrophication of, and changes to, quality of habitat; damage associated with human activity resulting from new development; adverse impacts caused by increased recreational pressures.

Ballykilbeg SAC: new development may result in indirect eutrophication of, and changes to, quality of habitat; potential for damage associated with human activity resulting from new development; extractive permissions on the periphery of the site affecting site hydrology.

Outer Ards SPA/ Ramsar: possible waterborne pollution from industry/ housing resulting in eutrophication and change to water quality; possible disturbance from development proposals in proximity to the site both during construction period and thereafter, disturbance from increased port related activities; possible disturbance from recreational activities resulting in disruption to feeding birds and subsequent loss to energy/ feeding budget.

Killough Bay and Strand Lough SPA/ Ramsar: possible waterborne pollution from industry/ housing resulting in eutrophication and change in plant composition; possible disturbance from development proposals in proximity to the site both during construction period and thereafter, disturbance from increased boating related activities; possible disturbance from recreational activities resulting in disruption to feeding birds and subsequent loss to energy/ feeding budget.

2.4.8 **Result of the Test of Likely Significance**

To facilitate the TOLS, the issues addressed by the Draft Plan have been grouped into 12 policy groupings. The 12 plan policy groupings have been tested alone and in combination against the conservation objectives/ selection features for each selected site. The results of this test are displayed in 'matrix' form in Appendix 2. Each policy group was scored as either: 'impact uncertain or significant' or 'no significant impact'.

2.4.9 **Findings and Conclusion of the Test of Likely Significance**

The Test of Likely Significance cannot establish that there will not be adverse effects. Nor can it be assumed that there will be no adverse

effects and therefore the precautionary principle must be applied and the Plan must be subject to an appropriate assessment.

3.0 STAGE TWO – APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT ON NATURA 2000 SITES

3.1 Introduction to the Appropriate Assessment

Having considered that the Plan is not directly connected with, or necessary to the management of any of the designated sites, an Appropriate Assessment has been undertaken of the implications of the Plan's implementation on the conservation objectives of each selected Ramsar and Natura 2000 site.

Where appropriate, an indicative hydrological 'zone of influence' has been defined for some of the Natura 2000 sites for the purpose of testing the effect of the implementation of certain Plan Policies (see Maps in Appendix 3). Individual Appropriate Assessments were carried out for each of the following sites:

- Strangford Lough SAC and Ramsar site
- Eastern Mourne SAC
- Lecale Fens Bog SAC
- Hollymount SAC
- Murlough SAC
- Aghnadarragh SAC
- Turmennan SAC and Ramsar site
- Ballykilbeg SAC
- Strangford Lough SPA
- Outer Ards SPA and Ramsar site
- Killough Bay and Strand Lough SPA and Ramsar site

The impacts of the following Land use types, and Plan policy proposals within the Plan have been assessed against each of the selected sites, namely;

1. Environment & Conservation
2. Settlement
3. Housing
4. Industry
5. Retailing, Services and Offices
6. Transportation
7. Recreation & Open Space
8. Tourism
9. Education & Community Facilities
10. Minerals
11. Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing
12. Countryside
13. In combination impact

Each Appropriate Assessment has identified those Plan Proposals and land use types within the Plan which have the potential to adversely impact on a designated site either as a result of the content of the policy or where the absence of a land use policy leaves a site potentially vulnerable to adverse impact.

The likely effects of the Plan on the international nature conservation interests and nature of the effects are described for each site in tabular form.

3.1.1 Appropriate Assessment Report for Strangford Lough Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Ramsar Site

The boundaries of the SAC and Ramsar site differ only slightly in that the Ramsar site also includes the River Quoile from Cattle Island up to the edge of Downpatrick. A map of the Natura 2000 site is attached (Appendix 3).

In the Test of Likely Significance it was not possible to objectively show that there would be no adverse effects on the integrity of either Strangford Lough SAC or Ramsar site. Therefore the 'precautionary principle' must be applied and adverse effects must be assumed.

In particular, the following Plan Proposals and Policy Topics have the potential to adversely affect the integrity of the site:

2. Settlement
3. Housing
4. Industry
5. Retailing, Services and Offices
6. Transportation
8. Tourism
12. Countryside
13. In combination

Having considered that the Plan is not directly connected with, or necessary to the management of the site, an Appropriate Assessment has been undertaken of the implications of the Plan's implementation on the site's conservation objectives.

The likely effects of the Plan on the international and European nature conservation interests for which Strangford Lough SAC and Ramsar sites were designated are described in Table 1 overleaf and amplified in the following section.

Table 1: Appropriate Assessment Report for Strangford Lough SAC and Ramsar site

PLAN PROPOSALS AND POLICY TOPICS	LIKELY ADVERSE EFFECTS	NATURE OF EFFECT
Proposal/ Policy Group 2: Settlement, SETT1, SETT2, SETT3 and associated Settlement Limit boundaries	There are Settlement Limits within the watershed of Strangford Lough where there is potential for additional pollution from sewerage and run-off associated with development, resulting in increased eutrophication and potentially adverse changes in plant community composition due to WWTWs with insufficient design capacity. In addition at Ballydrain the Settlement Limit overlaps the SAC/ SPA.	Indirect, cumulative & in combination
Proposal/ Policy Group 3 Housing Proposals/ Policies HOU 1, HOU 2, and associated housing zonings	There are housing policy areas within the proposed Settlement Limits within the watershed of Strangford Lough where there is potential for additional pollution from sewerage and run-off associated with development, resulting in increased eutrophication and potentially adverse changes to plant community composition due to WWTW with insufficient design capacity.	Indirect, cumulative & in combination
Proposal/ Policy Groups 4 & 5 Industry Policy IND 1, Proposals IND 2, IND 3 and Retailing, Services and Offices and associated industrial and retail zonings	There are industrial/ retail proposals within Settlement Limits within the watersheds of Strangford Lough where there is potential for additional pollution from discharges and run-off associated with development, resulting in potentially adverse changes to marine habitats due to WWTW with insufficient design capacity.	Indirect, cumulative & in combination
Proposal/ Policy Group 6 Transportation Policies TRAN 1, TRAN 2 and TRAN 3	Transportation Policies which facilitate road construction in combination with road construction plans/ projects may lead to potentially polluting run-off and/ or localised aerial deposition both during construction and use.	In combination effect with Road construction schemes and RTS
Proposal/ Policy Group 8 Tourism	Potential to cause 'disturbance'/ impact at the Strangford Lough site.	Indirect, cumulative, in combination
Proposal/ Policy Group 12 Countryside Policies COU 1 and COU 2	Areas within the SAC catchment area are subject to CPA and Greenbelt policies which may permit one-off development, with associated septic tanks and potential for pollution of watercourses.	Indirect, cumulative, in combination

N.B. The in combination effects are assessed to be the impacts occurring due to the combined effects of the above policy grouping.

Amplification

The following is a description of the Plan Proposals/ Policies in the Ards & Down Area Plan (alone or in combination with other projects or plans) that have been assessed as having the potential to give rise to significant effects on the conservation objectives of Strangford Lough SAC and Ramsar site.

Policy group 2 – SETT 1 Settlement Limits, SETT 2 Land Use Policy Areas, and SETT 3 Development Opportunity Sites and associated Settlement Limits

The proposed Settlement Limits, Land Use Policy Areas and Development Opportunity Sites in the Ards Borough and Down District Council areas, may cause discharge from new development (sewerage and associated run-off) that could adversely impact on water quality, either alone or cumulatively or in combination with other factors such as possible pollution from industry or agriculture.

However the Plan states that “Where waste water treatment works capacity is not sufficient to cope with a proposed development at the time of a planning application, the developer will be required to work with the Department and NIW to ensure that there will be no likely adverse impact on any Natura 2000 or Ramsar site by providing interim sewerage treatment arrangements”. In addition, where development of a zoned or designated site is likely to be dependent on the provision of interim sewage disposal measures, this is listed among the Key Design Considerations (KDC) for that site.

This KDC satisfies the requirements of the Habitats Directive, as, before development proceeds in areas where there is currently inadequate sewerage treatment capacity which could potentially result in waterborne pollution of Natura 2000 sites, measures will be put in place to protect the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

The Settlement Limit for Ballydrain (BDN01) includes part of the SAC. In combination with Policy SETT 1, there is a greater presumption for development within this portion of the designated Natura 2000 site. However, any future application would still be subject to PPS2 and it is judged that if development were to occur within the Settlement Limit, any impact would be likely to be *de minimis*.

Policy Group 3 – HOU 1 Zonings and Phasing: Ards Borough, HOU 2 Zonings and Phasing: Down District and associated zonings

Ards and Down Area Plan proposals, alone, cumulatively or in combination with proposals from other District Council areas may indirectly result in changes in water quality as a result of increased sewerage and run-off.

Within the Lough’s water catchment area, there are Housing Zonings within Settlement Limits where there is currently inadequate Waste Water Treatment Works (WWTW) capacity, where sites are very close to capacity or where the

Design Population Equivalent (PE) is currently unknown. Throughout Ards and Down Districts, Northern Ireland Water (NIW) has schemes programmed to upgrade the water and sewerage system, where required, and to comply with EU Directives, to ensure water quality and meet increasing demand (see Appendix 4, Status by Council of the Wastewater Treatment Works to accommodate development growth as detailed in the Ards and Down Area Plan 2015).

However the Plan states that “Where waste water treatment works capacity is not sufficient to cope with a proposed development at the time of a planning application, the developer will be required to work with the Department and NIW to ensure that there will be no likely adverse impact on any Natura 2000 or Ramsar site by providing interim sewerage treatment arrangements”. In addition, where development of a zoned or designated site is likely to be dependent on the provision of interim sewage disposal measures, this is listed among the Key Design Considerations (KDC) for that site.

This KDC satisfies the requirements of the Habitats Directive, as, before development proceeds in areas where there is currently inadequate sewerage treatment capacity which could potentially result in waterborne pollution of Natura 2000 sites, measures will be put in place to protect the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

Policy Group 4 – IND 1 Existing Industrial Sites, IND 2 Proposed Industrial Land, Ards Borough, IND 3 Proposed Industrial Land, Down District and Policy Group 5 – Retailing Services and Offices and associated zonings

Industrial and/ or Retail Proposals from Ards and Down Area Plan, alone or in combination, may indirectly result in pollution from effluent/ sewerage or run-off (see also comments on point source pollution in section on housing above).

Within the Strangford Lough water catchment area, there are industrial zonings within Settlement Limits. Discharges within the water catchment area may have the potential to alter the water quality. However the Plan states that “Where waste water treatment works capacity is not sufficient to cope with a proposed development at the time of a planning application, the developer will be required to work with the Department and NIW to ensure that there will be no likely adverse impact on any Natura 2000 or Ramsar site by providing interim sewerage treatment arrangements”. In addition, where development of a zoned or designated site is likely to be dependent on the provision of interim sewage disposal measures, this is listed among the Key Design Considerations (KDC) for that site.

This KDC satisfies the requirements of the Habitats Directive, as, before development proceeds in areas where there is currently inadequate sewerage treatment capacity which could potentially result in waterborne pollution of Natura 2000 sites, measures will be put in place to protect the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

Policy Group 6 – Policy TRAN 1 Planning Protection for Road Schemes, and TRAN 2 Development reliant on the provision of road schemes.

Road construction proposals have the potential to disturb/ adversely impact on Strangford Lough SAC/ Ramsar site in combination with Group 6 policies through aerial deposition and run-off. However, given the proximity of the road proposal (Bowtown Road – Portaferry Road Link, Newtownards) to the SAC and the local topography which would accentuate run-off towards the designated site, an independent Article 6 Assessment will be required for this road scheme. Any future applications would be subject to PPS 2 - Planning and Nature Conservation.

Policy Group 8 – Tourism

The Plan does not designate, zone or apply any specific tourism policies to the SAC or the surrounding landscape. As such, this policy area was assessed as having no (direct) impact on the SAC, its feature interest and component objectives.

The Draft Plan does refer to Tourist Development Opportunities identified by the RDS (Strangford Lough/ St Patrick's Country and the Mourne Mountains and Slieve Croob). Furthermore, a PAC recommendation for detailed proposals had the potential to impact on Eastern Mournes SAC. However, as this proposal has now been dropped from the RDS, it is considered no longer relevant to this Appropriate Assessment.

Any future applications related to tourism would be subject to PPS 2 - Planning and Nature Conservation and PPS 8 - Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation. As the Plan itself does not make any Tourism proposals, the impact of the plan in this respect is judged to be irrelevant.

Policy Group 12 – Countryside

The designations COU1 Green Belt, COU 2, Countryside Policy Areas, COU 11 Industrial Site, Ballynahinch Road, Crossgar could allow development that may indirectly result in pollution from sewerage or discharges or run-off associated with development. However, it should be noted that there are no specific development proposals in the Plan for housing in the countryside.

The Green Belt and Countryside Policy Area designations may allow development in the countryside and the potential for cumulative pollution of water bodies from diffuse sources. However any applications would be subject to PPS 2 - Planning and Nature Conservation and draft PPS 21 – Sustainable Development in the Countryside.

Conclusion

Safeguards are built into the Plan with regard to ensuring adequate treatment of any future sewerage outputs associated with Plan zonings.

The Plan indicates that where development of a zoned or designated site is likely to be dependent on the provision of interim sewage disposal measures, this is listed among the Key Design Considerations (KDC) for that site. The overlap of the SAC by the Ballydrain Settlement Limit is considered to be an issue that is not likely to have a significant impact. Consequently it is considered that there will be no adverse impact resulting from any of Policy Groups 2 (Settlement), 3 (Housing), 4 (Industry) or 5 (Retail).

The Plan does not propose any specific development within Policy Groups 6 (Transport), 8 (Tourism) or 12 (Greenbelt/ Countryside Policy Area) that is deemed likely to have an adverse impact. Moreover, any future tourism or transport planning applications or development within the Greenbelt or Countryside policy Areas cannot be implemented without influence from PPS2 and draft PPS 21. Development at the Industrial site COU11, Crossgar is not likely to cause an adverse impact as adequate waste water treatment capacity exists and any industry producing aerial pollution would be subject to an Article 6 Assessment.

As such, it is considered that the Plan will have no adverse effect on the integrity of the Strangford SAC.

3.1.2 Appropriate Assessment Report for Eastern Mourne Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

A map of the Natura 2000 site is attached (Appendix 3).

In the Test of Likely Significance it was not possible to objectively show that there would be no adverse effects on the integrity of Eastern Mourne SAC. Therefore the 'precautionary principle' must be applied and adverse effects must be assumed.

In particular, the following Plan Proposals and Policy Topics could adversely affect the integrity of the site:

- 4. Industry
- 8. Tourism
- 12. Countryside

Having considered that the Plan is not directly connected with, or necessary to the management of the site, an Appropriate Assessment has been undertaken of the implications of the Plan's implementation on the site's conservation objectives.

The likely effects of the Plan on the international nature conservation interests for which the site was designated may be described as follows:

Table 4: Appropriate Assessment Report for Eastern Mournes SAC

PLAN PROPOSALS AND POLICY TOPICS	LIKELY ADVERSE EFFECTS	NATURE OF EFFECT
Proposal/ Policy Group 4 Industry Policy IND 1, Proposals IND 2, IND 3	May result in industrial airborne pollution/ deposition that would detrimentally impact sensitive montane heath communities in the High Mournes.	Indirect, Alone or In-Combination with B/N&M AP
Proposal/ Policy Group 8 Tourism	Potential to cause 'disturbance'/ impact at the Eastern Mournes site.	Indirect, Alone or In-Combination with B/N&M AP
Proposal/ Policy Group 12 Countryside Policy COU 2	Changes to surrounding land-use are identified within the conservation objectives for Eastern Mournes SAC as having the potential for having an adverse impact. Countryside Policy Areas alone and in combination with other factors, may permit development proposals that would result in the loss of habitat adjacent to the SAC or potentially damaging hydrological changes.	Indirect, Alone or In-Combination with B/N&M AP Cumulative

N.B. The in combination effects are assessed to be the impacts occurring due to the combined effects of the above policy groupings

Amplification

The following is a description of the Plan Proposals (alone or in combination with other projects or plans) that have been assessed as having the potential to give rise to significant effects on the conservation objectives of Eastern Mourne SAC.

Policy Group 4 – Industry

The RDS provides a framework for sustainable industrial growth through the provisions of Strategic Planning Guidelines, which govern policy and zonings proposed within the Plan. In the Plan, a total of 82 hectares of land has been zoned for industry within the Ards & Down Borough areas under policies IND 2 and IND 3. None will impact the SAC directly.

However, scientific research has revealed the vulnerability of the vegetation communities of alpine and boreal heaths to eutrophication resulting from aerial deposition of atmospheric pollutants, particularly oxidised and reduced nitrogen. The habitats particularly at risk are alpine and boreal heaths and grasslands. The siliceous rock and scree habitats are also at risk. As these habitats are naturally poor in nutrients, they are particularly sensitive to additional inputs. Rapid changes in species composition have been shown to result from increased nutrient availability. Acidification and nitrogen enrichment from atmospheric deposition could potentially lead to vegetation changes, including the loss of *Racomitrium lanuginosum* and a reduction in other bryophyte and lichen interest. Elevated levels of ammonia can enhance the competitiveness of nutrient favourable species at the expense of alpine and boreal grassland and heath species.

Elevated areas are at more risk from these impacts, and within Northern Ireland, atmospheric nitrogen deposition increases from west to east and so the Mourne Mountains are particularly vulnerable. Impacts can extend over ranges of hundreds of kilometres.

There are no specific proposals for industry within the Plan. Any future industry with aerial emissions, proposed as a result of policies or zonings proposed within the Plan has the potential to impact the SAC. However, the plan states that: "An assessment will also be carried out before any development proceeds in respect of any industrial development which will have aerial emissions that could result in likely significant adverse impact on a Natura or Ramsar site". Any future applications would be subject to PPS 2 - Planning and Nature Conservation (PPS2).

Policy Group 8 - Tourism

The Plan does not designate, zone or apply any specific tourism policies to the SAC or the surrounding landscape. As such, this policy area was assessed as having no (direct) impact on the SAC, its feature interest and component objectives.

The Draft Plan does refer to Tourist Development Opportunities identified by the RDS (Strangford Lough/ St Patrick's Country and the Mourne Mountains and Slieve Croob). Furthermore, a PAC recommendation for detailed proposals had the potential to impact on Eastern Mournes SAC. However as this proposal has now been dropped from the RDS, it is considered no longer relevant to this Appropriate Assessment.

Recreation is identified within the conservation objectives for Eastern Mournes SAC as having the potential to have an adverse impact. There is a lack of guidance for tourist and recreational development in general, including car parks, picnic-areas and lay-bys which in conjunction with existing resources for outdoor recreation leaves scope to allow for damaging development in the future. The subsequent increase in use of these resources for outdoor recreation is likely to continue indefinitely, representing a potentially damaging cumulative impact on the integrity of the SAC.

Whilst future planning applications associated with Tourism may have the potential for impacts in-combination with other initiatives, any applications would be subject to PPS 2 - Planning and Nature Conservation and PPS 8 - Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation. As the Plan itself does not make any Tourism proposals, the impact of the Plan on Eastern Mournes SAC is judged to be irrelevant.

Policy Group - 12 Countryside.

The Mourne CPA covers the the SAC and the low-lying agricultural land north of the designated site within the Down District Council area. Countryside Policy Area (CPA) designations do not specifically prohibit, or place any specific criteria on planning applications within the context of the Plan. Rather, development is controlled in accordance with prevailing regional planning policy, primarily determined by current Planning Policy Statements.

Whilst changes to surrounding land-use are identified within the conservation objectives for Eastern Mournes SAC as having the potential to have an adverse impact on the SAC, it should be noted that there are no specific development proposals in the Plan for housing in the countryside, moreover, future applications would be subject to PPS 2 - Planning and Nature Conservation and draft PPS 21 – Sustainable Development in the Countryside.

Conclusion

The Plan does not propose any specific development within Policy Groups 4 (Industry), 8 (Tourism) or 12 (Countryside). Moreover, any future tourism planning applications or development within the Countryside Policy Area cannot be implemented without influence from PPS2 and draft PPS 21.

Development as the result of an Industrial zoning in the Plan is not likely to cause an adverse impact as any industry producing aerial pollution would be subject to an Article 6 Assessment as outlined in the Plan.

As such, it is considered that the Plan will have no adverse effect on the integrity of the Eastern Mourne SAC.

3.1.3 Appropriate Assessment Report for Lecale Fens Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Maps of this Natura 2000 site are attached (Appendix 3) showing the “Zones of Influence” considered for the Appropriate Assessment. The rationale for the Zones of Influence includes the designated sites and their watersheds. These are based on the surrounding topography of this complex of sites. Within the zones of influence, mineral extraction or one off housing, associated with the Plan Proposals and Policy outlined below, have the potential to cause direct or indirect adverse impact on the conservation objectives of the SAC.

In the Test of Likely Significance it was not possible to objectively show that there would be no adverse effects on the integrity of Lecale Fens SAC. Therefore the ‘precautionary principle’ must be applied and adverse effects must be assumed.

In particular, the following Plan Proposals and Policy Topics in combination with other plans/ projects could adversely affect the integrity of the site:

12. Countryside

Having considered that the Plan is not directly connected with, or necessary to the management of the site, an Appropriate Assessment has been undertaken of the implications of the Plan’s implementation on the site’s conservation objectives.

The likely effects of the Plan on the international nature conservation interests for which the site was designated may be described as follows:

Table 4: Appropriate Assessment Report for Lecale Fens SAC

<p>Proposal/ Policy Group 12 Countryside Policies COU 1 COU 2 and COU 8</p>	<p>Changes to surrounding land-use are identified within the conservation objectives for Lecale Fens SAC as having the potential for having an adverse impact. Greenbelts/ Countryside Policy Areas alone and in combination with other factors and lack of an Area of Constraint on Mineral Development (ACMD) around Corbally Fen, may permit development proposals that would result in the loss of habitat adjacent to the SAC or potentially damaging hydrological changes.</p>	<p>Indirect, Alone, Cumulative or In-Combination</p>
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N.B. The in combination effects are assessed to be the impacts occurring due to the combined effects of the above policy groupings

Amplification

The following is a description of the Plan Proposals (alone or in combination with other projects or plans) that have been assessed as having the potential to give rise to significant effects on the conservation objectives of Lecale Fens SAC.

Policy Group 12 – Countryside.

The Lecale is a lowland area typified by low drumlins with wide inter-drumlin hollows that are often poorly draining. The underlying rocks are mainly Silurian sandstones and shales. However, calcium-rich Kearny Siltstones occur locally, and some of the fens in the area are correspondingly fed by base-rich ground waters. The four sub-sites included within the Lecale Fens SAC are separately designated as ASSIs and are considered the best examples of calcium-rich spring water-fed fens remaining in the area. It is the co-occurring species in places both within the reedbeds and in the usually small areas of open fen, often at reedbed margins, that elevate the conservation importance beyond ASSI status. Ponds, pools and springs add diversity to the sites and at Loughkeelan the fen is associated with an important lake.

Within the Plan, the SAC sub-sites lie partially within the Countryside Policy Area and partially within Greenbelt. Loughkeelan is in Greenbelt and lies two and a half miles to the north west of Ballyhornan. Ballycam is in the Countryside Policy Area one mile to the south west of Killough. Corbally is in the Greenbelt and lies east of the A2 Clough to Killough road. Carrowcarlin is in the Countryside Policy Area and lies north of the A25 on the Strangford to Downpatrick road. Countryside Policy Areas (CPA) and Greenbelt designations do not specifically prohibit planning applications within the context of the Plan. Rather, development is controlled in accordance with prevailing regional planning policy, primarily determined by current Planning Policy Statements.

Loughkeelan, Carrowcarlin and Ballycam Fens lie within an Area of Constraint on Mineral Development (ACMD). However, Corbally Fen does not sit within an ACMD. This potentially leaves a greater presumption to approval for extraction of minerals adjacent to this site with potentially damaging results to the site's hydrology.

Changes to surrounding land-use are identified within the conservation objectives for Lecale Fens SAC as having the potential to have adverse impacts on the SAC. There are no specific proposals for built development around the Fens or for mineral extraction in the Plan. Any future applications for one-off housing or mineral extraction within the sites' Zones of Influence would be subject to policy within The Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland (PSRNI), draft PPS 21 and PPS 2 - Planning and Nature Conservation (PPS2).

Conclusion

There are no specific proposals within the Plan for one-off housing or mineral extraction within the zone of influence for Lecale Fens SAC.

The plan states that: “Where appropriate, hydrological Zones of Influence have been identified for Natura 2000 sites in line with the requirements of Planning Policy Statement 2 (PPS 2)An Article 6 Assessment will be carried out before development proceeds in respect of built development or mineral extraction applications within these zones of influence”. Moreover, Policy Group 12 (Countryside) cannot be implemented without influence from PSRNI, draft PPS 21 and PPS2.

As such, it is considered that the Plan will have no adverse effect on the integrity of the site.

3.1.4 Appropriate Assessment Report for Hollymount Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

A map of the Natura 2000 site is attached (Appendix 3) showing the “Zone of Influence” considered for the Appropriate Assessment. The rationale for the Zone of Influence includes the designated site and the surrounding area within which, applications for mineral extraction or one-off housing associated with the Plan Proposals, outlined below, have the potential to cause indirect adverse impact on the conservation objectives of the SAC. The Zone of Influence is based on the local topographical influence on the watershed for the site.

In the Test of Likely Significance it was not possible to objectively show that there would be no adverse effects on the integrity of Hollymount SAC. Therefore the ‘precautionary principle’ must be applied and adverse effects must be assumed.

In particular, the following Plan Proposals and Policy Topics could adversely affect the integrity of the site:

2. Settlement
3. Housing
4. Industry
5. Retailing, Services and Offices
12. Countryside

Having considered that the Plan is not directly connected with, or necessary to the management of the site, an Appropriate Assessment has been undertaken of the implications of the Plan’s implementation on the site’s conservation objectives.

The likely effects of the Plan on the international nature conservation interests for which the site was designated may be described as follows:

Table 4: Appropriate Assessment Report for Hollymount SAC

PLAN PROPOSALS AND POLICY TOPICS	LIKELY ADVERSE EFFECTS	NATURE OF EFFECT
Proposal/ Policy Group 2: Settlement, SETT1, SETT2, SETT3 and associated Settlement Limit boundaries	The Settlement Limit of Downpatrick abuts the watershed of Hollymount SAC where there is potential for additional pollution from sewerage and run-off associated with development, resulting in increased eutrophication and potentially adverse changes in plant community composition due to WWTWs with insufficient design capacity.	Indirect, cumulative & in combination
Proposal/ Policy Group 3 Housing Proposals/ Policies HOU 1, HOU 2, and associated housing zonings	There are housing policy areas within the proposed Settlement Limits within the watershed of Hollymount SAC where there is potential for additional pollution from sewerage and run-off associated with development, resulting in increased eutrophication and potentially adverse changes to plant community composition due to WWTW with insufficient design capacity.	Indirect, cumulative & in combination
Proposal/ Policy Groups 4 & 5 Industry Policy IND 1, Proposals IND 2, IND 3 and Retailing, Services and Offices and associated industrial and retail zonings	There are industrial/ retail proposals within Settlement Limits within the watershed of Hollymount SAC where there is potential for additional pollution from discharges and run-off associated with development, resulting in potentially adverse changes to marine habitats/ food availability due to WWTW with insufficient design capacity.	Indirect, cumulative & in combination
Proposal/ Policy Group 12 Countryside Policies COU 2 and COU 8	Changes to surrounding land-use are identified within the conservation objectives for Hollymount SAC as having the potential for having an adverse impact. Countryside Policy Areas alone and in combination with other factors and lack of an Area of Constraint on Mineral Development (ACMD) around the SAC may permit development proposals that would result in the loss of habitat adjacent to the SAC or potentially damaging hydrological changes.	Indirect, Alone or In-Combination Cumulative

N.B. The in combination effects are assessed to be the impacts occurring due to the combined effects of the above policy groupings

Amplification

The following is a description of the Plan Proposals (alone or in combination with other projects or plans) that have been assessed as having the potential to give rise to significant effects on the conservation objectives of Hollymount SAC.

Policy group 2 – SETT 1 Settlement Limits, SETT 2 Land Use Policy Areas, and SETT 3 Development Opportunity Sites and associated Settlement Limits

The Hollymount SAC sits both above and within the River Quoile floodplain. In particular, flooding events may cover the wet swamp carr woodland areas of the site. The proposed Downpatrick Settlement Limit may result in discharge from new development (sewerage and associated run-off) that could adversely impact on water quality, either alone or cumulatively or in combination with other factors such as possible pollution from industry or agriculture.

However the Plan states that “Where waste water treatment works capacity is not sufficient to cope with a proposed development at the time of a planning application, the developer will be required to work with the Department and NIW to ensure that there will be no likely adverse impact on any Natura 2000 or Ramsar site by providing interim sewerage treatment arrangements”. In addition, where development of a zoned or designated site is likely to be dependent on the provision of interim sewage disposal measures, this is listed among the Key Design Considerations (KDC) for that site.

This KDC satisfies the requirements of the Habitats Directive, as, before development proceeds in areas where there is currently inadequate sewerage treatment capacity which could potentially result in waterborne pollution of Natura 2000 sites, measures will be put in place to protect the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

Policy Group 3 – HOU 1 Zonings and Phasing: Ards Borough, HOU 2 Zonings and Phasing: Down District, and associated zonings

The Hollymount SAC sits both above and within the River Quoile floodplain. In particular, flooding events may cover the wet swamp carr woodland areas of the site. The proposed Downpatrick Settlement Limit may result in discharge from new development (sewerage and associated run-off) that could adversely impact on water quality, either alone or cumulatively or in combination with other factors such as possible pollution from industry or agriculture.

Within the site’s water catchment area, there are Housing Zonings within Downpatrick Settlement Limit where there is currently inadequate Waste Water Treatment Works (WWTW) capacity. Throughout Ards and Down Districts, Northern Ireland Water (NIW) has schemes programmed to upgrade the water and sewerage system, where required, and to comply with EU

Directives, to ensure water quality and meet increasing demand (see Appendix 4, Status by Council of the Wastewater Treatment Works to accommodate development growth as detailed in the Ards and Down Area Plan 2015).

However the Plan states that “Where waste water treatment works capacity is not sufficient to cope with a proposed development at the time of a planning application, the developer will be required to work with the Department and NIW to ensure that there will be no likely adverse impact on any Natura 2000 or Ramsar site by providing interim sewerage treatment arrangements”. In addition, where development of a zoned or designated site is likely to be dependent on the provision of interim sewage disposal measures, this is listed among the Key Design Considerations (KDC) for that site.

This KDC satisfies the requirements of the Habitats Directive, as, before development proceeds in areas where there is currently inadequate sewerage treatment capacity which could potentially result in waterborne pollution of Natura 2000 sites, measures will be put in place to protect the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

Policy Group 4 – IND 1 Existing Industrial Sites, IND 2 Proposed Industrial Land, Ards Borough, IND 3 Proposed Industrial Land, Down District and Policy Group 5 – Retailing Services and Offices and associated zonings

The Hollymount SAC sits both above and within the River Quoile floodplain. In particular, flooding events may cover the wet swamp carr woodland areas of the site. The proposed Downpatrick Settlement Limit may result in discharge from new industrial development (sewerage and associated run-off) that could adversely impact on water quality, either alone or cumulatively or in combination with other factors such as possible pollution from industry or agriculture.

Within the site’s water catchment area, there are industrial zonings where discharges within the water catchment area may have the potential to alter the water quality. However the Plan states that “Where waste water treatment works capacity is not sufficient to cope with a proposed development at the time of a planning application, the developer will be required to work with the Department and NIW to ensure that there will be no likely adverse impact on any Natura 2000 or Ramsar site by providing interim sewerage treatment arrangements”. In addition, where development of a zoned or designated site is likely to be dependent on the provision of interim sewage disposal measures, this is listed among the Key Design Considerations (KDC) for that site.

This KDC satisfies the requirements of the Habitats Directive, as, before development proceeds in areas where there is currently inadequate sewerage treatment capacity which could potentially result in waterborne pollution of Natura 2000 sites, measures will be put in place to protect the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

Policy Group - 12 Countryside.

Hollymount SAC lies within a Greenbelt and Countryside Policy Area. Greenbelt/ Countryside Policy Area (CPA) designations do not specifically prohibit planning applications within the context of the Plan. Rather, development is controlled in accordance with prevailing regional planning policy, primarily determined by current Planning Policy Statements.

Changes to surrounding land-use are identified within the conservation objectives for Hollymount SAC as an adverse impact on the SAC, and the use of tests of likely significance and appropriate assessments, through the planning process identified as a primary method of avoiding and mitigating for these impacts.

Hollymount SAC does not sit within an ACMD. This potentially leaves a greater presumption to approval for extraction of minerals adjacent to this site with potentially damaging results to the site's hydrology.

It should be noted that there are no specific development proposals in the Plan for housing in the countryside or for mineral extraction. However any future applications would be subject to PPS 2 - Planning and Nature Conservation and PPS 21.

Conclusion

Safeguards are built into the Plan with regard to ensuring adequate treatment of any future sewerage outputs associated with Plan zonings.

The Plan indicates that where development of a zoned or designated site is likely to be dependent on the provision of interim sewage disposal measures, this is listed among the Key Design Considerations (KDC) for that site. Consequently it is considered that there will be no adverse impact resulting from any of Policy Groups 2 (Settlement), 3 (Housing), 4 (Industry) or 5 (Retail).

There are no specific proposals within the Plan for one-off housing or for mineral extraction within the zone of influence for Hollymount SAC. The Plan states that: "Where appropriate, hydrological Zones of Influence have been identified for Natura 2000 sites in line with the requirements of Planning Policy Statement 2 (PPS 2)An Article 6 Assessment will be carried out before development proceeds in respect of built development or mineral extraction applications within these zones of influence". Moreover, Policy Group 12 (Countryside) cannot be implemented without influence from PSRNI, draft PPS 21 and PPS2.

As such, it is considered that the Plan will have no adverse effect on the integrity of the site.

3.1.5 Appropriate Assessment Report for Murlough Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

A map of the Natura 2000 site is attached (Appendix 3).

In the Test of Likely Significance it was not possible to objectively show that there would be no adverse effects on the integrity of Murlough SAC. Therefore the 'precautionary principle' must be applied and adverse effects must be assumed.

In particular, the following Plan Proposals and Policy Topics could adversely affect the integrity of the site:

2. Settlement
- 3 Housing
4. Industry
- 5 Retail, Services and Offices
8. Tourism
12. Countryside

Having considered that the Plan is not directly connected with, or necessary to the management of the site, an Appropriate Assessment has been undertaken of the implications of the Plan's implementation on the site's conservation objectives.

The likely effects of the Plan on the international nature conservation interests for which the site was designated may be described as follows:

Table 4: Appropriate Assessment Report for Murlough SAC

PLAN PROPOSALS AND POLICY TOPICS	LIKELY ADVERSE EFFECTS	NATURE OF EFFECT
Proposal/ Policy Group 2: Settlement, SETT1, SETT2, SETT3 and associated Settlement Limit boundaries	The Settlement Limits of Newcastle and Dundrum are adjacent to Murlough SAC. There is potential for additional pollution from sewerage and run-off associated with development, resulting in increased eutrophication and potentially adverse changes due to WWTW with insufficient design capacity.	Indirect, cumulative & in combination with B/N&M Area Plan
Proposal/ Policy Group 3 Housing Proposals/ Policies HOU 1, HOU 2, and associated housing zonings	There are housing policy areas within the proposed Settlement Limits of Newcastle and Dundrum and within the watershed of Murlough SAC, where there is potential for additional pollution from sewerage and run-off associated with development, resulting in increased eutrophication and potentially adverse changes due to WWTW with insufficient design capacity.	Indirect, cumulative & in combination with B/N&M Area Plan
Proposal/ Policy Groups 4 & 5 Industry Policy IND 1, Proposals IND 2, IND 3 and associated industrial and retail zonings	There are industrial policy areas within the proposed Settlement Limits of Newcastle and Dundrum and within the watershed of Murlough SAC, where there is potential for additional pollution from sewerage and run-off associated with development, resulting in increased eutrophication and potentially adverse changes due to WWTW with insufficient design capacity.	Indirect, Alone or In-Combination with B/N&M AP
Proposal/ Policy Group 8 Tourism	Potential to cause 'disturbance'/ impact at the Murlough site.	Indirect, Alone or In-Combination with B/N&M AP
Proposal/ Policy Group 12 Countryside Policies COU 1 and COU 2	Changes to surrounding land-use are identified within the conservation objectives for Murlough SAC as having the potential for having an adverse impact. Countryside Policy Areas alone and in combination with other factors, may permit development proposals that would result in the loss of habitat adjacent to the SAC or potentially damaging hydrological changes.	Indirect, Alone or In-Combination with B/N&M AP Cumulative

N.B. The in combination effects are assessed to be the impacts occurring due to the combined effects of the above policy groupings

Amplification

The following is a description of the Plan Proposals (alone or in combination with other projects or plans) that have been assessed as having the potential to give rise to significant effects on the conservation objectives of Murlough SAC.

Policy group 2 – SETT 1 Settlement Limits, SETT 2 Land Use Policy Areas, and SETT 3 Development Opportunity Sites

The Settlement Limits for Newcastle and Dundrum are adjacent to Murlough SAC. Discharges from new development (sewerage and associated run-off) associated with the Settlement Limits could impact adversely on water quality, either alone or cumulatively or in combination with other factors such as possible pollution from industry or agriculture.

However the Plan states that “Where waste water treatment works capacity is not sufficient to cope with a proposed development at the time of a planning application, the developer will be required to work with the Department and NIW to ensure that there will be no likely adverse impact on any Natura 2000 or Ramsar site by providing interim sewerage treatment arrangements”. In addition, where development of a zoned or designated site is likely to be dependent on the provision of interim sewage disposal measures, this is listed among the Key Design Considerations (KDC) for that site.

This KDC satisfies the requirements of the Habitats Directive, as, before development proceeds in areas where there is currently inadequate sewerage treatment capacity which could potentially result in waterborne pollution of Natura 2000 sites, measures will be put in place to protect the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

Policy Group 3 - HOU 2 Zonings and Phasing: Down District

Within the Murlough SAC water catchment area, there are Housing Zonings within Settlement Limits of Newcastle and other small settlements where there is currently inadequate Waste Water Treatment Works (WWTW) capacity or the lack of capacity to absorb discharge from further development.

Throughout Ards and Down Districts, Northern Ireland Water (NIW) has schemes programmed to upgrade the water and sewerage system, where required, and to comply with EU Directives, to ensure water quality and meet increasing demand (see Appendix 4, Status by Council of the Wastewater Treatment Works to accommodate development growth as detailed in the Ards and Down Area Plan 2015).

However the Plan states that “Where waste water treatment works capacity is not sufficient to cope with a proposed development at the time of a planning application, the developer will be required to work with the Department and NIW to ensure that there will be no likely adverse impact on any Natura 2000 or Ramsar site by providing interim sewerage treatment arrangements”. In addition, where development of a zoned or designated site is likely to be

dependent on the provision of interim sewage disposal measures, this is listed among the Key Design Considerations (KDC) for that site.

This KDC satisfies the requirements of the Habitats Directive, as, before development proceeds in areas where there is currently inadequate sewerage treatment capacity which could potentially result in waterborne pollution of Natura 2000 sites, measures will be put in place to protect the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

Policy Group 4 – IND 1 Existing Industrial Sites, IND 3 Proposed Industrial Land, Down District and Policy Group 5 – Retailing Services and Offices

Industrial and/ or Retail Proposals from Ards and Down Area Plan, alone or in combination, may indirectly result in pollution from effluent/ sewerage or run-off (see also comments on point source pollution in section on housing above).

Within the Murlough SAC water catchment area, there are industrial and retail zonings within Settlement Limits. Discharges within the water catchment area may have the potential to alter the water quality. Throughout Ards and Down Districts, Northern Ireland Water (NIW) has schemes programmed to upgrade the water and sewerage system, where required, and to comply with EU Directives, to ensure water quality and meet increasing demand.

However the Plan states that “Where waste water treatment works capacity is not sufficient to cope with a proposed development at the time of a planning application, the developer will be required to work with the Department and NIW to ensure that there will be no likely adverse impact on any Natura 2000 or Ramsar site by providing interim sewerage treatment arrangements”. In addition, where development of a zoned or designated site is likely to be dependent on the provision of interim sewage disposal measures, this is listed among the Key Design Considerations (KDC) for that site.

This KDC satisfies the requirements of the Habitats Directive, as, before development proceeds in areas where there is currently inadequate sewerage treatment capacity which could potentially result in waterborne pollution of Natura 2000 sites, measures will be put in place to protect the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

Any applications within the Ards or Down District area would be subject to PPS 2 - Planning and Nature Conservation.

Policy Group 8 - Tourism

The Plan does not designate, zone or apply any policies specific to the SAC or the surrounding landscape. As such, this policy area was assessed as having no (direct) impact on the SAC, its feature interest and component objectives.

The Draft Plan does refer to Tourist Development Opportunities identified by the RDS (Strangford Lough/ St Patrick's Country and the Mourne Mountains and Slieve Croob). Furthermore, a PAC recommendation for detailed proposals has the potential to impact on Eastern Mournes SAC. As this proposal has now been dropped from the RDS, it is considered no longer relevant to this Appropriate Assessment.

Recreation is identified within the conservation objectives for Murlough SAC as having the potential to have an adverse impact. Any subsequent increase in use of this resource for outdoor recreation could continue indefinitely, representing a potentially damaging cumulative impact on the integrity of the SAC.

It is considered that future planning applications associated with Tourism may have the potential for likely significant impacts in-combination with other initiatives. However, any future applications would be subject to PPS 2 - Planning and Nature Conservation and PPS 8 - Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation.

As the Plan itself does not make any Tourism proposals, the impact of the plan is judged to be irrelevant.

Policy Group - 12 Countryside

Murlough SAC lies within a Countryside Policy Area. Countryside Policy Area (CPA) designations do not specifically prohibit planning applications within the context of the Plan. Rather, development is controlled in accordance with prevailing regional planning policy, primarily determined by current Planning Policy Statements.

Changes to surrounding land-use are identified within the conservation objectives for Murlough SAC as having the potential for adverse impacts on the SAC. It should be noted that there are no specific development proposals in the Plan for housing in the countryside. However any applications would be subject to PPS 2 - Planning and Nature Conservation and draft PPS 21.

Conclusion

Safeguards are built into the Plan with regard to ensuring adequate treatment of any future sewerage outputs associated with Plan zonings.

The Plan indicates that where development of a zoned or designated site is likely to be dependent on the provision of interim sewage disposal measures, this is listed among the Key Design Considerations (KDC) for that site.

Consequently it is considered that there will be no adverse impact resulting from any of Policy Groups 2 (Settlement), 3 (Housing), 4 (Industry) or 5 (Retail).

The Plan does not propose any specific development within Policy Groups 8 (Tourism) or 12 (Countryside). Moreover, any future tourism planning applications or development within the Greenbelt or Countryside Policy Area cannot be implemented without influence from PPS2 and draft PPS 21.

As such, it is considered that the Plan will have no adverse effect on the integrity of the Murlough SAC.

3.1.6 Appropriate Assessment Report for Aughnadarragh Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

A map of the Natura 2000 site is attached (Appendix 3) showing the “Zone of Influence” considered for the Appropriate Assessment. The rationale for the Zone of Influence includes the designated site and their watersheds within which, developments associated with the Plan Proposals and Policy topics, outlined below, have the potential to cause direct or indirect adverse impact on the conservation objectives of the SAC.

In the Test of Likely Significance it was not possible to objectively show that there would be no adverse effects on the integrity of Aughnadarragh SAC. Therefore the ‘precautionary principle’ must be applied and adverse effects must be assumed.

In particular, the following Plan Proposals and Policy Topics could adversely affect the integrity of the site:

12. Countryside

Having considered that the Plan is not directly connected with, or necessary to the management of the site, an Appropriate Assessment has been undertaken of the implications of the Plan’s implementation on the site’s conservation objectives.

The likely effects of the Plan on the international nature conservation interests for which the site was designated may be described as follows:

Table 4: Appropriate Assessment Report for Aughnadarragh SAC

PLAN PROPOSALS AND POLICY TOPICS	LIKELY ADVERSE EFFECTS	NATURE OF EFFECT
Proposal/ Policy Group 12 Countryside Policies COU 1 and COU 8	Changes to surrounding land-use are identified within the conservation objectives for Aughnadarragh SAC as having the potential for having an adverse impact. Greenbelt policy alone and in combination with other factors, and lack of an Area of Constraint on Mineral Development (ACMD) around the SAC may permit development proposals that would result in the loss of habitat adjacent to the SAC or potentially damaging hydrological changes.	Indirect, Alone or In-Combination with B/N&M AP Cumulative

N.B. The in combination effects are assessed to be the impacts occurring due to the combined effects of the above policy groupings

Amplification

The following is a description of the Plan Proposals (alone or in combination with other projects or plans) that have been assessed as having the potential to give rise to significant effects on the conservation objectives of Aughnadarragh SAC.

Policy Group 12 – Countryside

Aughnadarragh SAC lies within a Greenbelt. Greenbelt designations do not specifically prohibit planning applications within the context of the Plan. Rather, development is controlled in accordance with prevailing regional planning policy, primarily determined by current Planning Policy Statements.

Aughnadarragh SAC does not sit within an ACMD. This potentially leaves a greater presumption to approval for extraction of minerals adjacent to this site with potentially damaging results to the site's hydrology.

Changes to surrounding land-use are identified within the conservation objectives for Aughnadarragh SAC as a potentially adverse impact on the SAC.

It should be noted that there are no specific mineral extraction proposals, nor proposals for one-off housing in the vicinity of Aughnadarragh SAC. However, any future applications would be subject to PPS 2 - Planning and Nature Conservation and PPS 21 Sustainable Development in the Countryside.

Conclusion

There are no specific proposals within the Plan for one-off housing or mineral extraction within the zone of influence for Aughnadarragh SAC.

The Plan states that: "Where appropriate, hydrological Zones of Influence have been identified for Natura 2000 sites in line with the requirements of Planning Policy Statement 2 (PPS 2)An Article 6 Assessment will be carried out before development proceeds in respect of built development or mineral extraction applications within these zones of influence".

Moreover, Policy Group 12 (Countryside) cannot be implemented without influence from PSRNI, draft PPS 21 and PPS2 and as such, it is considered that the Plan will have no adverse effect on the integrity of the site.

3.1.7 Appropriate Assessment Report for Turmennan Special Area of Conservation (SAC)/ Ramsar Site

A map of the Natura 2000 site is attached (Appendix 3) showing the “Zone of Influence” considered for the Appropriate Assessment. The rationale for the Zone of Influence includes the designated site and its watershed within which developments associated with the Plan Proposals and Policy topics outlined below, have the potential to cause direct or indirect adverse impact on the conservation objectives of the SAC.

In the Test of Likely Significance it was not possible to objectively show that there would be no adverse effects on the integrity of Turmennan SAC. Therefore the ‘precautionary principle’ must be applied and adverse effects must be assumed.

In particular, the following Plan Proposals and Policy Topics could adversely affect the integrity of the site:

12. Countryside

Having considered that the Plan is not directly connected with, or necessary to the management of the site, an Appropriate Assessment has been undertaken of the implications of the Plan’s implementation on the site’s conservation objectives.

The likely effects of the Plan on the international nature conservation interests for which the site was designated may be described as follows:

Table 4: Appropriate Assessment Report for Turmennan SAC

PLAN PROPOSALS AND POLICY TOPICS	LIKELY ADVERSE EFFECTS	NATURE OF EFFECT
Proposal/ Policy Group 12 Countryside Policies COU 1	Changes to surrounding land-use are identified within the conservation objectives for Turmennan SAC as having the potential for having an adverse impact. Greenbelt alone and in combination with other factors, may permit development proposals that would result in the loss of habitat adjacent to the SAC or potentially damaging hydrological changes.	Indirect, Alone or In-Combination Cumulative

N.B. The in combination effects are assessed to be the impacts occurring due to the combined effects of the above policy groupings

Amplification

The following is a description of the Plan Proposals (alone or in combination with other projects or plans) that have been assessed as having the potential to give rise to significant effects on the conservation objectives of Turmennan SAC.

Policy Group 12 – Countryside

Turmennan SAC lies within a Greenbelt and an ACMD. Greenbelt designations do not specifically prohibit planning applications within the context of the Plan. Rather, development is controlled in accordance with prevailing regional planning policy, primarily determined by current Planning Policy Statements. Whilst the site also lies within an ACMD which is restrictive in terms of mineral extraction, extraction may still be permitted in certain circumstances.

Changes to surrounding land-use are identified within the conservation objectives for Turmennan SAC as a potentially adverse impact on the SAC.

It should be noted that there are no specific development proposals in the Plan for housing in the countryside or mineral extraction. However any applications would be subject to PPS 2 - Planning and Nature Conservation and draft PPS 21 Sustainable Development in the Countryside.

Conclusion

There are no specific proposals within the Plan for extraction or one-off housing within the zone of influence for Turmennan SAC.

The Plan states that: "Where appropriate, hydrological Zones of Influence have been identified for Natura 2000 sites in line with the requirements of Planning Policy Statement 2 (PPS 2)An Article 6 Assessment will be carried out before development proceeds in respect of built development or mineral extraction applications within these zones of influence".

Moreover, Policy Group 12 (Countryside) cannot be implemented without influence from PSRNI, PPS2 and PPS 21 and as such, it is considered that the Plan will have no adverse effect on the integrity of the site.

3.1.8 Appropriate Assessment Report for Ballykilbeg Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

A map of the Natura 2000 site is attached (Appendix 3) showing the “Zone of Influence” considered for the Appropriate Assessment. The rationale for the Zone of Influence includes the designated site and its watershed within which, developments associated with the Plan Proposals and Policy topics, outlined below, have the potential to cause direct or indirect adverse impact on the conservation objectives of the SAC.

In the Test of Likely Significance it was not possible to objectively show that there would be no adverse effects on the integrity of Ballykilbeg SAC. Therefore the ‘precautionary principle’ must be applied and adverse effects must be assumed.

In particular, the following Plan Proposals and Policy Topics could adversely affect the integrity of the site:

12. Countryside

Having considered that the Plan is not directly connected with, or necessary to the management of the site, an Appropriate Assessment has been undertaken of the implications of the Plan’s implementation on the site’s conservation objectives.

The likely effects of the Plan on the international nature conservation interests for which the site was designated may be described as follows:

Table 4: Appropriate Assessment Report for Ballykilbeg SAC

PLAN PROPOSALS AND POLICY TOPICS	LIKELY ADVERSE EFFECTS	NATURE OF EFFECT
Proposal/ Policy Group 12 Countryside Policies COU 1 and COU 8	Changes to surrounding land-use are identified within the conservation objectives for Ballykilbeg SAC as having the potential for having an adverse impact. Greenbelt alone and in combination with other factors and lack of an Area of Constraint on Mineral Development (ACMD) around the SAC, may permit development proposals that would result in the loss of habitat adjacent to the SAC or potentially damaging hydrological changes.	Indirect, Alone or In-Combination Cumulative

N.B. The in combination effects are assessed to be the impacts occurring due to the combined effects of the above policy groupings

Amplification

The following is a description of the Plan Proposals (alone or in combination with other projects or plans) that have been assessed as having the potential to give rise to significant effects on the conservation objectives of Ballykilbeg SAC.

Policy Group 12 – Countryside

Ballykilbeg SAC lies within a Greenbelt. Greenbelt designations do not specifically prohibit, or place any specific criteria on planning applications within the context of the Plan. Rather, development is controlled in accordance with prevailing regional planning policy, primarily determined by current Planning Policy Statements.

Ballykilbeg SAC does not sit within an ACMD. This potentially leaves a greater presumption to approval for extraction of minerals adjacent to this site with potentially damaging results to the site's hydrology.

Changes to surrounding land-use are identified within the conservation objectives for Ballykilbeg SAC as a potentially adverse impact on the SAC.

It should be noted that there are no specific development proposals in the Plan for housing in the countryside or mineral extraction. However any applications would be subject to PPS 2 - Planning and Nature Conservation and PPS 21 Sustainable Development in the Countryside.

Conclusion

There are no specific proposals within the Plan for mineral extraction or one-off housing within the zone of influence for Ballykilbeg SAC.

The Plan states that: "Where appropriate, hydrological Zones of Influence have been identified for Natura 2000 sites in line with the requirements of Planning Policy Statement 2 (PPS 2)An Article 6 Assessment will be carried out before development proceeds in respect of built development or mineral extraction applications within these zones of influence".

Moreover, Policy Group 12 (Countryside) cannot be implemented without influence from PSRNI, draft PPS 21 and PPS2 and as such, it is considered that the Plan will have no adverse effect on the integrity of the site.

3.1.9 Appropriate Assessment Report for Strangford Lough Special Protection Area (SPA)

A map of the Natura 2000 site is attached (Appendix 3).

In the Test of Likely Significance it was not possible to objectively show that there would be no adverse effects on the integrity of Strangford Lough SPA. Therefore the 'precautionary principle' must be applied and adverse effects must be assumed.

In particular, the following Plan Proposals and Policy Topics could adversely affect the integrity of the site:

2. Settlement
3. Housing
4. Industry
5. Retailing, Services and Offices
6. Transportation
8. Tourism
12. Countryside
13. In combination

Having considered that the Plan is not directly connected with, or necessary to the management of the site, an Appropriate Assessment has been undertaken of the implications of the Plan's implementation on the site's conservation objectives.

The likely effects of the Plan on the international nature conservation interests for which the site was designated may be described as follows:

Table 4: Appropriate Assessment Report for Strangford Lough SPA

PLAN PROPOSALS AND POLICY TOPICS	LIKELY ADVERSE EFFECTS	NATURE OF EFFECT
Proposal/ Policy Group 2: Settlement, SETT1, SETT2, SETT3 and associated Settlement Limit boundaries	There are Settlement Limits within the watershed of Strangford Lough, where there is potential for additional pollution from sewerage and run-off associated with development, resulting in increased eutrophication and potentially adverse changes to food availability due to WWTW with insufficient design capacity. In addition at Ballydrain the Settlement Limit overlaps the SAC/ SPA.	Indirect, cumulative & in combination
Proposal/ Policy Group 3 Housing Proposals/ Policies HOU 1, HOU 2, and associated housing zonings	There are housing policy areas within the proposed Settlement Limits within the watersheds of Strangford Lough, where there is potential for additional pollution from sewerage and run-off associated with development, which could result in increased eutrophication and potentially adverse changes to food availability due to WWTW with insufficient design capacity.	Indirect, cumulative & in combination
Proposal/ Policy Groups 4 & 5 Industry Policy IND 1, Proposals IND 2, IND 3 and Retailing, Services and Offices and associated industrial and retail zonings	There are industrial proposals within Settlement Limits within the watersheds of Strangford Lough, where there is potential for additional pollution from discharges and run-off associated with development, resulting in potentially adverse changes to marine habitats/ food availability due to WWTW with insufficient design capacity.	Indirect, cumulative & in combination
Proposal/ Policy Group 6 Transportation Policies TRAN 1, TRAN 2 and TRAN 3	Transportation Policies which facilitate road construction may lead to potentially polluting run-off both during construction and use.	In combination effect with Road construction schemes and RTS
Proposal/ Policy Group 8 Tourism	Potential to cause 'disturbance'/ impact at the Strangford Lough site.	Indirect, cumulative, In combination
Proposal/ Policy Group 12 Countryside Policies COU 1 and COU 2	Areas within the SPA catchment area subject to CPA and Greenbelt policies may permit one-off development, with associated septic tanks and potential for pollution of watercourses.	Indirect, cumulative, in combination

N.B. The in combination effects are assessed to be the impacts occurring due to the combined effects of the above policy groupings.

Amplification

The following is a description of the Plan Proposals/ Policies in the Ards & Down Area Plan (alone or in combination with other projects or plans) that have been assessed as having the potential to give rise to significant effects on the conservation objectives of Strangford Lough SPA.

Policy group 2 – SETT 1 Settlement Limits, SETT 2 Land Use Policy Areas, and SETT 3 Development Opportunity Sites and associated Settlement Limits

The proposed Settlement Limits, Land Use Policy Areas and Development Opportunity Sites in the Ards and Down District Council areas, may cause discharge from new development (sewerage and associated run-off) that could adversely impact on water quality, either alone or cumulatively or in combination with other factors such as possible pollution from industry or agriculture.

However the Plan states that “Where waste water treatment works capacity is not sufficient to cope with a proposed development at the time of a planning application, the developer will be required to work with the Department and NIW to ensure that there will be no likely adverse impact on any Natura 2000 or Ramsar site by providing interim sewerage treatment arrangements”. In addition, where development of a zoned or designated site is likely to be dependent on the provision of interim sewage disposal measures, this is listed among the Key Design Considerations (KDC) for that site.

This KDC satisfies the requirements of the Habitats Directive, as, before development proceeds in areas where there is currently inadequate sewerage treatment capacity which could potentially result in waterborne pollution of Natura 2000 sites, measures will be put in place to protect the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

The Settlement Limit for Ballydrain (BDN01) includes part of the SPA. In combination with Policy SETT 1, there is a greater presumption for development within this portion of the designated Natura 2000 site. However any future application would still be subject to PPS2 and it is judged that if development were to occur within the Settlement Limit, any impact would be likely to be *de minimis*.

Policy Group 3 – HOU 1 Zonings and Phasing: Ards Borough, HOU 2 Zonings and Phasing: Down District, and associated zonings

Ards and Down Area Plan proposals, alone, cumulatively or in combination with proposals from other District Council areas may indirectly result in changes in water quality as a result of increased sewerage and run-off.

Within the Lough’s water catchment area, there are Housing Zonings within Settlement Limits where there is currently inadequate Waste Water Treatment Works (WWTW) capacity, where sites are very close to capacity or where the

Design PE is currently unknown. Throughout Ards and Down Districts, Northern Ireland Water (NIW) has schemes programmed to upgrade the water and sewerage system, where required, and to comply with EU Directives, to ensure water quality and meet increasing demand (see Appendix 4, Status by Council of the Wastewater Treatment Works to accommodate development growth as detailed in the Ards and Down Area Plan 2015).

However the Plan states that “Where waste water treatment works capacity is not sufficient to cope with a proposed development at the time of a planning application, the developer will be required to work with the Department and NIW to ensure that there will be no likely adverse impact on any Natura 2000 or Ramsar site by providing interim sewerage treatment arrangements”. In addition, where development of a zoned or designated site is likely to be dependent on the provision of interim sewage disposal measures, this is listed among the Key Design Considerations (KDC) for that site.

This KDC satisfies the requirements of the Habitats Directive, as, before development proceeds in areas where there is currently inadequate sewerage treatment capacity which could potentially result in waterborne pollution of Natura 2000 sites, measures will be put in place to protect the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

Policy Group 4 – IND 1 Existing Industrial Sites, IND 2 Proposed Industrial Land, Ards Borough, IND 3 Proposed Industrial Land, Down District and Policy Group 5 – Retailing Services and Offices and associated zonings

Industrial and/ or Retail Proposals from Ards and Down Area Plan, alone or in combination, may indirectly result in pollution from effluent/ sewerage or run-off (see also comments on point source pollution in section on housing above).

Within the Strangford Lough water catchment area, there are industrial zonings within Settlement Limits. Discharges within the water catchment area may have the potential to alter the water quality. However the Plan states that “Where waste water treatment works capacity is not sufficient to cope with a proposed development at the time of a planning application, the developer will be required to work with the Department and NIW to ensure that there will be no likely adverse impact on any Natura 2000 or Ramsar site by providing interim sewerage treatment arrangements”. In addition, where development of a zoned or designated site is likely to be dependent on the provision of interim sewage disposal measures, this is listed among the Key Design Considerations (KDC) for that site.

This KDC satisfies the requirements of the Habitats Directive, as, before development proceeds in areas where there is currently inadequate sewerage treatment capacity which could potentially result in waterborne pollution of Natura 2000 sites, measures will be put in place to protect the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

Policy Group 6 – Policy TRAN 1 Planning Protection for Road Schemes, and TRAN 2 Development reliant on the provision of road schemes

Road construction proposals have the potential to disturb/ adversely impact on Strangford Lough SPA site in combination with Group 6 policies through aerial deposition and run-off. However, given the proximity of the road proposal (Bowtown Road – Portaferry Road Link, Newtownards) to the SPA and the local topography which would accentuate run-off towards the designated site, an independent Article 6 Assessment will be required for this road scheme. Any future applications would be subject to PPS 2 - Planning and Nature Conservation.

Policy Group 8 – Tourism

The Plan does not designate, zone or apply any specific tourism policies to the SPA or the surrounding landscape. As such, this policy area was assessed as having no (direct) impact on the SPA, its feature interest and component objectives.

The Draft Plan does refer to Tourist Development Opportunities identified by the RDS (Strangford Lough/ St Patrick’s Country and the Mourne Mountains and Slieve Croob). Furthermore, a PAC recommendation for detailed proposals had the potential to impact on Eastern Mournes SAC. However, as this proposal has now been dropped from the RDS, it is considered no longer relevant to this Appropriate Assessment.

Any future applications related to tourism would be subject to PPS 2 - Planning and Nature Conservation and PPS 8 - Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation. As the Plan itself does not make any Tourism proposals, the impact of the plan in this respect is judged to be irrelevant.

Policy Group 12 – Countryside

The designations COU1 Green Belt, COU 2, Countryside Policy Areas, COU 11 Industrial Site, Ballynahinch Road, Crossgar could allow development that may indirectly result in pollution from sewerage or discharges or run-off associated with development. However, it should be noted that there are no specific development proposals in the Plan for housing in the countryside.

The Green Belt and Countryside Policy Area designations may allow development in the countryside and the potential for cumulative pollution of water bodies from diffuse sources. However any applications would be subject to PPS 2 - Planning and Nature Conservation and draft PPS 21 – Sustainable Development in the Countryside.

Conclusion

Safeguards are built into the Plan with regard to ensuring adequate treatment of any future sewerage outputs associated with Plan zonings.

The Plan indicates that where development of a zoned or designated site is likely to be dependent on the provision of interim sewage disposal measures, this is listed among the Key Design Considerations (KDC) for that site. The overlap of the SPA by the Ballydrain Settlement Limit is considered to be an issue that is not likely to have a significant impact. Consequently it is considered that there will be no adverse impact resulting from any of Policy Groups 2 (Settlement), 3 (Housing), 4 (Industry) or 5 (Retail).

The Plan does not propose any specific development within Policy Groups 6 (Transport), 8 (Tourism) or 12 (Countryside Policy Area / Greenbelt). Moreover, any future tourism or transport planning applications or development within the Greenbelt or Countryside policy Areas cannot be implemented without influence from PPS2 and draft PPS 21. Development at the Industrial site COU11, Crossgar is not likely to cause an adverse impact as adequate Waster water treatment capacity exists and any industry producing aerial pollution would be subject to an Article 6 Assessment.

As such, it is considered that the Plan will have no adverse effect on the integrity of the Strangford SPA.

3.1.10 Appropriate Assessment Report for Outer Ards Special Protection Area (SPA)/ Ramsar Site

A map of the Natura 2000/ Ramsar site is attached (Appendix 3).

In the Test of Likely Significance it was not possible to objectively show that there would be no adverse effects on the integrity of Outer Ards SPA. Therefore the 'precautionary principle' must be applied and adverse effects must be assumed.

In particular, the following Plan Proposals and Policy Topics could adversely affect the integrity of the site:

2. Settlement
3. Housing
4. Industry
5. Retailing, Services and Offices
8. Tourism
12. Countryside
13. In combination

Having considered that the Plan is not directly connected with, or necessary to the management of the site, an Appropriate Assessment has been undertaken of the implications of the Plan's implementation on the site's conservation objectives.

The likely effects of the Plan on the international nature conservation interests for which the site was designated may be described as follows:

Table 4: Appropriate Assessment Report for Outer Ards SPA/ Ramsar

PLAN PROPOSALS AND POLICY TOPICS	LIKELY ADVERSE EFFECTS	NATURE OF EFFECT
Proposal/ Policy Group 2: Settlement, SETT1, SETT2, SETT3 and associated Settlement Limit boundaries	There are Settlement Limits within the watershed of Outer Ards SPA, where there is potential for additional pollution from sewerage and run-off associated with development, resulting in increased eutrophication and potentially adverse changes to food availability due to WWTW with insufficient design capacity. In addition at the north eastern corner of Portavogie, the Settlement Limit (PE01) overlaps the SAC/ SPA.	Indirect, cumulative & in combination
Proposal/ Policy Group 3 Housing Proposals/ Policies HOU 1, HOU 2, and associated housing zonings	There are housing policy areas within the proposed Settlement Limits within the watershed of Outer Ards, where there is potential for additional pollution from sewerage and run-off associated with development, resulting in increased eutrophication and potentially adverse changes to food availability due to WWTW with insufficient design capacity.	Indirect, cumulative & in combination
Proposal/ Policy Groups 4 & 5 Industry Policy IND 1, Proposals IND 2, IND 3 and Retailing, Services and Offices and associated industrial and retail zonings	There are industrial proposals within Settlement Limits within the watershed of Outer Ards, where there is potential for additional pollution from discharges and run-off associated with development, resulting in potentially adverse changes to marine habitats/ food availability due to WWTW with insufficient design capacity.	Indirect, cumulative & in combination
Proposal/ Policy Group 8 Tourism	Potential to cause 'disturbance'/ impact at the Outer Ards site.	Indirect, cumulative, in combination
Proposal/ Policy Group 12 Countryside Policies COU 1 and COU 2	Areas within the SPA catchment area subject to CPA and Greenbelt policies may still allow one-off development, with associated septic tanks and potential for pollution of watercourses.	Indirect, cumulative, in combination

N.B. The in combination effects are assessed to be the impacts occurring due to the combined effects of the above policy groupings.

Amplification

The following is a description of the Plan Proposals/ Policies in the Ards & Down Area Plan (alone or in combination with other projects or plans) that have been assessed as having the potential to give rise to significant effects on the conservation objectives of Outer Ards SPA.

Policy group 2 – SETT 1 Settlement Limits, SETT 2 Land Use Policy Areas, and SETT 3 Development Opportunity Sites and associated Settlement Limits

The proposed Settlement Limits, Land Use Policy Areas and Development Opportunity Sites in the Ards and Down District Council areas, may cause discharge from new development (sewerage and associated run-off) that could impact adversely on water quality, either alone or cumulatively with discharge from outside the District area or in combination with other factors such as possible pollution from industry or agriculture.

However the Plan states that “Where waste water treatment works capacity is not sufficient to cope with a proposed development at the time of a planning application, the developer will be required to work with the Department and NIW to ensure that there will be no likely adverse impact on any Natura 2000 or Ramsar site by providing interim sewerage treatment arrangements”. In addition, where development of a zoned or designated site is likely to be dependent on the provision of interim sewage disposal measures, this is listed among the Key Design Considerations (KDC) for that site.

This KDC satisfies the requirements of the Habitats Directive, as, before development proceeds in areas where there is currently inadequate sewerage treatment capacity which could potentially result in waterborne pollution of Natura 2000 sites, measures will be put in place to protect the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

The Settlement Limit for Portavogie (PE01) includes part of the SAC. In combination with Policy SETT 1, there is a greater presumption for development within this portion of the designated Natura 2000 site. However any future application would still be subject to PPS2 and it is judged that if development were to occur, it would be likely to be *de minimis*.

Policy Group 3 – HOU 1 Zonings and Phasing: Ards Borough, HOU 2 Zonings and Phasing: Down District, and associated housing zonings

Ards and Down Area Plan proposals, alone, cumulatively or in combination with discharges from other sectors may indirectly result in changes in water quality as a result of increased sewerage and run-off.

Within the site’s water catchment area, there are Housing Zonings within Settlement Limits where there is currently inadequate Waste Water Treatment Works (WWTW) capacity or where sites are very close to capacity.

Throughout Ards and Down Districts, Northern Ireland Water (NIW) has schemes programmed to upgrade the water and sewerage system, where required, and to comply with EU Directives, to ensure water quality and meet increasing demand (see Appendix 4, Status by Council of the Wastewater Treatment Works to accommodate development growth as detailed in the Ards and Down Area Plan 2015) .

However the Plan states that “Where waste water treatment works capacity is not sufficient to cope with a proposed development at the time of a planning application, the developer will be required to work with the Department and NIW to ensure that there will be no likely adverse impact on any Natura 2000 or Ramsar site by providing interim sewerage treatment arrangements”. In addition, where development of a zoned or designated site is likely to be dependent on the provision of interim sewage disposal measures, this is listed among the Key Design Considerations (KDC) for that site.

This KDC satisfies the requirements of the Habitats Directive, as, before development proceeds in areas where there is currently inadequate sewerage treatment capacity which could potentially result in waterborne pollution of Natura 2000 sites, measures will be put in place to protect the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

Policy Group 4 – IND 1 Existing Industrial Sites, IND 2 Proposed Industrial Land, Ards Borough, IND 3 Proposed Industrial Land, Down District and Policy Group 5 – Retailing Services and Offices and associated zonings

Industrial and/ or Retail Proposals from Ards and Down Area Plan, alone or in combination, may indirectly result in pollution from effluent/ sewerage or run-off (see also comments on point source pollution in section on housing above.

Within the Outer Ards water catchment area, there are industrial zonings within Settlement Limits. Discharges within the water catchment area may have the potential to alter the water quality.

However the Plan states that “Where waste water treatment works capacity is not sufficient to cope with a proposed development at the time of a planning application, the developer will be required to work with the Department and NIW to ensure that there will be no likely adverse impact on any Natura 2000 or Ramsar site by providing interim sewerage treatment arrangements”. In addition, where development of a zoned or designated site is likely to be dependent on the provision of interim sewage disposal measures, this is listed among the Key Design Considerations (KDC) for that site.

Any applications within the Ards or Down District area would be subject to PPS 2 - Planning and Nature Conservation.

Policy Group 8 – Tourism

The Plan does not designate, zone or apply any policies specific to the SAC or the surrounding landscape. As such, this policy area was assessed as having no (direct) impact on the SAC, its feature interest and component objectives.

The Draft Plan does refer to Tourist Development Opportunities identified by the RDS (Strangford Lough/ St Patrick's Country and the Mourne Mountains and Slieve Croob). Furthermore, a PAC recommendation for detailed proposals had the potential to impact on Outer Ards SPA. As the proposal has now been dropped from the RDS, it is considered no longer relevant to this Appropriate Assessment.

Any future applications related to tourism would be subject to PPS 2 - Planning and Nature Conservation and PPS 8 - Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation. As the Plan itself does not make any Tourism proposals, the impact of the plan in this respect is judged to be irrelevant.

Policy Group 12 – Countryside

The designations COU1 Green Belt, COU 2, Countryside Policy Areas, COU 11 Industrial Site, Ballynahinch Road, Crossgar could allow development that may indirectly result in pollution from sewerage or discharges or run-off associated with development. It should be noted however that there are no specific development proposals in the Plan for one-off housing in the countryside.

The Green Belt and Countryside Policy Area designations may permit development in the countryside and the potential for cumulative pollution of water bodies from diffuse sources. Any applications would be subject to PPS 2 - Planning and Nature Conservation and draft PPS 21 – Sustainable Development in the Countryside.

Conclusion

Safeguards are built into the Plan with regard to ensuring adequate treatment of any future sewerage outputs associated with Plan zonings.

The Plan indicates that where development of a zoned or designated site is likely to be dependent on the provision of interim sewage disposal measures, this is listed among the Key Design Considerations (KDC) for that site. The overlap of the SPA/ Ramsar site by the Portavogie Settlement Limit is considered an issue of *de minimis* impact. Consequently it is considered that there will be no adverse impact resulting from any of Policy Groups 2 (Settlement), 3 (Housing), 4 (Industry) or 5 (Retail).

The Plan does not propose any specific development within Policy Groups 8 (Tourism) or 12 (Countryside). Moreover, any future tourism planning

applications or development within the Greenbelt or Countryside Policy Area cannot be implemented without influence from PPS2 and draft PPS 21.

As such, it is considered that the Plan will have no adverse effect on the integrity of the Outer Ards SPA/ Ramsar.

3.1.11 Appropriate Assessment Report for Killough Bay and Strand Lough Special Protection Area (SPA)/ Ramsar Site

A map of the Natura 2000 site is attached (Appendix 3).

In the Test of Likely Significance it was not possible to objectively show that there would be no adverse effects on the integrity of Eastern Mourne SAC. Therefore the 'precautionary principle' must be applied and adverse effects must be assumed.

In particular, the following Plan Proposals and Policy Topics could adversely affect the integrity of the site:

2. Settlement
3. Housing
4. Industry
5. Retailing, Services and Offices
8. Tourism
12. Countryside
13. In combination

Having considered that the Plan is not directly connected with, or necessary to the management of the site, an Appropriate Assessment has been undertaken of the implications of the Plan's implementation on the site's conservation objectives.

The likely effects of the Plan on the international nature conservation interests for which the site was designated may be described as follows:

Table 4: Appropriate Assessment Report for Killough Bay and Strand Lough SPA

PLAN PROPOSALS AND POLICY TOPICS	LIKELY ADVERSE EFFECTS	NATURE OF EFFECT
Proposal/ Policy Group 2: Settlement, SETT1, SETT2, SETT3 and associated Settlement Limit boundaries	There are Settlement Limits within the watershed of Killough Bay and Strand Lough SPA, where there is potential for additional pollution from sewerage and run-off associated with development, resulting in increased eutrophication and potentially adverse changes to food availability due to WWTW with insufficient design capacity.	Indirect, cumulative & in combination
Proposal/ Policy Group 3 Housing Proposals/ Policies HOU 1, HOU 2, and associated housing zonings	There are housing policy areas within the proposed Settlement Limits within the watershed of Killough Bay and Strand Lough SPA, where there is potential for additional pollution from sewerage and run-off associated with development, resulting in increased eutrophication and potentially adverse changes to food availability due to WWTW with insufficient design capacity.	Indirect, cumulative & in combination
Proposal/ Policy Groups 4 & 5 Industry Policy IND 1, Proposals IND 2, IND 3 and Retailing, Services and Offices and associated industrial and retail zonings	There are industrial proposals within Settlement Limits within the watershed of Killough Bay and Strand Lough, where there is potential for additional pollution from discharges and run-off associated with development, resulting in potentially adverse changes to marine habitats/ food availability due to WWTW with insufficient design capacity.	Indirect, cumulative & in combination
Proposal/ Policy Group 8 Tourism	Potential to cause 'disturbance'/ impact at the Outer Ards site.	In combination with the RDS
Proposal/ Policy Group 12 Countryside Policies COU 1 and COU 2	Areas within the SPA catchment area subject to CPA and Greenbelt policies may still allow one-off development, with associated septic tanks and potential for pollution of watercourses.	Indirect, cumulative, in combination

N.B. The in combination effects are assessed to be the impacts occurring due to the combined effects of the above policy groupings.

Amplification

The following is a description of the Plan Proposals/ Policies in the Ards & Down Area Plan (alone or in combination with other projects or plans) that have been assessed as having the potential to give rise to significant effects on the conservation objectives of Killough Bay and Strand Lough SPA.

Policy group 2 – SETT 1 Settlement Limits, SETT 2 Land Use Policy Areas, and SETT 3 Development Opportunity Sites and associated Settlement Limits

The proposed Settlement Limits, Land Use Policy Areas and Development Opportunity Sites in the Ards and Down District Council areas, may cause discharge from new development (sewerage and associated run-off) that could impact adversely on water quality, either alone or cumulatively with discharge from outside the District area or in combination with other factors such as possible pollution from industry or agriculture.

However the Plan states that “Where waste water treatment works capacity is not sufficient to cope with a proposed development at the time of a planning application, the developer will be required to work with the Department and NIW to ensure that there will be no likely adverse impact on any Natura 2000 or Ramsar site by providing interim sewerage treatment arrangements”. In addition, where development of a zoned or designated site is likely to be dependent on the provision of interim sewage disposal measures, this is listed among the Key Design Considerations (KDC) for that site.

This KDC satisfies the requirements of the Habitats Directive, as, before development proceeds in areas where there is currently inadequate sewerage treatment capacity which could potentially result in waterborne pollution of Natura 2000 sites, measures will be put in place to protect the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

Policy Group 3 – HOU 1 Zonings and Phasing: Ards Borough, HOU 2 Zonings and Phasing: Down District and associated housing zonings

Ards and Down Area Plan proposals, alone, cumulatively or in combination with discharges from other sectors may indirectly result in changes in water quality as a result of increased sewerage and run-off.

Within the site’s water catchment area, there are Housing Zonings within Settlement Limits where there is currently inadequate Waste Water Treatment Works (WWTW) capacity or where sites are very close to capacity or where the Design PE is currently unknown.

Throughout Ards and Down Districts, Northern Ireland Water (NIW) has schemes programmed to upgrade the water and sewerage system, where required, and to comply with EU Directives, to ensure water quality and meet increasing demand(see Appendix 4, Status by Council of the Wastewater

Treatment Works to accommodate development growth as detailed in the Ards and Down Area Plan 2015) .

However the Plan states that “Where waste water treatment works capacity is not sufficient to cope with a proposed development at the time of a planning application, the developer will be required to work with the Department and NIW to ensure that there will be no likely adverse impact on any Natura 2000 or Ramsar site by providing interim sewerage treatment arrangements”. In addition, where development of a zoned or designated site is likely to be dependent on the provision of interim sewage disposal measures, this is listed among the Key Design Considerations (KDC) for that site.

This KDC satisfies the requirements of the Habitats Directive, as, before development proceeds in areas where there is currently inadequate sewerage treatment capacity which could potentially result in waterborne pollution of Natura 2000 sites, measures will be put in place to protect the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

Policy Group 4 – IND 1 Existing Industrial Sites, IND 2 Proposed Industrial Land, Ards Borough, IND 3 Proposed Industrial Land, Down District and Policy Group 5 – Retailing Services and Offices and associated zonings

Industrial and/ or Retail Proposals from Ards and Down Area Plan, alone or in combination, may indirectly result in pollution from effluent/ sewerage or run-off (see also comments on point source pollution in section on housing above.

Within the Killough Bay and Strand Lough water catchment area, there are industrial zonings within Settlement Limits. Discharges within the water catchment area may have the potential to alter the water quality.

However the Plan states that “Where waste water treatment works capacity is not sufficient to cope with a proposed development at the time of a planning application, the developer will be required to work with the Department and NIW to ensure that there will be no likely adverse impact on any Natura 2000 or Ramsar site by providing interim sewerage treatment arrangements”. In addition, where development of a zoned or designated site is likely to be dependent on the provision of interim sewage disposal measures, this is listed among the Key Design Considerations (KDC) for that site.

This KDC satisfies the requirements of the Habitats Directive, as, before development proceeds in areas where there is currently inadequate sewerage treatment capacity which could potentially result in waterborne pollution of Natura 2000 sites, measures will be put in place to protect the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

Any applications within the Ards or Down District area would be subject to PPS 2 - Planning and Nature Conservation.

Policy Group 8 – Tourism

The Plan does not designate, zone or apply any policies specific to the SPA or the surrounding landscape. As such, this policy area was assessed as having no (direct) impact on the SPA, its feature interest and component objectives.

The Draft Plan does refer to Tourist Development Opportunities identified by the RDS (Strangford Lough/ St Patrick's Country and the Mourne Mountains and Slieve Croob). Furthermore, a PAC recommendation for detailed proposals had the potential to impact on Killough Bay and Strand Lough SPA. As the proposal has now been dropped from the RDS, it is considered no longer relevant to this Appropriate Assessment.

Any future applications related to tourism would be subject to PPS 2 - Planning and Nature Conservation and PPS 8 - Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation. As the Plan itself does not make any Tourism proposals, the impact of the plan in this respect is judged to be irrelevant.

Policy Group 12 – Countryside

The designations COU1 Green Belt and COU 2, Countryside Policy Area could allow development that may indirectly result in pollution from sewerage or discharges or run-off associated with development. It should be noted however that there are no specific development proposals in the Plan for one-off housing in the countryside.

The Green Belt and Countryside Policy Area designations may permit development in the countryside and the potential for cumulative pollution of water bodies from diffuse sources. Any applications would be subject to PPS 2 - Planning and Nature Conservation and draft PPS 21 – Sustainable Development in the Countryside.

Conclusion

Safeguards are built into the Plan with regard to ensuring adequate treatment of any future sewerage outputs associated with Plan zonings.

The Plan states that where development of a zoned or designated site is likely to be dependent on the provision of interim sewage disposal measures, this is listed among the Key Design Considerations (KDC) for that site. Consequently it is considered that there will be no adverse impact resulting from any of Policy Groups 2 (Settlement), 3 (Housing), 4 (Industry) or 5 (Retail).

The Plan does not propose any specific development within Policy Groups 8 (Tourism) or 12 (Countryside). Moreover, any future tourism planning applications or development within the Greenbelt or Countryside Policy Area cannot be implemented without influence from PPS2 and draft PPS 21.

As such, it is considered that the Plan will have no adverse effect on the integrity of the Killough Bay and Strand Lough SPA/ Ramsar.

4.0 OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 Area Plans sit within an overarching hierarchy of regional planning policy which includes the RDS, A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland and various Planning Policy Statements (PPSs). The Area Plan cannot be implemented in isolation from regional planning policy and for the purposes of this Article 6 Assessment the Plan was assessed in combination with other area plans and regional policy. In this instance, policies which are particularly relevant include: PPS2: Planning and Nature Conservation and draft PPS 21 Sustainable Development in the Countryside
- 4.2 In preparing the Ards & Down Area Plan 2015, Planning Service have been in consultation with Natural Heritage, NIEA from the formative stages of preparation. An Appropriate Assessment has now been carried out by NIEA on behalf of Planning Service on the final version of the Ards & Down Area Plan 2015.
- 4.3 Following the Appropriate Assessment, it is considered that there are no proposals, policies or zonings within the Plan that will directly or indirectly have a likely significant impact on any Natura 2000 sites.
- 4.4 This Appropriate Assessment Report serves to highlight the type of development within the Plan area that is likely to require a specific Article 6 Assessment in respect of the Habitats Directive. NIEA, Natural Heritage will continue to review with Planning Service the extent and nature of consultation in respect of future planning applications.
- 4.4 Accordingly, as it is considered that the Plan will have no likely significant impact on any Natura 2000 sites, authorisation is granted to publish the Ards & Down Area Plan 2015.

APPENDIX 1: Reference Sources

Area Plan Documents

- Banbridge Newry and Mourne Draft Area Plan
- Belfast Metropolitan Draft Area Plan

Regional Planning Documents

- Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025
- A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland
- Planning Policy Statements
- Regional Transportation Strategy

Natural Heritage Documents

- Conservation Objectives for Natura 2000 sites
- Site Condition Monitoring Reports

JNCC Documents

- Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands.

Other Documents

- Directive 2204/35/CE on environmental liability with regard to the prevention and remedying of environmental damage
- Managing the Water Environment in Northern Ireland 2000 (EHS)
- Regulation of Water Service Discharges Report for the year 2002/2003 (DOE)
- Spatial Environmental data and Ordinance Survey Maps within Natural Heritage's (EHS) Geographical Information Systems
- Water Framework Directive, Summary report of the characterisation and impact analyses required by Article 5 Northern Ireland (EHS)
- Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999
- Water Pollution Incidents and Enforcement 2004 (EHS)
- Water Quality and Planning Table April 2006 (EHS)
- Water Resource Strategy 2005-2015
- Reeds Nautical Almanac

APPENDIX 2

TOLS Matrix

Policy Groups	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Natura 2000 Sites													
Strangford Lough SAC/ Ramsar	X	?	?	?	?	?	X	?	X	X	X	?	?
Eastern Mourne SAC	X	X	X	?	X	X	X	?	X	X	X	?	?
Lecale Fens SAC	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	?	?
Hollymount SAC	X	?	?	?	?	X	X	X	X	X	X	?	?
Murlough SAC	X	?	?	?	?	X	X	?	X	X	X	?	?
Aughnadarragh SAC	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	?	?
Turmennan SAC/ Ramsar	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	?	?
Ballykilbeg SAC	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	?	?
Strangford Lough SPA	X	?	?	?	?	?	X	?	X	X	X	?	?
Outer Ards SPA/ Ramsar	X	?	?	?	?	X	X	?	X	X	X	?	?
Killough Bay & Strand Lough SPA/ Ramsar	X	?	?	?	?	X	X	?	X	X	X	?	?
Belfast Lough SPA/ Ramsar	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Belfast Lough Open Water SPA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Proposal/ Policy Groups

- 1 Environment & Conservation
- 2 Settlement
- 3 Housing
- 4 Industry
- 5 Retailing, Services and Offices
- 6 Transportation
- 7 Recreation & Open Space
- 8 Tourism
- 9 Education & Community Facilities
- 10 Minerals
11. Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing
- 12 Countryside
- 13 In combination impact

Scoring: ? = impact uncertain or significant, x = no significant impact

APPENDIX 3

Maps of Natura 2000 Sites and Zones of Influence

Map Number

- 1 Strangford Lough SAC
- 2 Strangford Lough SPA
- 3a Lecale Fens SAC and Ballykilbeg SAC with Zone of Influence
- 3b Lecale Fens SAC with Zone of Influence
- 3c Lecale Fens SAC with Zone of Influence
- 4 Hollymount SAC with Zone of Influence
- 5 Murlough SAC
- 6 Aghnadarragh SAC with Zone of Influence
- 7 Turmennan SAC with Zone of Influence
- 8 Killough Bay SPA/Ramsar
- 9 Eastern Mourne SAC
- 10 Outer Ards SPA

APPENDIX 4

Status by Council of the Wastewater Treatment Works to accommodate development growth as detailed in the Ards and Down Area Plan 2015

Category 1, are those works that are deemed satisfactory and as such have the capacity to accept development.

Category 2, details ongoing and planned work within the existing funding period (April 2007 – March 2010) where Northern Ireland Water has identified and is committed to capital improvements that will ensure the needs of the Area Plan are met from a development perspective.

Category 3, details those works that are being considered for inclusion within the capital programme for the period April 2010 to March 2013. These are obviously dependent on a positive determination by the Financial Regulator following submission of the Capital Programme in June 2009.

Ards Borough Council

Town/Village/ Small Settlement	Wastewater Treatment Facility	Comment
Category 1		
Donaghadee	North Down	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Balloo	Killinchy	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Greyabbey	Greyabbey	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Killinchy	Killinchy	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Kircubbin	Kircubbin	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Millisle	North Down	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Whiterock	Whiterock	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Ballyfrenis	North Down	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Cotton	North Down	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Kilmood	Kilmood	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Newtownards	Ballyrickard	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Comber	Ballyrickard	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Ballybarnes	Ballyrickard	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the

		Plan period
Ballystockart	Ballyrickard	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Ballywalter	Ballywalter	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Carrowdore	Carrowdore	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Category 2		
Ballyhalbert	Ballyhalbert	Interim upgrade facility operational Summer 2010
Glastry	Ballyhalbert	Interim upgrade facility operational Summer 2010
Cloughey	Cloughey	Interim upgrade facility operational Summer 2009
Portavogie	Portavogie	Interim upgrade facility operational Summer 2010
Portaferry	Portaferry	Upgraded works operational from Summer 2009
Ballydrain	Ringneill	Upgraded works operational from Spring 2010
Lisbane	Ringneill	Upgraded works operational from Spring 2010
Loughries	Loughries	Upgraded works operational from Summer 2010
Category 3		
Ballygowan	Ballygowan	Upgrade programmed 2010 – 2013 subject to Capital Programme Determination
Ballycranbeg	Ballycranbeg	Upgrade programmed 2010 – 2013 subject to Capital Programme Determination
Rubane	Rubane	Upgrade programmed 2010 – 2013 subject to Capital Programme Determination

Down District Council

Town/Village/Small Settlement	Wastewater Treatment Facility	Comment
Category 1		
Annsborough	Annsborough	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Castlewellan	Annsborough	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Burrenbridge	Annsborough	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Ballykinler	Ballykinlar	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Dundrum	Dundrum	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Killyleagh	Killyleagh	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Crossgar	Killyleagh	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Shrigley	Killyleagh	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Drumaness	Drumaness	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development

		within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
The Spa	Drumaness	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Drumaroad	Drumaroad	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Strangford	Strangford	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Kilclief	Strangford	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Kilcoo	Kilcoo	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Raholp/Ballyalton	Downpatrick	Satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment that is proposed in the Plan through the Plan period
Category 2		
Downpatrick	Downpatrick	Upgraded works operational from Spring 2010
Ardglass	Ardglass	Upgraded works operational from Spring 2011
Clough	Clough	Upgraded works operational from Spring 2010
Loughinisland	Clough	Upgrade works operational from Spring 2010
Saintfield	Saintfield	Upgraded works operational from Summer 2009
Darragh Cross	Saintfield	Upgraded works operational from Summer 2009
Seaforde	Seaforde	Upgrade works operational from Spring 2010
Category 3		
Ballynahinch	Ballynahinch	Upgrade programmed 2010 – 2013 subject to Capital Programme Determination
Newcastle	Newcastle	Upgrade programmed 2010 – 2013 subject to Capital Programme Determination
Bryansford	Newcastle	Upgrade programmed 2010 – 2013 subject to Capital Programme Determination
Killough	Killough	Upgrade programmed 2010 – 2013 subject to Capital Programme Determination
Kilmore	Kilmore	Upgrade programmed 2010 – 2013 subject to Capital Programme Determination
Annacloy	Annacloy	Upgrade programmed 2010 – 2013 subject to Capital Programme Determination
Ballyhornan	Ballyhornan	Upgrade programmed 2010 – 2013 subject to Capital Programme Determination
Coney Island	Coney Island	Upgrade programmed 2010 – 2013 subject to Capital Programme Determination
Maghera	Maghera	Upgrade programmed 2010 – 2013 subject to Capital Programme Determination

APPENDIX 5: List of Acronyms

ASSI	Area of Special Scientific Interest
DOS	Development Opportunity Site
DOE	Department of the Environment
DRD	Department for Regional Development
EC	European Community
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EU	European Union
HGI	Housing Growth Indicator
KDC	Key Design Considerations
LNR	Local Nature Reserve
NI	Northern Ireland
NIEA	Northern Ireland Environment Agency
NILCA	Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment
NILS	Northern Ireland Lakes Survey
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics Research Agency
NNR	National Nature Reserve
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
p/e	population equivalent
PPS	Planning Policy Statement
PRC	Primary Retail Core
PRF	Primary Retail Frontage
PS	Planning Service
PSRNI	A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland
RDS	Regional Development Strategy
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SPA	Special Protection Area
TOLS	Test of Likely Significance
WeBS	Wetland Birds Survey
WMU	Water Management Unit
WWTW	Waste Water Treatment Works
ZOI	Zone of Influence

APPENDIX 6

Note on inclusion of Ramsar Sites for Assessment

By definition, a Ramsar site is not a Natura 2000 site. In Northern Ireland, all Ramsar sites have also been designated as Natura 2000 sites and in the majority (not all) of cases, the boundaries are identical.

In Northern Ireland, Planning Policy Statement 2, Planning and Nature Conservation, paragraph 39 states that development or land use (which is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site) which may affect a proposed or designated Ramsar site, will be subject to the most rigorous examination.

In England, Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 9 sets out the principles and policies that apply to the integration of nature conservation priorities and land use planning. Development affecting SPAs and SACs are covered in Annex B, C7, which also gives equal status of treatment to Ramsar sites as follows:

“Regulations 48, 49, and 54 restrict the granting of planning permission for development which is likely significantly to affect an SPA or SAC, and which is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site. They apply to planning decisions taken on or after the date the Regulations come into force, regardless of when the application was submitted. They apply to classified SPAs, and to SACs from the point where the Commission and the Government agree the site as a Site of Community Importance to be designated as an SAC. They do not apply to potential SPAs or to candidate SACs before they have been agreed with the Commission, but as a matter of policy the Government wishes development proposals affecting them to be considered in the same way as if they had already been classified or designated (see paragraph 13 of this PPG). The Government has chosen to apply the same considerations to listed Ramsar sites.”

Consequently, the appropriate assessment carried out in this report also considers the designated Ramsar sites.

APPENDIX 7

Note on Copeland Islands ASSI

Copeland Islands ASSI

Natural Heritage, (NIEA) considers that the Copeland Islands ASSI merits designation as a Natura 2000 site and has initiated the process of having it declared as a Special Protection Area (SPA). As the site is not yet a SPA, it has not been formerly addressed in the main body of the report with a Test of Likely Significance. However, it has been considered on a 'precautionary basis' and findings are detailed below.

The site is composed of three islands, Big Copeland, Light House Island and Mew Island, lying off the north-east coast of the Outer Ards SPA. The islands are sites for breeding seabirds, with Big Copeland and Lighthouse Island being home to the main colonies. Important breeding and wintering populations of Eider Duck occur. Notable breeding populations of wader species also occur on Big Copeland.

The SPA would include all land areas, excluding those with buildings and adjoining gardens, as the Manx Shearwater population especially use both inland and coastal areas for breeding purposes. The inland breeding gull and wader populations also support inclusion of the core of Big Copeland. Sea areas adjoining the Copeland Islands will also be included in the SPA (used by breeding tern and Manx Shearwater). Such areas adjoining colonies are of particular importance for courtship, preening and loafing behaviours, and also feeding.

The site's integrity is subject to pressures such as disturbance due to recreational pressure.

As with Belfast Lough SPA and Belfast Lough Open Water SPA, the Plan is not likely to have an adverse impact on the proposed SPA.

The 'Net Tidal Flow' is from north to south from Belfast Lough along the County Down coast. On this basis, there are no Plan Proposals that would result in the loss, fragmentation, disruption, disturbance or change to key elements of the site.