



A Sustainable Outdoor Recreation Plan for
Strangford and Lecale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
and Strangford Lough Marine Protected Area

Prepared by Outdoor Recreation NI

May 2018

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In October 2017, Outdoor Recreation NI (ORNI) was commissioned by Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership to develop -

‘A Sustainable Outdoor Recreation Plan for the Strangford and Lecale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Strangford Lough Marine Protected Area (MPA)’.

Funding for the project was provided from both Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs - Northern Ireland Environment Agency and Sport Northern Ireland. In addition to these organisations the project steering group was comprised of representatives of Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs – Marine and Fisheries Division, Newry, Mourne And Down District Council and Ards and North Down Borough Council.

The study area covers the Strangford and Lecale AONB including the Strangford Lough Marine Protected Area. The area measures approximately 52,553 hectares and is located within the jurisdiction of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council and Ards and North Down Borough Council. A large part of the area is water, hence, recreation on or close to the water is a key focus of this report.

Throughout the course of the study an extensive process of consultation was carried out with public and statutory agencies, national governing bodies of Sport (NGB's), individual Council officers and others taking part or interested in outdoor recreation within the study area.

In addition, desk research and site surveys and GIS mapping took place to ensure the plan was fully informed.

This study should be read in conjunction with *‘An audit of access to Strangford Lough for water based recreation’*. This audit was completed by ORNI in 2018 and included an audit of 36 sites around Strangford Lough. This report extended this audit to assess a further 9 sites within the study area.

Analysis of the information gathered, identified a number of key findings regarding the current and future development and promotion of outdoor recreation in the study area.

These included –

Landownership is a mixture of both public and private. While the National Trust and Crown Estate are prominent landowners, most land and key sites are privately owned. In addition, the area is rich in natural, built and maritime heritage with a range of designations to ensure its protection.

However, there are numerous plans relating to the area that identify the positive impact that outdoor recreation can have on communities, economies and environments along with opportunities to realize these impacts.

In relation to current recreation, land, water and air-based recreation takes place.

Land based recreation, summary of key findings -

- Research suggests that walking is the most popular activities over 40 walk trails within the study area including quality walks, PRoW's and informal walk trails. The majority of these are short walks i.e. not more than 5miles in length and tend to be site based. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the majority of these are well used and popular among repeat visitors and for many are part of their everyday lives.

However, there is a lack of medium and long-distance walking opportunities within the study area, particularly along the shore of Strangford Lough and the Irish Sea coast along the Ards Peninsula. There is also a lack of doorstep walking opportunities and safe places to walk within many of the towns/villages within the study area.

- The study area is a popular location for road cycling, especially the Ards Peninsula given its flat terrain and scenic landscapes. In addition, the ability to complete a circular trip around the Lough on bike is a popular attraction with the National Cycle Network, providing a waymarked route (combination of route 20 and 99).

There are already substantial issues relating to the number of road cyclists regularly using the route (particularly large groups taking part in Club runs). This impacts on traffic flow particularly on the Ards Peninsula when traffic queues frequently develop behind cycling groups.

In terms of off-road cycling, there are opportunities to improve family trail provision for example at Delamont Country Park.

- Horse riding is well catered for within the study area, with several dedicated sites, trails and public rights of way.

Current permit and user numbers discussed above do not highlight a high demand for horse riding trail provision at present.

In terms of managing the impact of land-based recreation on the AONB environment several issues were noted -

- Dogs (off leads) were noted as a consistent problem causing disturbance to birds both feeding and nesting and seals. Within the study area, the impact is greatest at the northern end of Strangford Lough especially at low tides where overwintering birds congregate.

Water based recreation, summary of key findings –

As a large part of the study area is water, it is not surprising that there is a wide range of water-based recreation taking place with the most popular activities being sailing/ cruising, angling and canoeing (including kayaking). The introduction of coastal rowing in 2014 has proven very successful among local communities with 5 villages developing clubs within the study area.

Similarly, to land based recreation, disturbance to wildfowl and seals was noted as an issue. However, the main issue was unregulated moorings within the Lough and the impact this may have on the seabed.

The report then considers opportunities and recommendations in relation to -

Development

Land based recreation

Without doubt the greatest barrier to delivering meaningful improvement in the opportunities for walking within the study area moving forward relates to the interpretation and implementation of N. Ireland's access legislation.

It became apparent throughout the consultation process that there is a lack of consistency across the study area relating to the assertion, management and maintenance of PRoWs, permissive paths and Public Paths. Differing interpretations of the Access Order and related legislation along with differing priorities within the legacy Council areas, has resulted in a non-uniform approach to access across the study area.

There is a clear need for Councils to take a proactive approach to their duties in relation to the relevant legislation. In addition, a concerted effort is required to raise awareness and inform private landowners of –

- The potential access arrangements that can be entered into when creating public access (e.g. permissive path agreements) and;

- The *reality* that no successful liability cases have been brought in Northern Ireland in the last 20 years.

A proactive and committed approach among Councils to walk trail development could lead to the realization of a range of opportunities including medium and long distance trails, greenways and doorstep walks through delivery of Community Trail Plans.

There is an opportunity to improve off road cycling provision within the study area, particularly for family cycling. It is recommended that the development of off-road family cycling is considered at –

- Delamont Country Park
- Hollymount Forest
- Mount Stewart

Water based recreation

There is an opportunity to attract more cruisers to the Lough. In addition, both Portaferry and Strangford Marinas have plans to increase the number of berths particularly for visitor moorings, highlighting that there is a demand.

Potential development of physical infrastructure for the cruising market includes Killyleagh Quay, Kircubbin Quay and the extension of public pontoons in Portaferry and Strangford Marinas.

It is recommended that market analysis is completed to identify the potential of Strangford Lough as a cruising destination. This should consider not only the demand, but the type of infrastructure that cruisers require.

In addition to this study it is recommended that –

- A visitor mooring scheme is introduced for Strangford Lough.
- An attempt is made to improve access to current landing places involving negotiation with key sailing and yacht Clubs around the Lough.

It is also recommended that –

- The development of a water taxi on the Lough is proactively taken forward.
- A review of the 2 Canoe Trails is completed and all canoe trail panels are removed by the responsible organisation.¹
- A survey is undertaken regarding the location and condition of historic quays in addition to costing the works required to stabilise these.

There is also a range of site-based water recreation development opportunities set out in Section 7.2.5.

Specific site-based product development

3 sites are recommended for development as follows –

- Delamont Country Park – completion of a Recreation Masterplan
- Scrabo Country park implementation of the Trail Review and Information Plan
- Tyrella Beach – completion of a Recreation Masterplan

Management

¹ When the Canoe Trail panels were installed, management agreements were signed with all relevant landowners.

Management recommendations relate to –

- Councils' adopting a more consistent and proactive approach to outdoor recreation
- Improved promotion of responsible outdoor recreation and wildlife monitoring opportunities to users of the Lough
- A more positive approach to the management of moorings within the Lough to ensure that the designated features are protected
- Development of a 'sensitivity criteria' based on a combination of landscape indicators that can be reflected in user guidance
- Development of a holistic access management system which can be reflected in user guidance

Communication

It is recommended that there is a more planned and focused approach to communication through the development of a Communication Plan that is the sole remit for one organisation. This is critical to communicate the right message on the most appropriate communication platform for targeted audiences.

This will help address the outdoor recreation objectives of encouraging access to the countryside and water resource and ensuring that this is carried out in a responsible and sustainable manner.

In addition to the work completed by ORNI, Blackstaff Ecology was commissioned to produce 'Information to inform an HRA report'.

This Stage 1 HRA (Screening) considers both the recommendations for access infrastructure, the holistic access management system and recommends mitigations as required.

Based on the above, the Action Plan includes 29 recommendations relating to 9 key action areas. This is set out in Section 11.

These are divided into low, medium and high priority. The highest priority relates to Communication.

2 BACKGROUND

The Strangford and Lecale AONB and Strangford Lough MPA are valuable resources for participation in outdoor recreation, particularly due to the expanse of water and the ability to either access the water or lands adjacent to it. There is potential to further sustainably develop opportunities for outdoor recreation and facilities to create a more accessible outdoor environment for all.

Strangford Lough is one of the UK and Europe's most important marine sites and is a designated Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ), a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), a Special Protection Area (SPA), and a Ramsar site. Its shores are designated Areas of Specific Scientific Interest (ASSI). Other parts of the coast and some inland areas are also designated ASSIs, SACs and SPAs.

The project was commissioned by Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership with funding from both Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs - Northern Ireland Environment Agency and Sport Northern Ireland. In addition to these organisations the project steering group was comprised of representatives of Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs – Marine and Fisheries Division, Newry, Mourne And Down District Council and Ards and North Down Borough Council.

This study has been commissioned to:

- Assist Councils to deliver actions within the 'Strangford and Lecale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Action Plan (2012-2022), including -
 - Development of '*Sustainable Access & Outdoor Recreation*' within the AONB
 - Encouragement of sustainable recreation within the AONB and Marine site
 - Liaison with users, landowners and local communities
- Assist in the delivery of the Marine Protected Area (MPA) Management Scheme for Strangford Lough (draft) (2018), including -
 - Reducing the risk to conservation features from key outdoor recreation activities
 - Ensuring that outdoor recreation and tourism are managed sustainability
- Support the Northern Ireland Programme for Government in relation to;
 - The NI Biodiversity Strategy
 - Making Life Better – a whole system framework 2013-2023
 - A Fitter Future for All – Framework for Preventing and Addressing Overweight and Obesity in Northern Ireland 2012-2022
 - Programme for Government
 - Contributing towards the favourable management of protected areas on land and sea by 2020
- Help meet requirements under the DAERA NIEA Environment Fund requirements for SLLP;
 - To develop and deliver cohesive management of the AONB and MPA with consultation and stakeholder input
 - To implement AONB Action Plan actions
 - To develop sustainable outdoor recreation, increase access to the countryside and reduce risk to conservation features and priority species and habitats through having engaged users and related guidance

2.1 Aim and Objectives

The aim of this Plan is:

‘To develop a Sustainable Outdoor Recreation Plan for the Strangford and Lecale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Strangford Lough Marine Protected Area.’

To achieve the aim, ORNI was required to:

- Detail and GIS map the nature and extent of current outdoor recreation provision in the Strangford and Lecale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Strangford Lough Marine Protected Area.
- Engage and consult with the outdoor recreation community
- Identify the future opportunities for outdoor recreation in the Strangford and Lecale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Strangford Lough Marine Protected Area.
- Compile and amalgamate existing strategic plans and feasibility studies for the development of outdoor recreation and tourism across the study area
- Identify and fill in gaps where existing strategies and plans to form a cohesive plan for the whole study area
- Identify green lanes in public ownership that could be used to link trails across the AONB
- Provide recommendations to improve the quality of the Ulster Way in the study area
- Complete a detailed access audit to Strangford Lough and the AONB coast for water-based recreation
- Review and provide recommendations for related signposting, interpretation and guidance, online information across the study area
- Highlight the potential for key sites to act as hubs for outdoor recreation
- Consider activities that impact large numbers of people and ensure that effort is weighted appropriately
- Include guidelines and management recommendations for sustainable outdoor recreation relevant to current and potential activities
- Produce a targeted Action Plan outlining delivery partners
- Produce a Habitats Regulations Assessment Stage 1 for relevant Natura 2000 sites

While this report contains substantial detail on outdoor recreation within the study area, it does not provide an exhaustive list of all current outdoor recreation. The results recorded are based on the information received through consultation with various individuals and organisations and desk research. Although every endeavor has been taken to ensure accuracy in mapping, some trails, sites, public land and activities may appear under-represented due to a lack of feedback or limited response.

2.2 Outdoor recreation defined

Outdoor recreation takes place on land, water and in the air within the study area. The following activities are covered within the scope of the study.

Land	Water	Air
Cycling/ biking on and off road	Angling	Helicopter
Horse riding	Canoeing and kayaking	Light aircraft
Orienteering	Coastal rowing	Microlite
Walking	Sailing and cruising	Drones ²
	Boat trips	
	Jet skiing	
	Windsurfing and Kitesurfing	
	Stand up paddle boarding	
	Coasteering	
	Diving	
	Swimming including triathlon	

Fig. 1: Outdoor recreation activities

These activities take place both formally and informally within the study area.

Formal recreation implies that users are invited to take part and therefore, there is an increased duty of care to users.

In addition, formal recreation has a clear legal status with identified management and maintenance responsibilities with information provided for users.

Informal recreation takes place throughout the study area at locations where there are no formal agreements in place. In most cases this is tolerated, in some cases there are associated issues.

2.3 Benefits of outdoor recreation

It is well documented that participation in outdoor recreation realises significant benefits both in personal terms to individual participants and to wider society, the economy and the environment.

More specifically this includes getting more people active and therefore generating cost savings to the health service, improving the educational attainment of children and young people, supporting people into education, employment and training for example through volunteering, increasing social capital and creating economic prosperity through tourism.

Due to the lack of research available on the benefits of outdoor recreation specific to Northern Ireland and therefore specifically to the study area, this section of the report also draws on relevant research from throughout the United Kingdom.

² Please note that although the flying of drones was not included within the remit of this study, it is noted that they are noteworthy in terms of potential disruption to wildlife, health and safety and liability concerns..

2.3.1 Health and Well Being

Northern Ireland's Chief Medical Officer's (CMO) recommended level of physical activity is minimum of 75 minutes vigorous aerobic activity (e.g. running, playing competitive sport) or a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity (e.g. walking, cycling, swimming) per week. Results from the most recent health survey showed that only 53% of Northern Ireland's population currently meet the CMO's guidelines, with 28% of the population being completely inactive.³

It is widely recognised that regular exercise offers important health and wellbeing benefits. Regular physical activity can prevent dementia, type 2 diabetes, some cancers, heart disease and other common serious conditions – reducing the risk of each by at least 30%⁴ and proving more effective than many prescribed drugs.

Physical activity is also known to enhance wellbeing with a 20–30% lower risk of depression and dementia in adults participating in daily physical activity⁵.

Inactivity not only has consequences for personal health, but also places a substantial cost on the nation's health services. The estimated direct cost of physical inactivity to the NHS across the UK is £1.06 billion⁶. It is estimated in the UK that by 2050, 60% of males and 50% of females could be obese, adding £5.5 billion to the annual total cost of the NHS by 2050, with wider costs to society and business estimated at £49.9 billion⁷.

Focusing specifically on walking provision, research from Scotland demonstrates that for every £1 invested on health walks, £8 of benefits are generated for society⁸.

Walking is perhaps the most accessible form of outdoor recreation for several reasons:

- It is free
- It is already the most popular physical activity for residents in Northern Ireland
- It requires no special training or equipment
- Almost everyone can do it, anywhere and at any time
- Walking is accessible to people from targeted groups (identified by Sport NI) who require increased quality opportunities to develop and sustain participation in sport and outdoor recreation across key life-course transitions (for example children moving from primary school to post-primary, young people leaving education, having a family, or retiring from work). including:
 - Women and girls (specifically aged 14-25)
 - People with a disability; and
 - Those living in areas of greatest social need (specifically people living within the top 25% of wards designated by NI Multiple Deprivation Measure Index 2010)

Provision of outdoor recreation services and infrastructure can therefore be viewed as a key method of addressing the increasing levels of inactivity and obesity.

³ DHSS&PS (2015), *Health Survey Northern Ireland: First Results 2013/14*,

⁴ Academy of Royal Medical Colleges (2015) *Exercise: The miracle cure and the role of the doctor in promoting it*

⁵ Mental Health Foundation (2013) *Let's Get Physical, the impact of physical activity on wellbeing*,

⁶ Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health (2007), *The burden of physical activity-related ill health in the UK*.

⁷ UK Government's Foresight Programme (2007), *Tackling Obesities*,

⁸ Paths for All (2013), *Making an impact, Glasgow Health Walks Social Return on Investment Analysis*,

2.3.2 Learning and Education

According to a report for the National Foundation for Education Research⁹, learning outdoors can have a range of positive cognitive, affective, interpersonal/social and physical/behavioral impacts. Research in Scotland found that the single most important factor influencing use of woodland by adults was whether they had visited woodlands when they were young¹⁰.

"When playing outdoors children are also more likely to meet other children and improve social skills, an opportunity which doesn't arise at home. Being outside in nature puts children in touch with their senses and has a restorative effect, also helping them to cope with stress."

This statement was made by Liz O'Brien, Deputy Head of Social and Economic Research Group at the Forestry Commission on the launch of Outdoor Play Week 2010 a partnership between the Forestry Commission and Play England to highlight the health benefits of outdoor play and that children today are playing outside far less than ever before.

As such, outdoor recreation provision / development within the study area provides important opportunities for children and young people to derive benefits from experiencing the natural environment.

2.3.3 Social Capital and Community Cohesion

Development of outdoor recreation can offer opportunities for increased community capacity to achieve shared goals, through increased 'bonding' social capital (i.e. within communities) and 'bridging' social capital (i.e. between members of communities and external partners)¹¹.

The provision of volunteering programmes, events and participation in sports and physical recreation can offer opportunities for people to get involved in their community, meet new people, improve their well-being and improve their skills. Social return of investment research shows that £1 invested in environmental volunteering can lead to a return of up to £4.¹²

People who live close to Parks and have a variety of green space options close to their homes tend to participate more in physical activity¹³. Residents of highly walkable neighbourhoods are more active and have slightly lower body weights than their counterparts in less walkable neighbourhoods, as do those living in areas with high land-use mix.

Mixed land use, public spaces, residential density and interesting places to go increases social connectivity such as knowing and trusting others/neighbours¹⁴.

2.3.4 Biodiversity and Environment

Well planned and sensitive investments in the countryside can help to improve and protect habitats, thereby encouraging and maintaining biodiversity. Recent research from Wales¹⁵, demonstrates that

⁹ Dillon, J., Morris, M., O'Donnell, L., Reid, A., Rickinson, M., and Scott, W. (2005). *'Engaging and Learning with the Outdoors: The Final Report of the Outdoor Classroom in a Rural Context Action Research Project. National Foundation for Education Research.*

¹⁰ Ward Thompson, C., Aspinall, P., Bell, S., Findlay, C., Wherrett, J. and Travlou, P. (2004). *'Open Space and Social Inclusion: Local Woodland Use in Central Scotland'. OPENspace Research Centre, Report for Forestry Commission, Edinburgh.*

¹¹ Forestry Commission Scotland (2009) *'A Valuation of the Economic and Social Contribution of Forestry for People in Scotland'*, Forestry Commission, Edinburgh.

¹² BTCV *'Inspiring People, Improving Places - The positive impact and behavioural change achieved through environmental volunteering with BTCV'*

¹³ Greenspace and obesity: A systematic review of the evidence, Obesity Rev (2011)

¹⁴ Environ Int. (2011) *Improving health through policies that promote active travel: A review of evidence to support integrated health impact assessment.*

¹⁵ Wales Outdoor Recreation Survey 2014: Final Report, Natural Resources Wales, (2015)

regular visitors to the countryside (21+ visits in the last 4 weeks) were more likely than the average to participate in several activities to protect the environment. Such activities include:

- recycling (96%)
- reducing their energy use at home (94%)
- buying local food (89%)

Human health ultimately depends upon healthy ecosystems (such as availability of fresh water, food and fuel sources) which are necessary for good human health and productive livelihoods. Biodiversity loss can have significant direct human health impacts if ecosystem services are no longer adequate to meet social needs.

Protected areas can contribute to physical and mental well-being. At a time when obesity has become a more serious health problem than malnutrition on a global scale, the role of exercise and personal responsibility for health is being more widely acknowledged. In many parts of the world parks and nature reserves provide some of the few spaces where people can take exercise in safe and pleasant surroundings. Many conservation organisations are actively working with health authorities to encourage such approaches. More recently it has been recognised that beautiful landscapes and seascapes are not only good places to exercise for physical health but can have important therapeutic benefits for the mind as well¹⁶.

2.3.5 Growing the Economy

In 2013, SportNI, NIEA and Tourism NI published a report on the economic contribution of outdoor recreation in Northern Ireland which found that outdoor recreation in Northern Ireland generated £102 million gross added value and that the sector employs more than 3,537 Full Time Equivalent ¹⁷.

In addition, the importance of outdoor recreation development on the local economy through tourism is significant. The outdoor adventure tourism sector was estimated by Mintel to be worth €128m in Northern Ireland in 2013, increasing to €146m¹⁸ by 2018, whilst in Wales, outdoor activity tourism contributes £481 million per annum to the economy¹⁹, in the Republic of Ireland overseas visitors engaging in activity tourism are worth €1.2 billion per annum ²⁰ and in England 42.4 million adults visiting the natural environment generate a total visitor spend of £21 billion per annum²¹.

¹⁶ *Arguments for Protection - Vital Sites - The contribution of protected areas to human health* WWF (2010)

¹⁷ *Assessing the Economic Impact of Outdoor Recreation in NI* (SportNI, NEA, NITB, 2013)

¹⁸ *Information from Mid Ulster Tourism Strategy and Action Plan 2016-2021* (BTS, 2016)

¹⁹ *The Economic Impact of Outdoor Activity Tourism in Wales* (Visit Wales, 2014)

²⁰ *Survey of Overseas Travellers* (Failte Ireland, 2011)

²¹ *MENE Survey 2012-2013*. (Natural England, 2014)

3 SCOPE

3.1 Study area

The study area, Fig. 2, covers the Strangford and Lecale AONB including the Strangford Lough Marine Protected Area. The area measures approximately 52,553 hectares and is located within the jurisdiction of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council and Ards and North Down Borough Council. However, a large part of the area is water, hence, recreation on or close to the water is a key focus of this report.

Each Council area is subdivided into 3 District Electoral Areas (DEA's) as follows –

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

- Rowallane
- Downpatrick
- Slieve Croob

Ards and North Down Borough Council

- Ards Peninsula
- Newtownards
- Comber

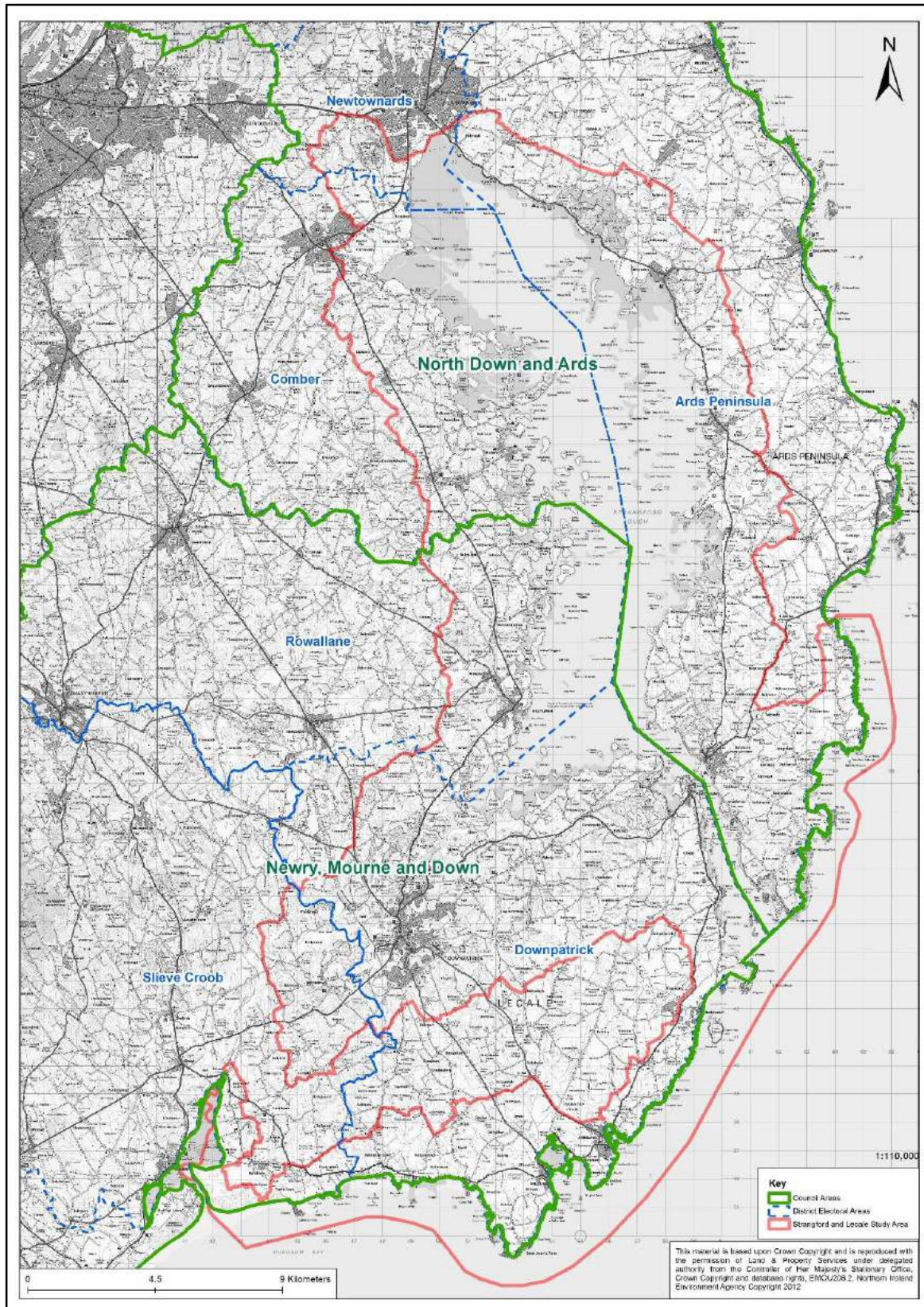


Fig. 2: Map of study area

3.2 Heritage

The study area, which is protected under several statutory designations, is rich in both natural, built and maritime heritage. These designations, in turn, govern the management and development of this area to ensure the natural landscape, built features and maritime history remain protected.

3.2.1 Natural Heritage

As can be seen in Fig. 3, the study area is heavily designated to protect its natural heritage features. As a designated Natura 2000 site (Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Area (SPA), there is a requirement for Strangford Lough to reach favourable conservation status for the habitats and species for which it was designated, as such it is important to set clear conservation objectives. Selection features for the Natura 2000 designation status include habitats such as large shallow inlet, coastal lagoons, mudflats and reefs and include species such as Common Seal and wildfowl assemblages including Light Bellied Brent Geese and Golden Plover. Selection features for different designations (such as ASSI) often overlap, for example the ASSI designation also protects for mudflats, Common Seal and wintering waterbirds amongst others.

The Lecale Coast and inland parts of the study area are also quite heavily designated both at a National and European level for a diverse range of habitats such as coastal sand dunes, mudflats, oak woodland, fens and species such as Marsh Fritillary butterfly, Harbour Seal and a range of plant, invertebrate and fungi assemblages.

For Natura 2000 sites, after the ecological requirements and conservation objectives have been addressed, management bodies must also prevent any damaging activities that could significantly disturb those species and habitats for which the site was designated, and to protect the site from new potentially damaging plans and projects likely to have a significant effect on the site. Potential plans and projects are required to be assessed under the Habitats Directive - Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA), to be evaluated against the conservation objectives and to determine if there is likely to be a significant effect on the protected area. For designated ASSI's, notifiable operations or activities that the Department deem to have the potential to harm flora and fauna within a site, include recreational activities occurring in a fashion that is likely to damage or disturb wildlife.

In terms of partaking in or developing outdoor recreation, the high quality and density of designations is both positive and negative. One of the main reasons that people chose to partake in recreation in the study area is the outstanding natural beauty of the area and the diverse types of habitats and species that can be found there. The level of protection afforded to these sites means that they are of a high quality and will continue to be of high quality, subject to conservation objectives being met. Alternatively, the level of designations present may be perceived to be a barrier to participating in or developing recreation. Terminology around the legal status of the designations can be off-putting for users as can the threat of enforcement under certain circumstances. However, participation in recreation activities and the development of recreation facilities, if done in a sustainable manner, can co-exist and thrive within an area heavily protected for nature conservation reasons.

Within the study area, there are 35 sites protected under seven different types of statutory designations. This incorporates:

- Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
- Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) x 26
- Special Area of Conservation (SAC) x 2
- Candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC)
- Special Protection Area (SPA)
- Ramsar x 3

- Marine Conservation Zone

Within the study area there are other sites that are protected for their natural heritage and biodiversity interest, but are not subject to statutory designations:

- National Nature Reserves or Nature Reserves x 8
- Ancient Woodland x 178

The above sites either fall entirely or in part within the study area.

3.2.2 Built Heritage

Built heritage and archaeological remains are a limited and non-renewable resource, in many cases highly fragile and vulnerable to damage and destruction. Appropriate management is therefore essential to ensure that they survive in good condition. Care must be taken to ensure that built heritage is not needlessly or thoughtlessly damaged or destroyed through unsustainable recreation - development or usage. Not only are built heritage sites valuable for their own sake, but also for their role in education, leisure and tourism.

The cultural and environmental value of features of the archaeological and built heritage can help promote an area as a visitor destination which can generate widespread economic benefits through tourism and recreation.

It is the responsibility of Historic Environment Division (HED) within the Department for Communities to “*protect the environment*” inclusive of “*any site of historic or archaeological interest*”. By helping to sustainably protect and manage built heritage, HED is ensuring that these sites can be enjoyed by both by current recreational users and those of the future. HED wishes to encourage the use and appreciation of built heritage sites within the study area, but this can only be achieved if development and use is undertaken in a sustainable manner.

Noted not only for the beauty and diversity of its natural landscape, the study area is rich in built heritage and archaeological features, see Fig. 4.

Within the study area there are:

- Historic Parks, Gardens and Demesnes x 13
- Sites and Monuments Record x 1070, of which:
 - ‘scheduled’ protection status x 139
 - ‘state care’ protection status x 24
- Scheduled Zones x 94

3.2.3 Maritime Heritage

Strangford Lough is one of the principle areas in Northern Ireland used by recreational divers for training, exploring wrecks and observing marine life. The Lough’s sheltered waters are ideal as training areas for novice divers, while other areas provide some of the most challenging dives in Northern Ireland for the more experienced divers.

The Lecale Coast, although with less identified heritage sites and features, presents untapped potential in terms of discovering maritime heritage. The heritage of the area is under constant pressure from coastal erosion, development and potentially damaging activities.

It is the responsibility of Historic Environment Division (HED) within the Department for Communities to “*protect the environment*” inclusive of “*any site of historic or archaeological interest*”. Historic Environment Division works with the Marine and Fisheries Division (DAERA) and other key partners, to ensure significant marine archaeological sites are managed and protected. By helping to protect and

manage sustainably important marine archaeological sites, HED is ensuring that these sites can be enjoyed by both by current recreational users and those of the future.

HED does this by helping to ensure that key marine heritage sites are managed and protected through licensing, formal designation, strategic investigation and the delivery of appropriate policy and guidance; also by coordinating marine historic environment advice to support marine planning, marine licensing and the designation of marine conservation zones; helping to enhance the record of the marine historic environment and dissemination of this information, and helping to develop a wider understanding and enjoyment of marine heritage.

The marine historic environment is characterised by the following heritage assets:

- Wrecks of ships, boats and aircraft
- Submerged prehistory, such as artefacts, structures and deposits that are presently submerged because of sea-level rise, but which originated from human activities on land
- Coastal and intertidal archaeology, which covers a very wide range of artefacts, structures and deposits that originated from inhabitation or use of the coast

Sites within the study area includes:

- Maritime Sites and Monuments Record x 489, of which:
 - 'scheduled' protection status x 59
 - 'state care' protection status x 3
- Scheduled Zones x 10
- Wrecks x 30

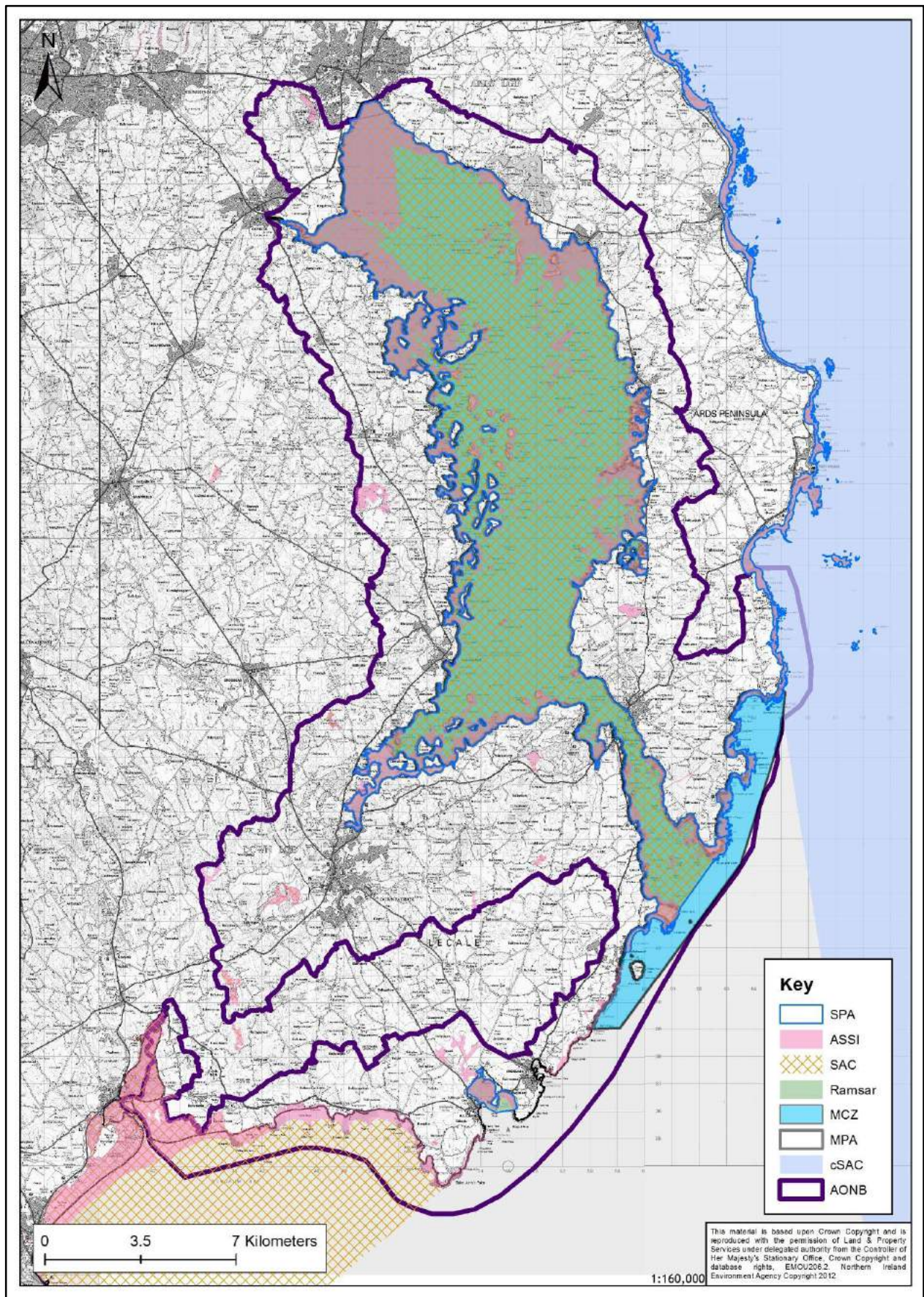


Fig. 3: Map of natural heritage designations within the study area

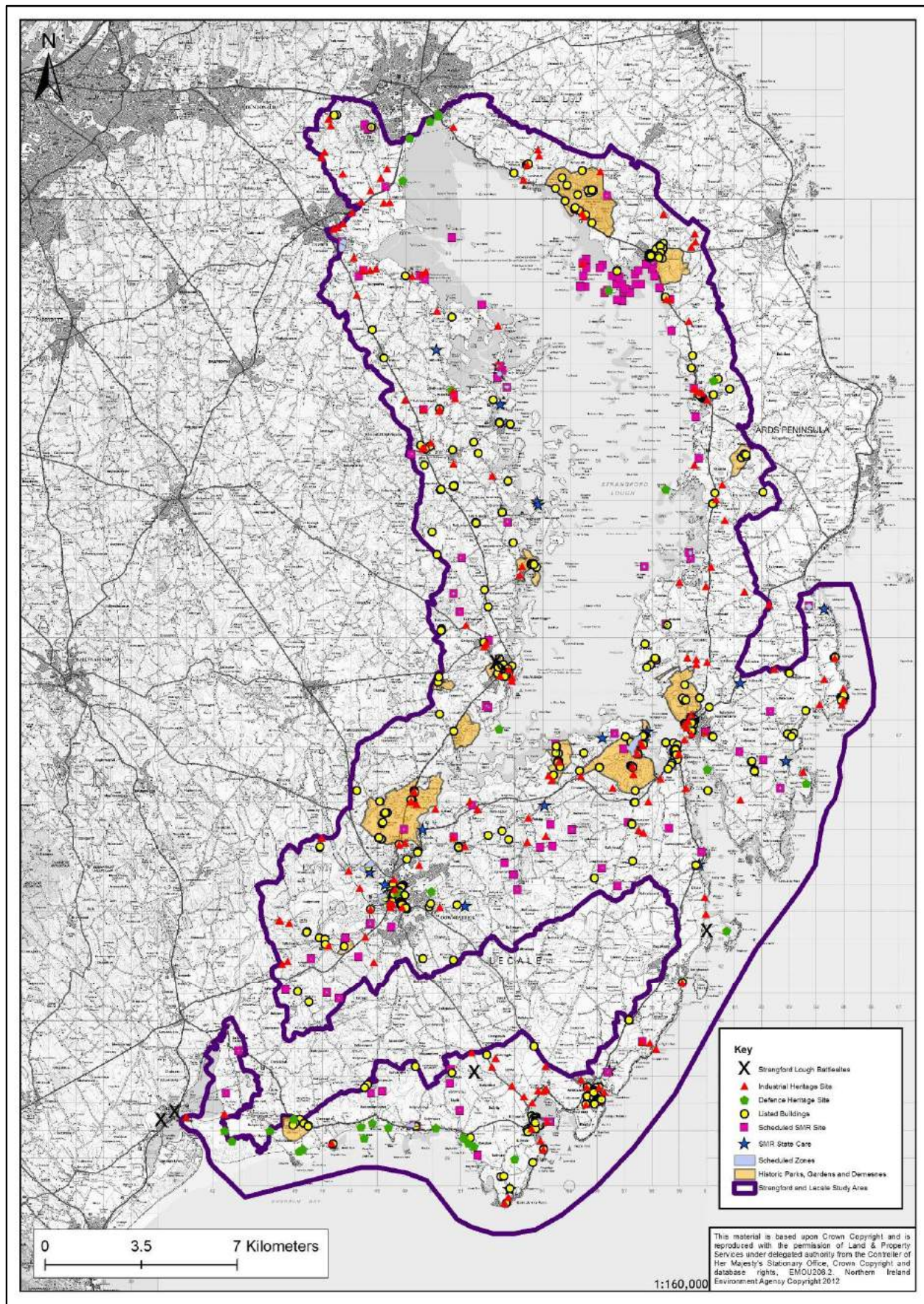


Fig. 4: Map of built heritage designations within the study area

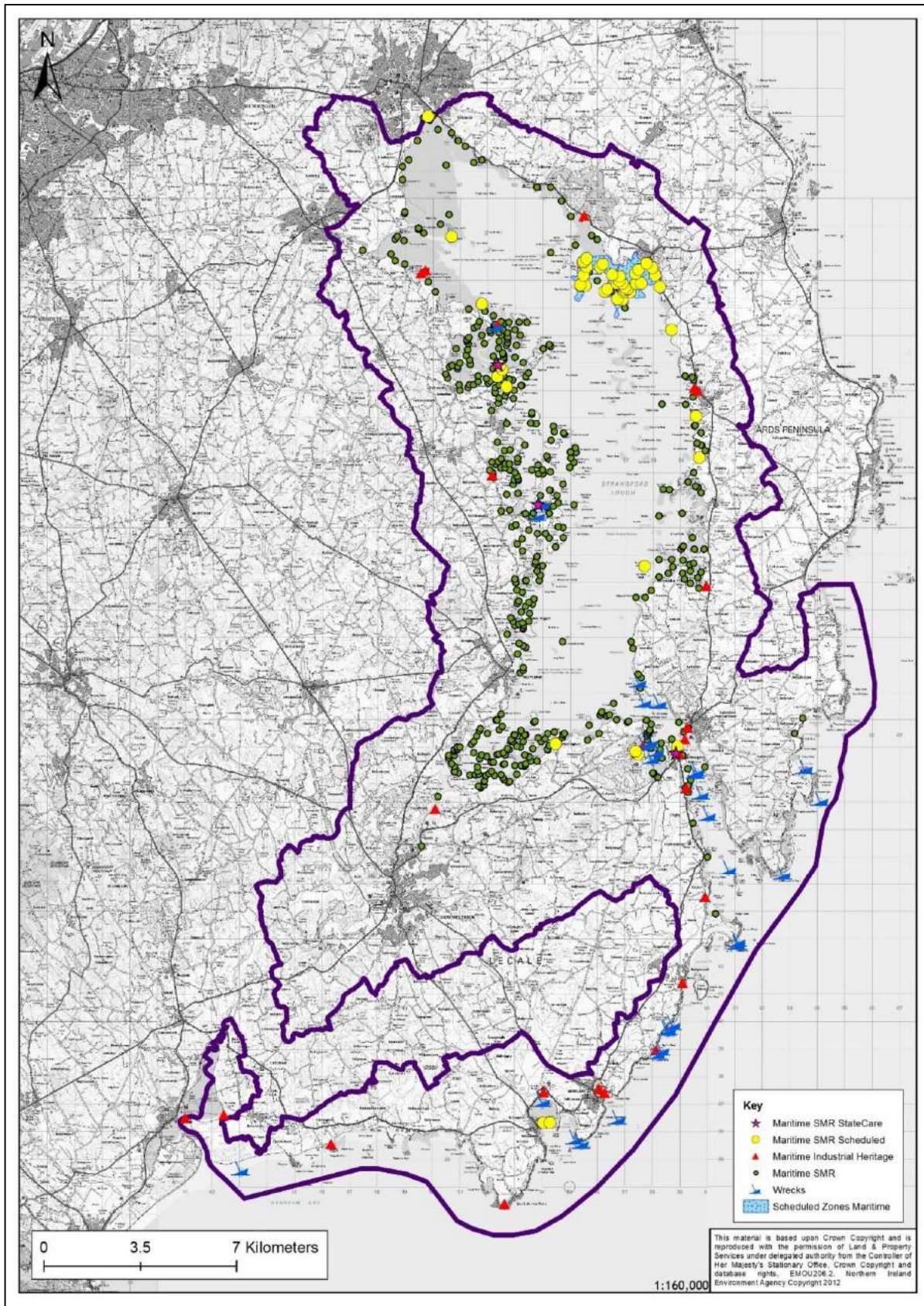


Fig. 5: Map of maritime heritage within the study area

3.3 Landownership and land management

Land ownership within the study area is a mixture of both public and private.

In relation to the Lough shore, it is estimated that the foreshore is 406 kms long²² (this includes those islands linked to land via a causeway). Of this, at least 75% is estimated to be public land²³.

However, most of the land and key sites within the study area are privately owned.

There are 8 public landowners²⁴ who own land that facilitates outdoor recreation, the largest of which is the Crown Estate.

3.3.1 Crown Estate

The Crown Estate owns and manages the seabed and foreshore from mean high watermark to the 12 NM territorial sea limit and holds the rights to the resources to develop renewable energy out to the continental shelf around England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The Crown Estate operates under UK statute (the Crown Estate Act 1961). Under this Act consent is required for placing a mooring on the seabed. In relation to Strangford Lough, various areas of the foreshore have been granted by the Crown Estate through 'claims' to landed estates. Certain areas were sold to others. e.g. for the development of ports or harbours such as Portaferry.

In addition, the Crown Estate enters into lease arrangement with others such as the National Trust. They also issue licences for specific activities/ events such as the Skiffie Worlds where a licence was issued for this international coastal rowing championships at Delamont in 2016, a condition of issuing the licence was that all statutory approvals were in place e.g. DAERA Marine Licence.

For the Crown Estate, the figures presented represent the total amount of foreshore under its ownership. However, in addition, the Crown Estate owns most of the seabed making it the largest public landowner within the study area.

3.3.2 National Trust

The National Trust owns substantial areas of land and key outdoor recreation sites within the study area. e.g. Castle Ward Demesne, Mount Stewart, Murlough Nature Reserve, Kearney etc..

About half of the foreshore of Strangford Lough is owned by the National Trust, with a further quarter leased from the Crown Estate. An extensive area of seabed and approximately 50 islands in Strangford Lough are also in Trust ownership. Some islands such as Taggart and Salt Island are popular egress points on the Lough, others rarely have visitors.

Many of the surrounding wetlands, woodland, car parks and picnic sites are owned or leased and cared for by the National Trust. The National Trust also holds the sporting rights for most of the foreshore and therefore plays a key role in the management and conservation of Strangford Lough's international wildlife interests. In the early 1960's, The Strangford Lough Wildlife Scheme was established to maintain a balance between shooting and nature conservation. A refuge/shooting permit scheme was established whereby wildfowling was either banned or restricted to certain times of year. In 1990 a major review of the effectiveness of the refuge system was carried out. The review stressed that refuges should be free from all forms of disturbance, not just shooting.

For organisations wishing to undertake new recreational activity, it is courteous to contact the National Trust where the activity relates to an area managed or owned by the organisation. For example, Council

²² This is the length of the county boundary taken from OSNI data

²³ This includes land identified through this project as belonging or leased to Crown Estate, National Trust, Councils, NI Water, DAERA

²⁴ Both the National Trust and the Woodland Trust are registered charities, however as their lands are accessible by the public they are classified as public within this report

sought permission from the National Trust to install the temporary pontoon at Delamont where the Trust lease the foreshore from the Crown Estate.

The National Trust currently has a proactive approach to recreation within the study area.

Consultation identified the following National Trust aspirations -

- The acquisition and development of a property on the Lough that would enable access to the water and the Lough and provide opportunities for land-based recreation adjacent to the Lough.
- The acquisition and development of a property on the Lough the main purpose of which is for nature conservation reasons. Public amenity value etc. would be secondary to nature conservation as a purpose.
- A focus on the development of a Coastal Path around Northern Ireland. This is included in the National Trust Business Plan. As part of this, the Trust would be keen to see a walk around Strangford Lough and associated coastline. To take this forward, a full time Coastal Officer (based at the North Coast), has recently been appointed.

Entry charges are in place for access to many National Trust properties. The National Trust's aim is to encourage people to take out annual membership rather than pay to enter properties for each visit.

3.3.3 Forest Service NI (FSNI)

FSNI owns the woodland at Hollymount Forest to the west of Downpatrick and leases land from the National Trust at both Mount Stewart and at Castle Ward Demesne²⁵.

Under the Forestry Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 '*... the public shall have right of access on foot to all forestry land for the purposes of recreation.*'

3.3.4 Local Councils

Both Newry, Mourne and Down District Council (NMDDC) and Ards and North Down Borough Council (ANDBC), own/ lease and manage a range of facilities within the study area. This includes recreation sites such as Island Hill, Comber and Delamont Country Park, Killyleagh, Tyrella beach and facilities such as car parks, toilets, quays and jetties.

It should be noted that both Councils were not able to supply up to date landownership data for the report due to ongoing in-house data audits which has resulted in them not being able to verify the accuracy of the information at this present time. Council owned land that was used within previously completed ORNI studies have been used to inform Fig. 7, in the interim, but accuracy cannot be confirmed. Any site-based recommendations have been individually checked with Councils, so the recommendations of the report can be taken as accurate.

3.3.5 Other publicly owned land

There are several other government departments with ownership or lease arrangements within the study area.

This includes –

- The Department of Education land ownership at Killyleagh Outdoor Education Centre and at Delamont Country Park.
- Department for Communities, (Historic Environment Division) ownership of several historic sites including Nendrum monastic site on Mahee Island, the abbey at Greyabbey, Kilclief, Clough and Audley's Castle(s).

²⁵ These land areas have not been included within the public land ownership totals for FSNI as they are included under National Trust.

- Transport NI who owns the ferry and related facilities (including ferry slips) at both Portaferry and Strangford.
- DAERA, Natural Environment Division (NED) who own land at the Quoile estuary including Janes Shore and land at Quoile Yacht Club, Scrabo Country Park.
- NI Water owns various sewage works around the Lough. For example, at Greyabbey, Comber/ Newtownards and Strangford. Often these sites, in public ownership, are in prime locations that are adjacent to the Lough.

Fig. 6 and Fig. 7 show the extent and distribution of publicly owned land within the study area.

Landowner	Area (ha)	No. of sites
Ards & North Down Borough Council	46	61
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council	147	51
Crown Estate (foreshore only ²⁶)	1,866	1
Crown Estate (leased to National Trust)	826	9
Crown Estate (leased to Council)	496	6
Crown Estate (leased to other)	100	4
Forest Service NI	111	1
National Trust	5,754	6
Woodland Trust	10.2	3
NI Water	56	2
NIEA	50	1
Total	9,413	144

Fig. 6: Public land ownership overview

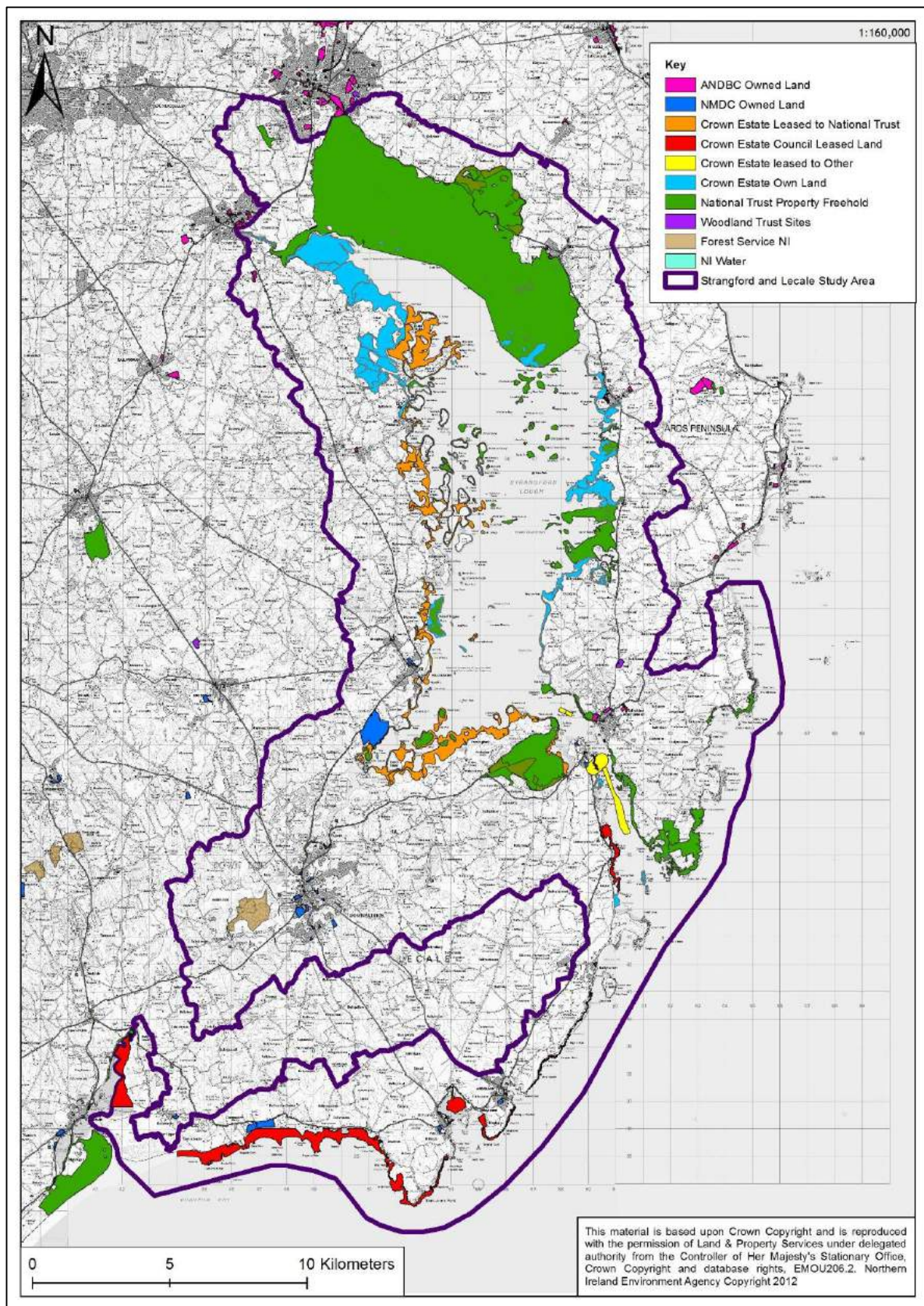


Fig. 7: Map of publicly owned land within the study area

3.4 Legislation relating to access

3.4.1 Legislation relating to public rights of way

The Access to the Countryside (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 (The 1983 Order)

Under 'The 1983 Order', Councils have a duty to assert and protect existing rights of way.

A public right of way over land is a right of way over a defined linear route. It exists in perpetuity unless extinguished by a due legal process.

These can either be –

- Existing PROW's (majority of PROW's in N. Ireland)
- Rights of way which arise by a public path creation agreement entered into by the landowner and Council (very limited use in N. Ireland). If agreement with a landowner cannot be reached, then Council has the power to make a public path creation order.

Common Law Liability

The duty of the owner of the land where a right of way is situated is very limited and is covered under common law. The owner of the land has no duty in common law to maintain the surface of the right of way so no liability will arise if the owner allows the surface of the right of way to fall into disrepair. Liability will only arise if the owner does something which creates a defect or danger to potential users of the right of way i.e. being blatantly negligent.

Landowner specific duties (under Article 5 of the 1983 Order) –

- To ensure that any existing gates and stiles are safe to use.

Private rights of way

A private right of way is for an individual or group (other than the public) to gain access to a destination (e.g. a house).

3.4.2 Legislation relating to Permissive Path Agreements

Recreation and Youth Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 (Article 10)

Permissive Path Agreements are entered into under 'The 1986 Order' between a Council and a landowner by which the landowner allows people to cross his land over a designated route.

These –

- Generally, run over several years
- Do not create a public right of way over a route

In addition -

- The landowner will owe the entrant the common duty of care under the 1957 Act i.e. as a visitor. Therefore, entering into a PPA opens up the landowner to Occupiers Liability.
- This can be transferred to Council i.e. Councils may provide insurance to landowners. This must be included in the PPA.

NB - These arrangements are outside of "The Access to the Countryside (Northern Ireland) Order 1983".

3.4.3 Legislation relating to Access Agreements/ Orders

The 1983 Order makes provision for a Council to enter into an access agreement with a landowner to enabling the public to have access to open countryside for open air recreation. If agreement with a landowner cannot be reached, then Council has the power to make an access order.

3.4.4 Occupiers' Liability Legislation

Occupiers' of land have certain responsibilities, or a "duty of care", towards people who come onto their land.

Two pieces of legislation determine what this level of responsibility is –

The Occupiers' Liability Act (Northern Ireland) 1957 (the 1957 Act)

The Occupiers' Liability Act (Northern Ireland) 1957 (The 1957 Act) governs an occupier's duty of care towards "visitors" on the land. It legislates that the occupier will take care that the visitor will be reasonably safe for the reason that he/ she is visiting their land.

This covers visitors there by permission and it is likely that a court would include those on a route with a Permissive Path Agreement in place.

It is therefore important that notices/ wording is in place highlighting any risks/ danger.

The Occupiers' Liability (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 (the 1987 Order)

Article 3 of The Occupiers' Liability (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 (The 1987 Order) determines whether a duty is owed towards "non-visitors" such as trespassers and the extent of that duty.

- It does not place an automatic duty on landowners to 'non-visitors'
- The duty towards a 'non-visitor' or trespasser is lower than that owed to visitors

However, an occupier owes a duty of care to 'non-visitors' if –

- He is aware of the danger or has reasonable grounds to believe that it exists, and that the non-visitor is in the vicinity or is likely to come into the vicinity of this danger
- The risk is one against which he may reasonably be expected to offer some protection

4 CONTEXT

This section outlines the context of the audit and how it fits with other relevant plans and strategies written at a strategic, regional and local level.

4.1 National Context

4.1.1 Draft Programme for Government 2016 – 2021

The Draft Programme for Government (PfG) 2016 – 2021 concluded its public consultation on 23rd December 2016. It is noted that at the time of writing the Northern Ireland Assembly has not formed an Executive following a General Election on 2nd March 2017, therefore the outcome of this Draft Programme for Government is uncertain.

In due course, the Programme for Government Framework will provide the strategic context for other key Executive strategy documents, including the Investment Strategy, the Economic Strategy and an Anti-Poverty/Social Strategy. The Programme will also inform the development of the Executive's budget over the course of this mandate and provide a mechanism for ensuring limited funds are best directed to where they can contribute most.

The Draft Framework contains 14 strategic outcomes which, taken together, set a clear direction of travel and enable continuous improvement on the essential components of societal wellbeing. They touch on every aspect of government, including the attainment of good health and education, economic success and building confident and peaceful communities. In addition to merely fulfilling statutory obligations, the new Executive hopes to be able to target those things that make real improvements to the quality of life for the citizen.

A Sustainable Outdoor Recreation Plan will aid in the delivery of the following outcomes:

- Outcome 2: We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment
- Outcome 3: We have a more equal society
- Outcome 4: We enjoy long, healthy, active lives
- Outcome 11: We have high quality public services
- Outcome 12: We have created a place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest
- Outcome 13: We connect people and opportunities through our infrastructure
- Outcome 14: We give our children and young people the best start in life

The strategic outcomes are supported by 48 indicators, which are clear statements for change. The following indicators are of relevance to the proposed Sustainable Outdoor Recreation Plan:

- Indicator 2. Reduce health inequality
- Indicator 3. Increase healthy life expectancy
- Indicator 6. Improve mental health
- Indicator 29. Increase environmental sustainability
- Indicator 30. Improve our attractiveness as a destination
- Indicator 42. Increase quality of life for people with disabilities

Key to the success of the new PfG is the ability of Departments to work collaboratively with not only themselves but also with other public bodies, the voluntary and private sector.

4.1.2 Regional Development Strategy for N. Ireland 2035 (Department of Regional Development, 2010)

The Regional Development Strategy (RDS) for Northern Ireland to 2035, published in 2010 by the Department of Regional Development, is the spatial strategy for the Northern Ireland Executive and takes account of key driving forces such as population growth, the increasing number of households, transportation needs, economic changes and the spatial implications of a divided society. It seeks to inform and guide the whole community in the drive to create a dynamic, prosperous and progressive Northern Ireland in the third millennium.

Several key aims of the RDS are applicable to this Action Plan.

One of the aims of the RDS is to 'Support our towns, villages and rural communities to maximise their potential', rural areas including towns and villages have a key role in supporting economic growth. They offer opportunities in terms of their potential for growth in new sectors, the provision of rural recreation and tourism, their attractiveness as places to invest, live and work, and their role as a reservoir of natural resources and highly valued landscapes.

Additionally, another aim is to 'Promote development which improves the health and well-being of communities.' A healthy community is better able to take advantage of the economic, social and environmental opportunities which are open to it. Improved health and well-being is derived not only from easy access to appropriate services and facilities, although this is important, but also from the creation of a strong economy set within a safe and attractive environment. The provision of more social and affordable housing also helps to build strong balanced communities.

The Spatial Framework identified within the RDS for Northern Ireland identifies Strangford Lough and Coast as a Strategic Natural Resource.

The development of recreation activities and access opportunities within the study area responds to the Spatial Development strategies within the RDS on the following:

RG4: Promote a sustainable approach to the provision of tourism infrastructure

- Improve facilities for tourists in support of the Tourist Signature Destinations.

RG7: Support urban and rural renaissance through:

- Developing innovative ways to bring forward under-utilised land and buildings
- Promote regeneration in areas of social need

RG11: Conserve, protect and, where possible, enhance our built heritage and our natural environment

- Maintain the integrity of built heritage assets, including historic landscapes
- Sustain and enhance biodiversity
- Protect and manage important geological and geomorphological features
- Protect enhance and manage the coast
- Recognise and promote the conservation of local identity and distinctive landscape character
- Conserve, protect and where possible enhance areas recognised for their landscape quality
- Protect designated areas of countryside from inappropriate development (either directly or indirectly) and continue to assess areas for designation.

SFG13: Sustain rural communities living in smaller settlements and the open countryside

- Revitalise small towns and villages

- Facilitate the development of rural industries, businesses and enterprises in appropriate locations
- Encourage sustainable and sensitive development

4.1.3 Health and Wellbeing 2026 Delivering Together (Department of Health, 2016)

The Strategy envisages a future in which; people are supported to keep well in the first place with the information, education and support to make informed choices and take control of their own health and wellbeing. Aligned with the aspirations the Executive set out in the draft Programme for Government, the overarching ambition is for every one of us to lead long, healthy and active lives.

It is well known that partaking in outdoor recreation is a key conduit to good health and by providing opportunities for recreation this Action Plan will ensure the study area is part of the newly envisaged future for health and wellbeing.

4.1.4 A Fitter Future for All - Framework for Preventing and Addressing Overweight and Obesity in Northern Ireland (Department of Health, 2012-2022)

This Framework aims to ‘empower the population of Northern Ireland to make healthy choices, reduce the risk of overweight and obesity related diseases and improve health and wellbeing, by creating an environment that supports and promotes a physically active lifestyle and a healthy diet’.

It identifies that prevention is taken forward through action to address two main areas – improving diet and nutrition and increasing participation in physical activity. Acknowledging this, two overarching objectives for the Framework have been set: to increase the percentage of people eating a healthy, nutritionally balanced diet; and to increase the percentage of the population meeting the CMO guidelines on physical activity.

Greater access to public and privately-owned land and more people having access to local facilities and opportunities for organised and nonorganized physical activity are articulated as two of the outcomes to achieve this.

4.1.5 Our Great Outdoors – The Outdoor Recreation Action Plan for Northern Ireland

This Action Plan was commissioned by Sport NI and Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) with support from the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) Inland Waterways Branch. Outdoor Recreation NI (ORNI) was also involved throughout the process.

The vision for the Outdoor Recreation Action Plan is: ‘a culture of dynamic, sustainable outdoor recreation in Northern Ireland’

To achieve this vision the aim is for Northern Ireland to be a place where:

- There are increasing opportunities and improved access and infrastructure for sustained and increased participation for everyone in a broad range of outdoor recreation activities
- People enjoy the outdoors and show a high degree of responsibility for themselves, towards others and towards the environment they are using, and play their part in maintaining, supporting and enhancing our environment and heritage.

4.1.6 Sports Matters: Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009 -2019

Whilst Northern Ireland’s environment provides conditions of international quality for a range of activities, Sport Matters recognises that not everyone will wish to achieve in performance sport and the Strategy encourages the development and use of open spaces for a variety of informal recreational and outdoor pursuits. Being out in the fresh air enjoying the scenery, whilst taking exercise, is recognised as an important element of Sport Matters.

The Strategy acknowledges that the natural environment provides many opportunities for a range of sporting and physical recreation activities but that access issues exist. In aspiring to the target that “By 2019 Northern Ireland will have developed a range of new, improved and shared sports facilities to a standard comparable with other similar regions of the UK” the Strategy indicates that this will require:

- Public access to and sustainable use of, publicly-owned lands across Northern Ireland for sport, physical recreation and activity tourism
- A planning system which facilitates and protects the provision of spaces for sport and physical recreation by following Planning Policy Statement 8: Open Space Sport and Outdoor Recreation

Sport Northern Ireland has recently approved a position statement about access to the natural environment in support of targets set out in “Sport Matters”. The objective is to communicate Sport Northern Ireland’s position on the importance it attaches to outdoor recreation through:

- Promoting the best possible access to the natural environment for sport and physical recreation within the confines of existing legislation and organisation of the land ownership prevalent in Northern Ireland.
- Encouraging and supporting full access for responsible and sustainable recreation on public land through the development of policy frameworks by other public bodies – especially those that are custodians of public land.

4.1.7 Valuing Nature - A consultation on a Biodiversity Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020

This Strategy stresses the importance of engaging people, especially young people, with the natural environment so they feel a strong sense of ownership. The Strategy highlights that it is essential for people to be provided with opportunities to experience nature and to develop a love of the natural environment which might then be harnessed to help the work to halt biodiversity loss.

This Strategy recognises the link between outdoor recreation and quality of life. Northern Ireland has extremely varied land and seascapes within a small geographical area and there is often access to local hills, forests and water bodies that make the outdoors a place that most people can use and enjoy. Access to such features can create opportunities for people to work together in a non-competitive environment pursuing common interests, thereby supporting community cohesion. Outdoor recreation can also have accompanying benefits to local communities in terms of physical and mental health, social inclusion and economic development.

This Strategy sets out 38 strategic targets that reflect what actions the Government need to take to help achieve the overall goal of halting biodiversity loss.

4.2 Regional Context

4.2.1 Strangford Lough and Lecale Heritage Management Strategy 2013-2018

This Strategy recognises the importance of the heritage assets of Strangford Lough and Lecale and the need to work together to protect and enhance the assets. This will enable local communities to use the area for their own enjoyment and to help sustain a healthy lifestyle and a thriving economy.

Despite the numerous heritage assets present in the Strangford and Lecale area, local people and visitors feel there is a lack of opportunity to engage in outdoor recreation in relation to water-based activities. The Strategy reveals SLLP’s aim to develop access points to Strangford Lough and provide a co-ordinated system and opportunity to take part in water-based activities. This will be implemented through clubs, outdoor recreation providers and events. With regards to land-based recreation, the aim in this Strategy is to develop and promote short to medium heritage walks especially around and between settlements. This is intended to increase local use across a range of abilities and to provide activities for visitors and to make the heritage more accessible. The area is also well used by cycling

clubs and the growth in cycling is evidenced by the number of regular road events held in the area. Off road cycling trails have been developed at Castle Ward. Horse riding takes place mainly along green lanes and country roads. Wildlife watching and nature pursuits have been identified as under developed activities in the area, given its international environmental importance.

4.2.2 Strangford Lough and Lecale AONB Action Plan 2017-2022

This Plan sets out actions to help conserve the landscape and biodiversity within Strangford Lough and Lecale AONB. This should involve communities, individuals and groups. Developing sustainable access to outdoor recreation within the AONB will also help increase public awareness and appreciation of the AONB. It is important to manage and monitor the progress of the AONB to achieve sustainable development. The action point which aligns with the development of outdoor recreation in the study area is as follows;

- Action 4.2: Encourage sustainable recreational use of the AONB and Marine Site, liaising with users, landowners and local communities. This will be done by creating a Sustainable Outdoor Recreation Plan with guidelines for sustainable outdoor recreation use relevant to activities on-line

Other actions can be indirectly addressed such as elements with regards to the control and eradication of invasive species, reducing risk to wildlife and improving habitats by reducing litter and promoting best practice on restoring and improving key habitats and features.

4.2.3 Strangford Lough Marine Protected Area Management Scheme 2017 (draft)

The Scheme sets out the legal requirements of a Management Scheme for Strangford Lough as a Marine Protected Area (MPA). It is underpinned by international Conventions and Directives, as well as UK policy and legislation. Conservation objectives are at the core of this management scheme and it is the authorities' responsibility to ensure these objectives are met. The objectives provide guidance on the management of any activities or issues that might adversely affect the designated site.

The aims of this Scheme are to;

- Protect and conserve ecosystems and biological diversity of Strangford Lough MPA
- Assist statutory bodies to fulfil their duties set out in the Conservation Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995
- Meet objectives set out in the European Habitats and Birds Directives
- Comply with the goals of the Convention of Biological Diversity

In addition, the management scheme will ensure the condition of the MPA is monitored and issues affecting Strangford Lough are reported and dealt with in the best way possible. Monitoring any issues this will ensure the designated features are protected for future generations while also maintaining the socio-economic interests of the area.

The Scheme stresses the important role Non-government organisations (NGOs) and voluntary organisations play in securing improved management of the MPA. Many activities, including most outdoor recreation pursuits, are unregulated and require voluntary co-operation to ensure that they remain sustainable.

4.2.4 Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Corporate Plan 2015-2019

The Council's mission is to 'lead and serve a District that is prosperous, healthy and sustainable'. To achieve this, they will focus on eight core areas, the first five of which align with the development of outdoor recreation in the study area.

1. Become one of the premier tourism destinations on the island of Ireland

- Ensuring a cultural and tourism infrastructure that will attract and serve the expectations of a growing number of local and international visitors.
- 2. Attract investment and support the creation of new jobs.
 - Facilitating business investment and job creation as well as a skilled workforce to support new industries.
- 3. Support improved health and well-being outcomes.
 - Improving quality of life and reducing health inequalities, primarily through programmes, services and access to open spaces.
- 4. Protect our natural and built environment.
 - Developing clean and attractive places with increase in biodiversity and renewable energy sources and lower energy costs
- 5. Lead the regeneration of our urban and rural areas.
 - Ensuring that our city, towns, villages and surrounding rural areas are great places for people to live, work, and visit.

The following actions are outlined as key ways of delivering on the objectives:

- Key Action of Objective 1: Explore the potential for Geotourism along the east coast/border areas.
- Key Action of Objective 2: Secure the District's position as a 'cross border' gateway for Dublin, Belfast and beyond and successfully deliver Small Business Start and Growth Programmes, locally based.
- Key Action of Objective 3: Promote increased physical activity levels.
- Key Action of Objective 4: Protect the District's rich natural and built heritage.
- Key Action of Objective 5: Establish a new Community Planning Partnership to engage and involve statutory partners as well as communities in developing the District.

At conclusion of the four-year period they expect to see the following tangible outcome, all of which can help to be achieved through development of outdoor recreation in the study area:

- An increase in the number of visitors to the District with a corresponding increase in visitor spend
- Support for local business to create new employment opportunities
- Investment in facilities and programmes to encourage healthier lifestyles
- The regeneration of our towns and villages including investment in rural development
- Local communities that are energised, empowered as well as actively engaged around the issues that are important to them

4.2.5 Ards and North Down District Council Corporate Plan 2015- 2019

The Council's vision is 'that Ards and North Down will be a place to be proud of which is more prosperous, vibrant, healthy, sustainable and where people enjoy an excellent quality of life.' To achieve this, the 4-year Plan has focused on 3 external objectives. These are people, place and prosperity. Delivery of these external objectives are supported by one internal objective which is concerned with performance excellence. Each objective involves a success measure that will enable the Council to determine how well each objective is performing. Objectives which align with the development of sustainable outdoor recreation in the study area are;

1. People

Improve health, wellbeing and promote active lifestyles

- provide opportunities for residents to enjoy an active lifestyle and work to reduce social deprivation and inequality

2. Place

Invest in and promote the borough's rich cultural heritage and environment

- strive to ensure residents' benefit from a well-planned and designed borough with attractive local environments

Invest in and promote facilities and outdoor spaces

- make the borough an attractive place to live/visit through a variety of recreational and sporting facilities and events

3. Enhance our towns, villages and coastlines

- enhance all our local neighbourhoods to support services for individuals, community groups and businesses

4. Prosperity

Enhance the visitor experience to increase visitor spend

- promote the cultural, recreational, sporting and event offerings in the borough to attract visitors

4.2.6 Newry, Mourne and Down Tourism Strategy 2017-2021

This five-year Strategy sets out the strategic direction for the tourism industry within the District of Newry, Mourne and Down. The vision for 2021 Newry, Mourne & Down is a 'premier, year-round mountain and maritime destination in Ireland recognised for its EPIC experiences in outdoor adventure, its rich tapestry of cultural heritage, myths and unique stories, and its authentic local life.'

The goal of the destination is to work collaboratively toward assisting Northern Ireland achieve its targeted growth rate of 6% per annum in overnight expenditure by:

1. Focusing on developing visitor destination experiences that will deliver 'EPIC moments'.
2. Building a unified and entrepreneurial industry that is customer-focused.
3. Ensuring that the development of tourism is undertaken sustainably and contributes to the enhancement of social, cultural and environmental values.

Three underlying themes are identified:

1. Outdoor adventures to challenge and refresh the body, spirit and mind
2. Unique cultural heritage in inspirational settings
3. The storybook of Ireland

Destination Experience - The Mournes Coast

The Mourne Coastal Experience is highlighted as a key Destination Experience. Outdoor recreation opportunities along The Mournes Coast presents a strong focus on water-based activities, primarily due to the significant yachting market. This strategy recognises the potential for the coast to offer an even greater range of water-based activities but improvements in access to the water needs to be put in place, particularly for visitors with physical disabilities.

Several focus points are highlighted which align with the development of outdoor recreation along The Mourne Coast.

- *Developing more effective gateway and hub communities*; Downpatrick is recognised as a hub community along The Mourne Coast but needs to be further strengthened as a destination hub as there is currently insufficient accommodation to host visitors overnight.
- *Expanding the emphasis on festivals and events*; to strategically enhance the positioning of NMD – in other words to support the mountains, myths and maritime, and the underlying themes:
- *Developing the role of supporting businesses*; is a critical success factor in bringing a destination to life. Businesses need to understand the needs of the visitor and have the capacity to respond effectively.
- *Enhancing accessibility*; improving connectivity between trail networks, ensuring that signage and wayfinding markers are in place, enhancing the resilience of path networks, and maintaining adequate public transportation services are important elements in delivering a satisfactory visitor experience.
- *Experience Development Plan*; further planning and development of visitor experiences are required if The Mourne Coast is going to attract international markets and generate longer stays.

4.2.7 Integrated Strategy for Ards and North Down, Tourism, Regeneration and Economic Development 2018-2030

The vision for 2030 Ards and North Down is 'Blue Green, Creatively Connected' which relates to Ards and North Down's three particular strengths: The natural landscape of sea, loughs and land – a blue green space. This stands by the idea that improving the quality of the natural environment will help lead to a more prosperous economy.

Actions which align with the development of outdoor recreation in the study area are;

Action 4.3: Connect our Places and People

- Develop a Blueway and Greenway Network
- Continuous Coastal Route
- Promote increasing the use of sustainable modes of transport such as cycling

Action 4.4: Equip with skills and spaces

- Offer support to the development of sustainable tourism accommodation e.g. boutique hotel, small motorhome facilities

Action 4.6: Nurture our assets

- Enable people to actively participate in caring for their environment through wildlife habitat improvement projects such as tree planting, beach cleans, building nest boxes or creating a new wetland boardwalk.
- Make effort to restore historic buildings and to find sustainable uses for existing buildings, be they culturally significant or visually prominent.

4.2.8 A Community Plan for Newry, Mourne and Down to 2030

The vision is for Newry, Mourne and Down to be a place with strong, safe and vibrant communities where everyone has a good quality of life and access to opportunities, choices and high-quality services which are sustainable, accessible and meet people's needs.

One main aim of the Community Plan is to 'Improve the wellbeing of people in Newry, Mourne and Down' something which the development of outdoor recreation in the Strangford Lough and Lecale area can help to achieve.

This engagement process has led to the development and confirmation of the following five key priority areas, described as outcomes, on which the Council will focus the delivery of services over the life of the Plan to 2030. The outcomes are that all people in Newry, Mourne and Down:

- get a good start in life and fulfil their lifelong potential
- enjoy good health and wellbeing
- benefit from prosperous communities
- benefit from a clean, quality and sustainable environment
- live in respectful, safe and vibrant communities

4.2.9 Ards and North Down Community Plan 2017 to 2032

'The Big Plan' establishes a vision that 'Ards and North Down is a vibrant, connected, healthy, safe and prosperous place to be.' The overarching ambition of the Big Plan is 'To have empowered, resilient individuals and communities; to reduce inequality; to promote good relations and sustainability; and to improve the accessibility of all public services.'

This engagement process has led to the development and confirmation of the following five key priority areas, described as outcomes, on which the Council will focus the delivery of services over the life of the Plan to 2032. The outcomes are that all people in Ards and North Down:

- fulfil their lifelong potential
- enjoy good health and wellbeing
- live in communities where they are respected, are safe and feel secure
- benefit from a prosperous economy
- feel pride from having access to a well-managed sustainable environment

4.3 Local context

In 2012, Newry and Mourne District Council developed a series of Village Renewal and Development Plans. The Plans show a clear desire for recreation development in the area. The updated 2017 Village Renewal and Development Plans for NMDDC provide an update on the progress of the actions set out in the 2012 Village Plans. The updated Plans also summarise any new projects that have been identified as potential to take forward. For some villages, an updated Village Plan has yet to be produced.

The following table provides an overview of each of the Village Plans in NMDDC in relation to the future opportunities for outdoor recreation development:

Village Plan	Future Potential
Ardglass (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Boardwalk around the harbour on top of the rocks out to the pier• Walkway around the pitch at the Gaelic Club• There is ongoing provision of water recreation activities at harbour• Develop events around the harbour to include yachting regatta
Ballyhornan (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ongoing refurbishment is taking place to walking/cycling paths at 'The Lanes' entry.• There is a new project to facilitate cyclists and ramblers throughout the village/ exploit link to the Ulster Way• There is an opportunity to create secondary walking routes via existing public rights of way• NMDDC have recently carried out a study which explored the feasibility of a coastal path along the extent of the Newry, Mourne and Down coast. This would pass through Ballyhornan.• There are ongoing refurbishment works to public access to beach. There is also the potential to develop an area at the beach as a key hub along the Strangford Lough Coastal Walking Path
Dundrum (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SWOT analysis recognises Dundrum is in a beautiful location and has great potential to develop outdoor recreation• Improve access to harbour for water recreation activities• Improve walk around harbour and walk along beach• Promote Dundrum as a walking centre; lobby to have surfaces of lanes improved to facilitate walkers; mark/sign walks and produce walking brochure• Lobby for additional accommodation; explore potential for transit site for camper vans

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the growth of Dundrum Coastal Rowing Club there is demand from the community for boat storage facilities, improved access to slipway and a floating pontoon
Kilclief (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SWOT analysis recognises there is a lack of community space and facilities for sport, health and recreation and poor access to the two nearest beaches, Kilclief and Caffertys. There are also no pedestrian footpaths/walkways outside Kilclief centre • There is an opportunity to develop a coastal walking/cycling path to neighbouring village of Strangford • There is a need for footpaths/walkways to link up the area e.g. Church, Castle, School, GAA Club, beach and along Shore Road to St Malachy's Park • There is potential to develop Cloughy Rocks as an overnight stop off point for camper vans, touring caravans
Killough (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A feasibility study is proposed to upgrade outdoor sports facilities. This will include cycling, skateboarding and water sports • Develop walking and cycling routes e.g. enhance the Ropewalk and develop a biodiversity trail • A new public connection extending Palatine Lane from School Road to St Joseph's Primary School will create a new walking and cycling route between existing housing to the south and the school to the north. A new public walkway at this location will also serve to provide a circular walking route for Killough linked with the existing Ropewalk. • Upgrade the Lecale Way to ensure access for all members of the community, including those less able and the elderly
Killyleagh (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a proposal for Riverside Recreation Area at Braeside Gardens • There is a proposal for Riverside Walk / Recreation Area at Cross Street
Strangford (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NMDDC are currently seeking funding to undertake a feasibility study into the development of formalised walking paths in and around Strangford. • There is also a proposal for coastal walking and cycling path to Kilclief • Community aspiration to connect Strangford Village to the Down Coastal Path to enhance and improve the accessibility to the coastline and nearby settlements. Strangford Community Association have submitted a planning application and funding application to progress this project. <p>Develop facilities for water-based activities, including rowing club. The rowing club has significantly grown since 2012 and require improved facilities.</p>

Fig. 8: Village Plan overview for NMDDC

Ards and North Down District Council developed a series of Village Plans in 2013/14 which reveal community aspirations for recreational development in this area. Funding was secured to review and update eight of the existing Village Plans for Ards and North Down District Council in 2016. Work is now well underway to deliver these revised Plans.

The table below provides an overview of each of the Village Plans in ANDBC in relation to the future opportunities for outdoor recreation development:

Village Plan	Future Potential
Cloughey (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SWOT analysis recognises Cloughey is an attractive coastal location but there is a lack of provision of water-based activities. • There is an opportunity to improve access to the beach, linkages and facilities at The Warren. • Walking and cycling is dangerous in the village. There are no formal pedestrian crossing points or safe looped walks • Cloughey is located on Strangford Lough Cycle Trail but cyclists rarely stop here as there are no bike stands in the village • Recent development has enabled access to Slans Graveyard • Statutory planning for the Cloughey Coastal Walk is complete, a looped walk taking in the beach, Slanes Point and The White House
Greyabbey (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The plan proposes a conservation area designation within the village led by the community • Establish a formal promenade walking route along Strangford Lough. This could include a seating and picnic area, trim trail site and boardwalk to the playing fields. • Promote the Greyabbey Heritage Trail by installing finger posts and improve pathways and access points to sites. • Improve access to the Abbey
Killinchy (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is little provision of outdoor recreation in Killinchy and no plans to develop outdoor recreation. There is demand from within the community to redevelop the community hall to include a 3G pitch. This would encourage more team sports.
Kircubbin (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a slipway at Kircubbin Harbour to provide improved access for commercial/ sporting/recreational boats • Improvements to existing footpath network to connect lower car park, harbour and upper car park • A canoe/skiff access point at the harbour slipway offering an additional access point beyond Kircubbin Sailing Club. This would enhance recreational use of Kircubbin Bay. • Connect existing walking and proposed walking routes to provide walkers with a comprehensive network of circular routes that emanate from village centre. This will allow for the linking up of several routes to provide longer walks which extend beyond Kircubbin.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Installation of wildlife lookout points, two outdoor gyms/ trim trails and two picnic areas
Lisbarnett & Lisbane (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action plan recognises the need to identify walking and cycling routes that could be developed and publicise these. The village is already located on cycling routes but cycling stands may encourage cyclists to stop in the village • Local assets need to be promoted more e.g. local people provided with more information about AONB designation • There are plans for improved play facilities such as skate/BMX area
Portaferry (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a new pontoon at Portaferry Marina and a jetty/pier at Cook Street Quay which would allow for recreational boating. • Formalise boating, canoeing and excursion tours along Portaferry's shoreline. There is potential to provide canoe hire facilities • Install permanent sea fishing stands/rod holders at the pier. The village plan supports the concept of the lough being sensitively developed as a premier angling destination. • There are walking opportunities to capitalise on, e.g. formalise the Mountain Road (circular) walking route and promote a heritage trail • Develop the rear of the premises of Portaferry Sailing Club to become a space for general outdoor recreation and camping. The facility would support a range of activities, targeting groups including young people, walkers, cyclists, environmentalists, families and tourists • Proposal for parkland to become caravan pitches and camping area. Children's play area could become an adventure zone catering for older children and containing elements such as climbing walls, high wire walks and zip lines • Potential redevelopment of the lands around the Exploris Aquarium as part of a new Outdoor Recreation and Pursuits Centre and potential to provide bike hire facilities

Fig. 9: Village Plan overview for ANDBC

4.4 Strategic Context Summary

The proposed Outdoor Recreation Action Plan for Strangford and Lecale AONB has the potential to:

Executive and Departments

- Assist the NI Executive to deliver improvement on the essential components of societal wellbeing. This includes the attainment of good health and education, economic success and building confident and peaceful communities.
- Support the Department of Regional Development to maximise the potential of towns, villages and rural communities in Strangford Lough and Lecale whilst improving the health and wellbeing of its communities
- Help the Department of Health to create an environment that supports a physically active lifestyle
- Support Sport NI to provide more opportunities and improved access and infrastructure for participation in a broad range of outdoor recreation activities
- Help the Department of Environment engage people, especially young people, with the natural environment which may be harnessed to help the work to halt biodiversity loss

Local Communities within Ards and North Down Borough Council and Newry Mourne and Down Borough Council

- Contribute to the creation of a prosperous, healthy and sustainable district by improving the quality of life of residents, protecting the natural and built heritage and regenerating rural areas
- Empower rural communities to help themselves through collaboration and tourism opportunities, complementing rather than competing with other towns, villages and rural areas
- Improve the wellbeing of the people in Strangford Lough and Lecale and in turn improve levels of deprivation in line with the Community Plans
- Assist in developing gateway and hub communities in the study area where accessibility to outdoor experiences and the rich cultural heritage of the area is enhanced
- Lead to the creation of outdoor recreation facilities and trails to meet community needs
- Contribute to the goal of existing studies by recommending the need for capital infrastructure, a focus on trail connectivity and the development of hubs to generate sustainable tourism growth.
- Offer a greater range of water-based activities with improvements in access to the water, particularly for visitors with physical disabilities
- Enhancing accessibility by improving connectivity between trail networks, ensuring that signage and wayfinding markers are in place and enhancing the resilience of path networks
- Identifying potential improvements in water and land-based recreation opportunities and the development of actions to ensure strategic growth of outdoor recreation as a tourism sector

Strangford Lough and Lecale

- Ensure communities, individuals and groups work together to protect and enhance the important heritage assets of Strangford Lough and Lecale
- Ensure outdoor recreation is developed sustainably and identify issues affecting the designated features of the MPA.
- Support SLLP aim to develop sustainable access to outdoor recreation within the AONB, particularly for water-based activities

5 METHODOLOGY

5.1 Overview

This study was completed using the methodology outlined below:

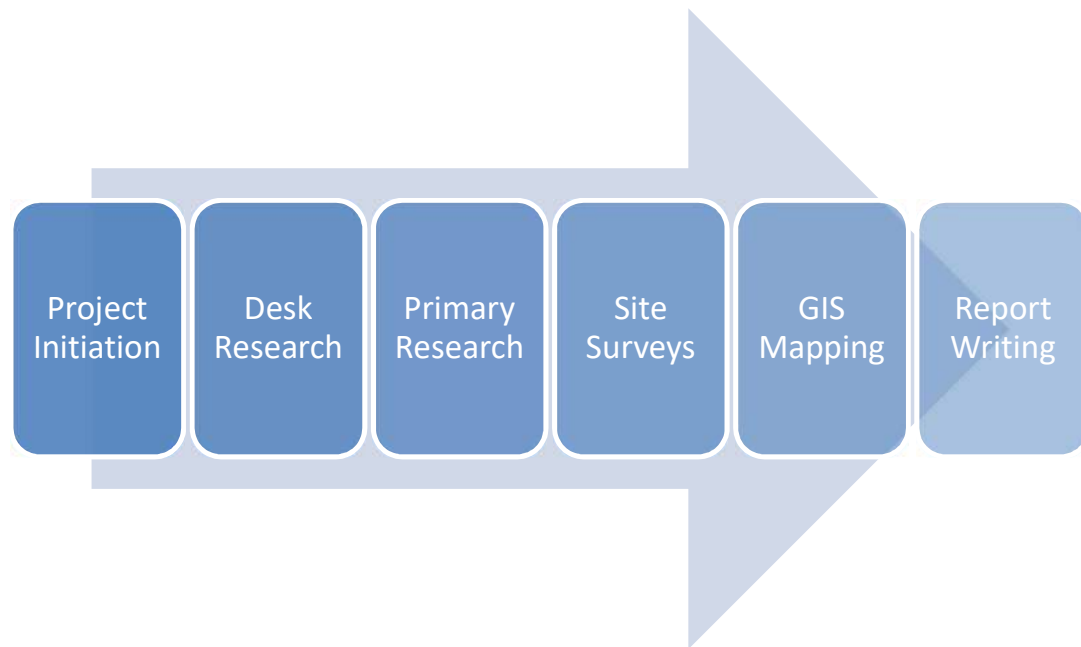


Fig. 10: Methodology overview

The following detailed methodology was employed to prepare this report -

Method	Purpose	Details
1. Project Initiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce key delivery staff • Agree the Terms of Reference • Agree methodology and timelines including schedule for progress updates • Identify further documentation that will assist the delivery of the project 	Meeting with Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership representatives on 31st January 2018
2. Desk research	<p>Strategic Context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake an examination of strategic context within which the plan will operate • Ascertain the Plan's contribution to national and regional policies <p>Current Provision:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an initial base of current provision utilising: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ORNI in-house records ○ Existing promotional literature ○ GIS and database audit of key organisations 	<p>See Section 3</p> <p>See Section 5</p>
3. Consultation (Primary Research)	One to one – targeted consultation with primary stakeholders to capture specific information about current outdoor recreation provision and future opportunities	See list of one to one consultees within Appendix 2
3. Site surveys	To gather site specific information regarding selected sites to verify data collated during desk research and consultation (where required)	<p>All 36 sites identified as part of the Water Based Recreation Access Audit had previously been visited and assessed.</p> <p>An additional 10 sites were identified within the Recreation Action Plan study area, these were also visited and assessed.</p>
4. GIS mapping	To map all current provision of recreation sites and facilities, including future development opportunities	See maps contained in report
5. Report writing	To analyse and present all findings and recommendations in a concise report	See report

Fig. 11: Detailed methodology

5.2 Use of GIS

The spatial mapping tool Arc GIS was used to analyse and present the spatial data collected through the audit. The following information was mapped:

- Current provision of all land, air and water-based activities – sites and trails
- Land ownership
- Public Rights of Way (PRoW's) and permissive path agreements
- Environmental designations

Please note that where the extent of the landownership was known, it was shown in polygon format and where this was not known, it was shown in point format.

The routes and sites mapped as part of this study are based on information and data obtained through consultation and desk research. The accuracy of the described and digitized route and sites is therefore dependent on the reliability of the information received.

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PART 2// FINDINGS

6 CURRENT PROVISION OF OUTDOOR RECREATION

This section provides an audit of current provision and issues in relation to formal outdoor recreation within the study area. This is divided into land, water and air-based recreation.

This includes -

- What is in place e.g. formal provision including Canoe Trails, Quality Walks, Public Rights of Way and the Ulster Way etc.
- User numbers – qualitative and quantitative data from ORNI consumer websites – OutdoorNI.com, WalkNI.com, CanoeNI.com, CycleNI.com and OutmoreNI.com. Information obtained from key site managers regarding user numbers (where available).
- A summary of private sector activity providers – provided through ORNI’s previous role as Secretariat of the Activity Tourism Forum

This is supported by available information from –

- Existing websites such as DiscoverNorthernIreland.com, VisitStrangfordLough.com and StrangfordLough.org
- Existing literature
- Information audit of key organizations such as the governing bodies of sport for each of the named activities.

6.1 Activity providers

Both publicly and privately-run organisations provide guiding services to members of the public. Activity providers located within or adjacent to the study area can be seen in Fig. 12 and Fig. 13.

Key activity providers who use Strangford Lough but are based outside the study area are also included.

Activity Provider	Activity
Ards Peninsula Tours	Guided walks
Bed and Bike	Guided cycle tours
Cherry Tree Riding Centre	Horse riding lessons
Clearsky Adventure Centre	Archery, climbing, abseiling, orienteering, mountain biking, coasteering, kayaking
D. V. Diving	Diving
Delamont Outdoor Education Centre	Education
Helipower	Helicopter training and charter services
Hollow Farm Shooting Grounds	Shooting
Field of Dreams	Clay pigeon shooting, archery, coarse fishing, orienteering
Ganaway Activity Centre	Archery, climbing, abseiling, canoeing, kayaking, mountain biking, hill walking, bouldering, orienteering, stand up paddle boarding, caving
Iron Donkey Bicycle Touring	Guided cycle tours
Killyleagh Outdoor Education Centre	Education
Lecale Peninsula Tours	Guided walks

Mac Adventure	Guided canoe trips
Millbridge Riding Centre Ltd	Horse riding lessons, livery and competition
Newtownards Sailing Club	Members club
NI Kitesurfing	Lessons
St Patrick's Way Stables	Horse riding lessons
Strangford Lough Yacht Club	Members club
Strangford Yacht Charter	Guided tours
Tullymurray Equestrian Centre	Horse riding lessons, livery and competition

Fig. 12: Activity providers based within the study area

Activity Provider (external to study area)	Activity
Belfast Canoe Club	Canoeing
Life Adventure Centre	Canoeing
Mobile Team Adventure	Canoeing
Outdoor Concepts NI	Canoeing
Tollymore National Outdoor Centre	Canoeing, paddle boarding
Scouts and Guides (local, national and international groups)	Archery, climbing, abseiling, canoeing, kayaking, mountain biking, hill walking, bouldering, orienteering, stand up paddle boarding, caving

Fig. 13: Activity providers using the study area, externally based

Fig. 14 provides an overview of the activities taking place in the study area and the location of the activity providers identified above.

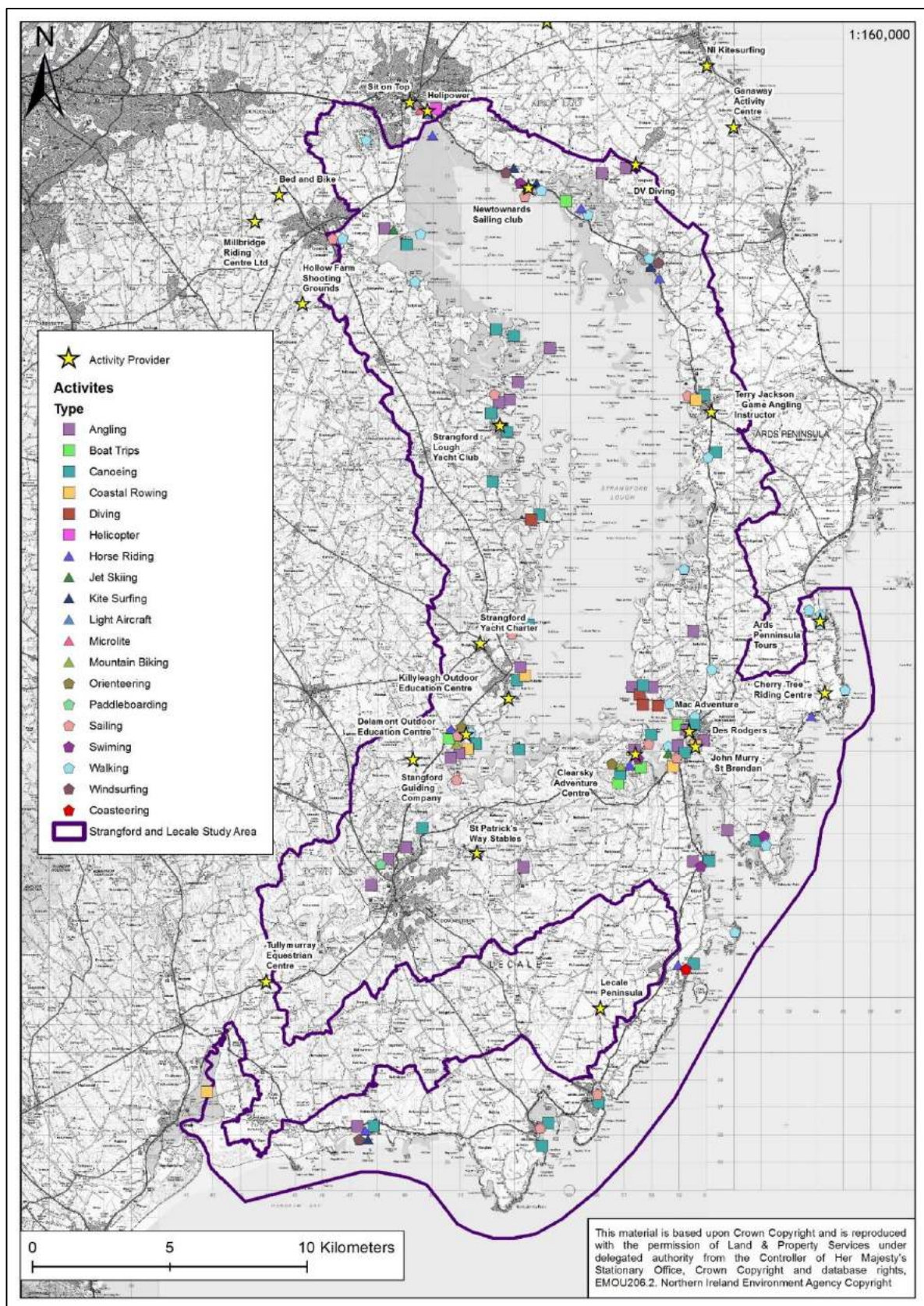


Fig. 14: Map of activities and activity providers

6.2 Land based recreation

The following activities are included within land-based recreation –

- Walking
- Cycling (on and off road)
- Horse riding
- Orienteering

6.2.1 Walking

Walking is one of the most popular activities undertaken within the study area. It is often a conduit to other activities such as sightseeing, bird watching, photography etc., hence participation levels are high. Walking opportunities identified within the study area can be seen in Fig. 18.

6.2.1.1 Quality Walks

Developed in 2007 by ORNI, the quality walks scheme recognises and promotes N. Ireland's best short (0-5 miles), medium (5-19 miles) and long-distance (20 miles plus) walking routes and includes the Waymarked Ways and sections of the Ulster Way. When the scheme was established, all Quality Walks were accredited by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. All are promoted on WalkNI.com.

33 quality walks are located within the study area split over 17 sites (excluding the Lecale Way) see Fig. 15. The majority of these are short walks of up to 5 miles. There is one medium-distance walk at the Quoile.

The *Lecale Way* is a long-distance walking route. 49 miles in length it starts in Downpatrick, travels to Strangford village and then down the Lecale Coast via Ballyhornan, Ardglass, Killough and Dundrum before ending in Newcastle. Certain sections of the route are problematic due to being on road, wet underfoot for most of the year, have ongoing issues with local landowners or require maintenance of signage and vegetation that the Council struggles to keep up with. For example, Ghost Lane which is part of the Lecale Way adjacent to the Strangford Road, floods badly which results in muddy conditions for most of the year. The private landowner opposite Ghost Lane uses excessive fencing to keep sheep in, which is off putting to walkers.

Although some small sections of the route of the Lecale Way have been investigated previously by Council (Blackstaff – Ballykinler, Ballykinler – Tyrella and Ardtole), the entire route has not been fully assessed or individual landowners approached in many years.

Name	Length (km)	Length (miles)
SHORT WALKS – up to 5 miles		
Ballyquintin Farm		
- Bar Hall Bay	2.5	1.5
- National Nature Reserve	1.5	0.9
- Portkelly	1.2	0.8
Castle Espie		
- All Ability Trail	1.2	0.7
- Wildlife Wander	1.2	1.0
- Woodland Trail	1.6	2.3
Castle Ward Demesne		
- Blue Route	3.8	2.3
- Boundary Trail	5.3	3.3
- Castle Trail	2.8	1.7
- Farm Trail	4.4	2.8
- Shore Trail	3.3	2.1
Cloughey Coastal Path	3.7	2.3
Corrog Wood	0.7	0.4
Delamont Country Park		
- Corbally Walk	4.3	2.7
- Long Walk	4.5	2.8
- Mullagh Walk	1.4	0.9
- Strangford Walk	1.8	1.1
Greyabbey Heritage Trail	1.2	0.7
Island Hill and North Strangford Nature Reserve	1.1	0.7
Kearney	1.7	1.0
Killard National Nature Reserve	2.2	1.4
Killynether Wood	1.7	1.0
Mount Stewart		
- Lake & Garden Walk	1.7	1.1
- Red Trail	2.9	1.8
- Blue Trail	4.1	2.6
- Ramble	2.0	1.3
- Yellow Trail	1.0	0.6
Portaferry Windmill Hill	1.7	1.1
Quoile Countryside Centre Ramble	2.7	1.7

Scrabo Hill	2.3	1.4
Slans Graveyard	0.3	0.2
MEDIUM DISTANCE WALKS – 5-20 miles		
Quoile River Walk	9.0	5.6
LONG DISTANCE WALKS - >20 miles		
Lecale Way (76km/47-mile total)	62.9	39.1
Total	145.1	90.2

Fig. 15: Quality Walks within the study area

While most of the quality walks are free to access, entry charges do apply at some sites where there are a range of other facilities i.e. not just the walk trail. This includes the National Trust properties at Castle Ward Demesne and Mount Stewart and Delamont Country Park (see Fig. 16).

Site		Gift Aid	Standard
Castle Ward	Adult	£10.50	£9.50
	Child	£5.25	£4.75
Mount Stewart	Adult	£11.50	£10.45
	Child	£5.75	£5.22
Delamont Country Park	Per car	N/A	£5.00
	Annual pass	N/A	£25.00
Castle Espie	Adult	£9.20	£8.36
	Child	£5.10	£4.63

Fig. 16: Admission charges to sites with Quality Walks

6.2.1.2 Formal walking

In addition to Quality Walks, there are several sites where formal walking takes place. Routes not classified as a Quality Walk either do not meet the Quality Walk assessment criteria or they may not yet have been assessed. A list of known formal walking sites is detailed in Fig. 17.

Generally, these walks are well maintained and well used with no known issues.

Ards and North Down Borough Council
Floodgates Walk
Greyabbey Walk
Highway to Health, Downshire Hospital
Portaferry Town Trail
Cloughey Warren
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council
Compass Hill, Strangford
Kilclief Beach
Ballyhornan Beach
Tyrella Beach
National Trust
Nugent's Wood, Portaferry

Fig. 17: Formal walk sites within the study area

6.2.1.3 Informal Walking

In addition to Quality and formal walking routes, informal walking occurs at many locations within the study area where there is not necessarily a designated trail.

This includes -

- Forest Service land ²⁷ at Hollymount, outside Downpatrick
- Numerous minor roads without footpaths
- On the foreshore of Strangford Lough e.g. at Greyabbey and the Irish Sea coast
 - Informal walking takes place on the foreshore between high and low water marks, what is known to be Crown Estate owned land. In the study area much of the Crown Estate owned foreshore is leased to the National Trust. The public does not have a right to walk on the foreshore, although the Crown Estate tolerates this use. i.e. does not try and prevent it.
- Green Lanes
 - Informal walking takes place on unsurfaced access routes within the study area. Green lanes may connect two public roads, may be used for access to private and agricultural property and are likely to have historically been used by the public as a walk route. Green lanes are privately owned and do not fall under the Department of Infrastructure NI's remit.
 - Research identified a range of opportunities to improve walking and cycling provision through the use of green lanes (pedestrian only) and the connection of existing trails to create a series of looped walks. These are set out in 7.1.1.5.

²⁷ Under the Forestry Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 '... the public shall have right of access on foot to all forestry land for the purposes of recreation.'

- Quiet Lanes
 - Informal walking takes place on quiet lanes, which are defined as ‘surfaced, rural minor roads, where vegetation may or may not be present in the middle of the road. Quiet lanes are part of the transport network managed and maintained by DoI, Transport NI, and as such all roads within the network are available for use by members of the public either by vehicle, bicycle or on foot ²⁸.
 - They are used by both pedestrians and cyclists, but they may not be the most desirable walking routes due to the presence of vehicular traffic.
 - Research identified a range of opportunities to improve walking and cycling provision through the use quiet lanes (pedestrians and cyclists) and the connection of existing trails to create a series of looped walks. These are set out in 7.1.1.5.

²⁸ Transport NI was not able to provide mapping that displayed all adopted public roads, due to this detailed dataset not being available.

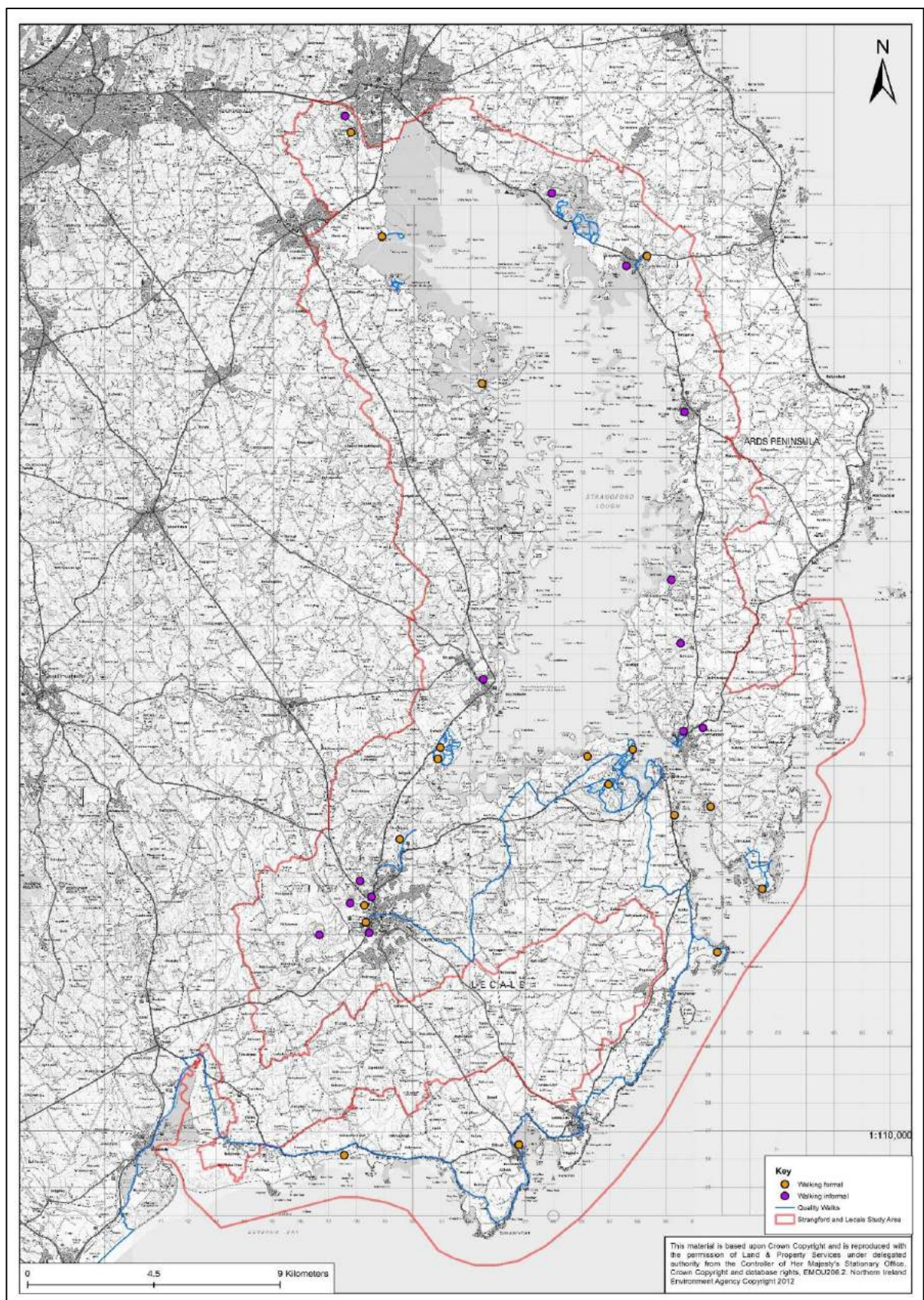


Fig. 18: Map of current walking provision within the study area

6.2.1.4 Public Rights of Way

Public Rights of Way (PROW's) are routes that the public are legally allowed to access regardless of whether the land is in public or private ownership i.e. the public has a right to be there. New PROW's are created through the Countryside (NI) Order 1983 and responsibility for implementing the Order lies with the District Councils. District Councils have a discretionary power for the management and maintenance of PROW's.

Information obtained from both Councils shows that there are 29 PROW's within the study area creating approximately 32 kms of trails. Of these, 20 totalling 22.8 kms are within NMDDC area and 9 PROWs totalling 9.2kms are within the ANDBC area (see Fig. 19).

In addition to PROW's there are a range of alleged PROW's within the study area. These are as the name suggests routes that are 'alleged' to be rights of way but that the Council has not gone through the process of assertion.

6.2.1.5 Permissive Path Agreements

Councils can also create 'Permissive Path Agreements' – these are paths that are open to the public with agreement from the landowner. Unlike a PROW, the public does not have a right to be on a PPA but is there by invitation from the landowner. There is one known PPA within ANDBC at Cloughey.

Within the study area, there is an inconsistent approach to the development and management of access, this includes both Public Rights of Way and Permissive Path Agreements. Some PROW's are blocked and others contested by private landowners over whose land the PROW passes.

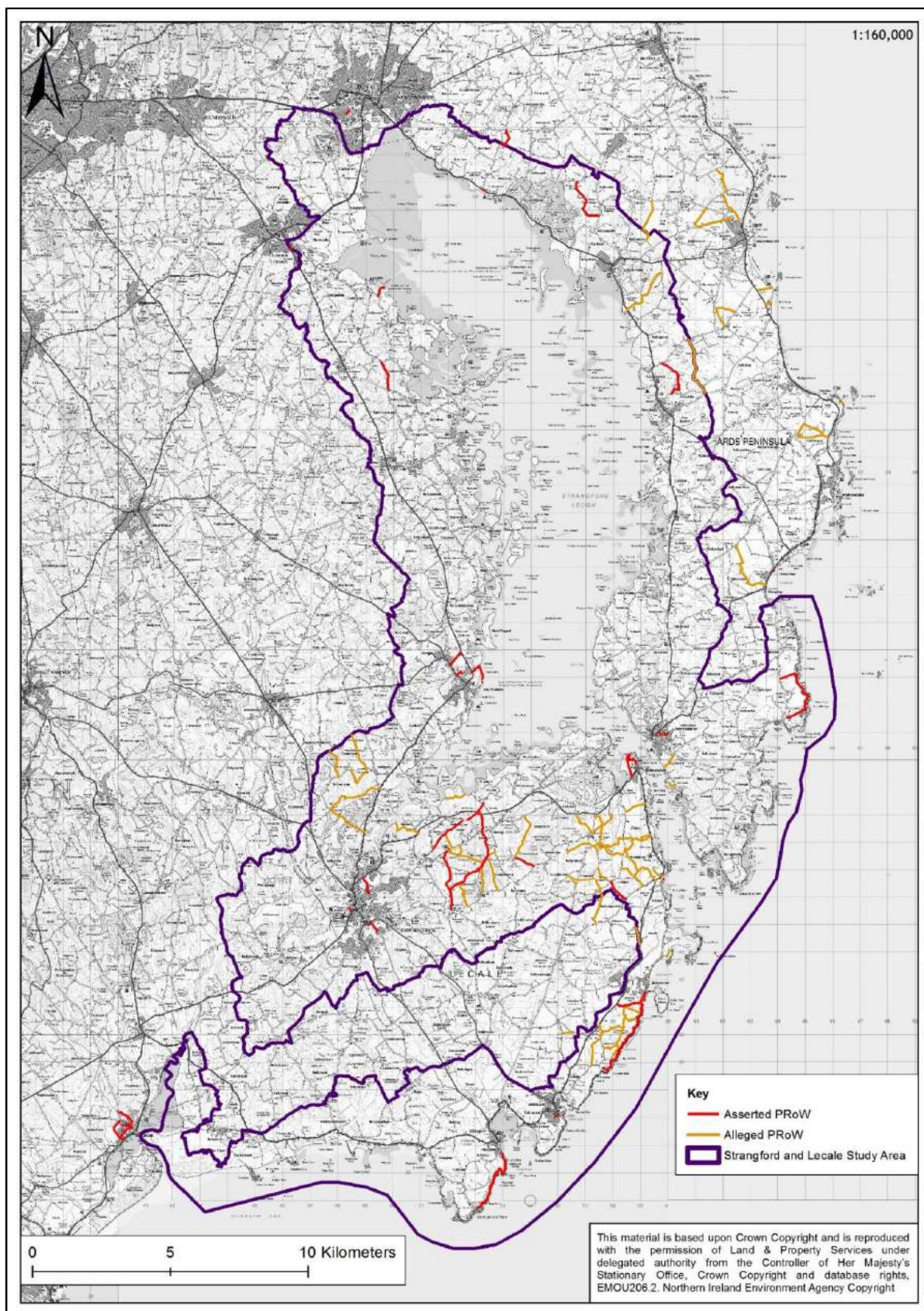


Fig. 19: Map of asserted and alleged Public Rights of Way

6.2.1.6 All ability trails

All ability trails are defined as those that can be accessed by any user including those with limited mobility²⁹. Due to the high specification for an all ability trail, the number of these is relatively low throughout Northern Ireland in general. The National Trust provides two all ability trails - one at Castle Ward (Shore Trail) and the other at Mount Stewart (Ramble). The WWT at Castle Espie also promote their site as being accessible to everyone with paths around the site being mostly level access.

The key attributes of a Category 1 Multi-use 'All Ability' Trail are set out in the table below.

Attribute	Specification
Trail Width	Minimum 2.5 wide
Trail Gradient	Maximum Average Gradients not more than 3% Maximum Absolute Gradients not more than 5% for not more than 30m in length
Trail Surface	Sealed surfaces only, must be even and consistent throughout and can include asphalt and compacted gravel ensuring that users of limited mobility can use the trail
Line of Sight	Minimum of 40m
Trail Features	Flat or level trails with no trail features Any bridges should not be less than 2m wide with handrails throughout

Fig. 20: Specification for an All Ability Trail

²⁹ *Principles and Standards for Trail Development in Northern Ireland, Outdoor Recreation NI, 2012*

6.2.1.7 The Ulster Way

History - The original Ulster Way, developed by Wilfred Capper in 1946, was planned to link a ring of 15 Youth Hostels that encircled N. Ireland. There were 15 hostels in total and the idea was that walkers could plan to tour the country sleeping in a different place each night. The original route included a lot of road walking and some sections began to suffer from increased traffic. There were also issues regarding permission to cross private land. These factors resulted in a Working Group being established by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) in 2003 to review the Ulster Way.

The Working Group concluded that a reappraisal of both the route and the management system was required. NIEA was identified as the most appropriate body to take over the management and co-ordination of the route and independent advice was supplied by an Ulster Way Advisory Committee which included members from walking groups and other agencies including Outdoor Recreation NI (ORNI). A new Ulster Way route was agreed in early 2009, this was designed to provide a high-quality walking experience. To deliver this quality experience, the new route was divided into Quality and Link sections.

The original and current route within the study area can be seen in Fig. 21.

The revised and current Ulster Way is a 655-mile circular walking route that traverses all six counties in Northern Ireland as well as small sections of the Irish Counties of Louth, Monaghan, Cavan and Donegal. It includes quality sections (mainly on the already established Waymarked Ways) and link sections where walkers are encouraged to use public transport (as they are mainly on public roads).

It is one of the longest waymarked trails in Britain and Ireland and is used by a range of walkers including long-distance walkers who walk for several days, as well as leisure walkers who walk sections of the route or visit certain viewpoints etc. However, there is no data regarding user numbers, anecdotal evidence suggests that there are very few people who complete the entire route.

In relation to the study area, the Ulster Way currently includes –

- A 'Quality' section on the North Down Coast ending at Groomsport
- A 'Link' section along the eastern coastline of the Ards Peninsula to Cloughey which then leads inland to reach the eastern shore of Strangford Lough at Marlfield, before continuing south to Portaferry.
- Ferry crossing (Portaferry to Strangford)
- A 'Quality' section from Strangford via the Black Causeway Road to Kilclief, then following the coast using on and off-road sections to reach Dundrum, (part of the Lecale Way).

A quality section should have a minimum of 70% off road.

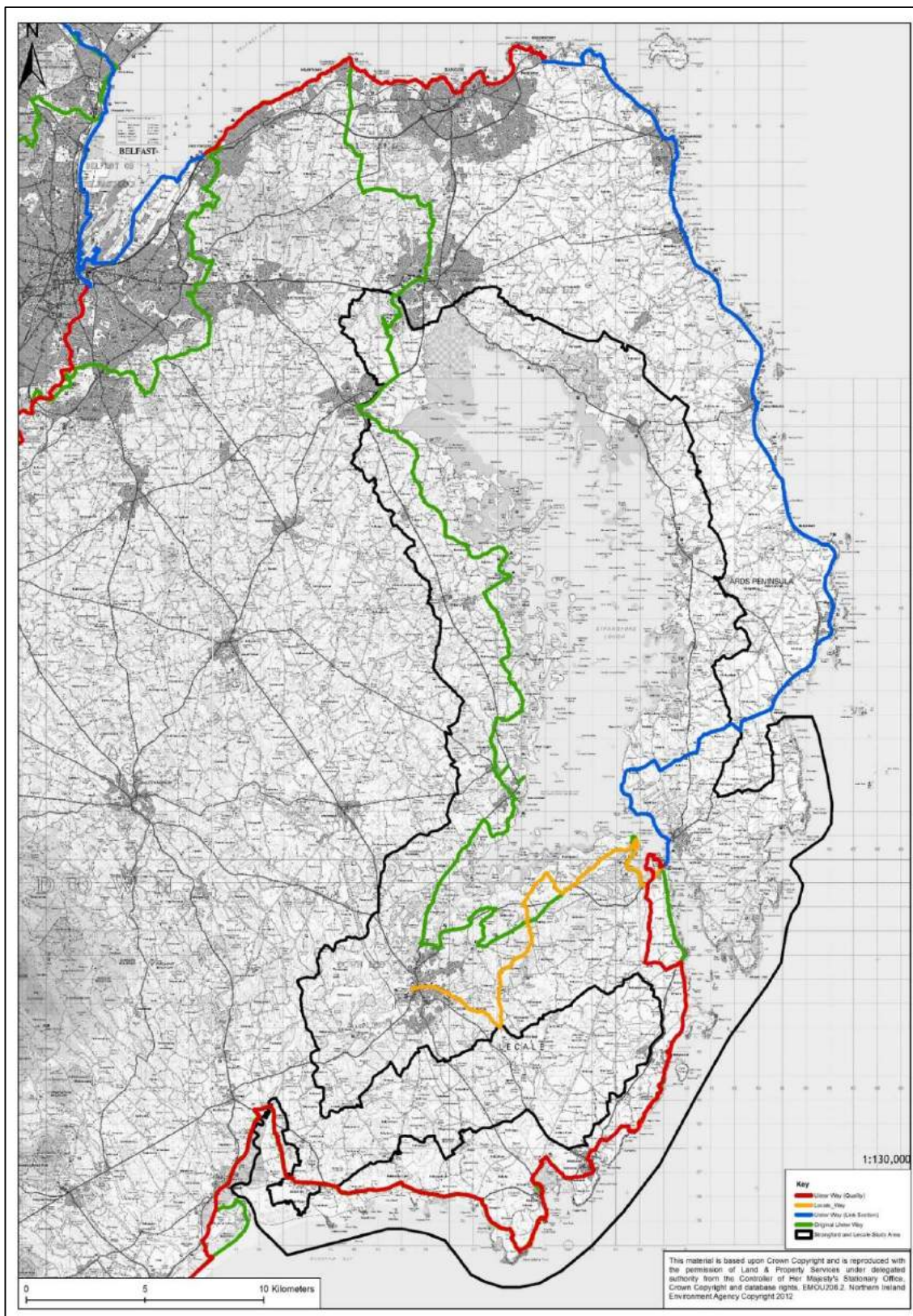


Fig. 21: Original and current route of the Ulster Way

A review of the current Ulster Way within the study area has been completed as part of this study with the aim of identifying how it can be improved as a walking product. This does not include a review of walking facilities e.g. accommodation etc.

Consideration was given to improving the current route through assessing 3 potential corridors shown in Fig. 23.

Corridor 1 - Western shore of Strangford Lough

This corridor option proposes a route from the North Down coast via the Clandeboye Way and through Newtownards (via Whitespots Country park) before leading off to the western side of Strangford Lough passing through or near to the villages of Comber, Whiterock, Killyleagh and Downpatrick before reaching Strangford. This corridor mirrors the original Ulster Way (pre-2009). However, this route was abandoned following the Ulster Way review for a range of reasons including-

- High proportion of the route is on road
- Permission from landowners for some off-road sections was not in place

Due to the high proportion of the route being on road, this proposal would not lead to the creation of a 'Quality' section and is therefore discounted.

Corridor 2 - Eastern shore of Strangford Lough

This corridor option proposes a route from the North Down coast via the Clandeboye Way and through Newtownards (via Whitespots Country Park) before leading down the eastern side of Strangford Lough passing through or near to the villages of Greyabbey and Kircubbin before reaching Portaferry. Following assessment of current and potential walking within Corridor 2, it has been identified that there is no suitable option for a route that is a minimum of 70% off road.

Due to the high proportion of the route being on road, this proposal would not lead to the creation of a 'Quality' section and is therefore discounted.

As moving the route has been discounted, consideration has been given to -

Corridor 3 - Eastern Ards Peninsula

This corridor includes most of the current Ulster Way i.e.

- The Link section – Groomsport to Burr Point to Cloughey to Portaferry via Marlfield
- The Quality section - Strangford to Newcastle (partly along the Lecale Way).

To improve the current route, this option considers –

Increasing the amount of off road walking within the current link section

- The current Quality section from Belfast ends at Groomsport to allow walkers to avail of public transport links, however, an off-road walk trail exists from Groomsport south to Orlock Point (approximately 2kms).
- ANDBC currently has plans to –
 - Investigate the feasibility of extending the North Down Coastal path between Orlock Point and Donaghadee; and
 - Upgrading the path to Greenway standard between Kinnegar and Donaghadee.

The Mourne and Strangford Lough Coastal Walking Path review considered a walk trail on the Outer Ards as far as Burr Point, therefore, there is a gap in terms of a 'Feasibility Study' between Donaghadee and Burr Point.

Rerouting the Ulster Way at Cloughey within the current link section

The aim of this would be to create a coastal path from Cloughey to Kearney, Knockinelder and Ballyquinton before heading north towards Portaferry. The National Trust would be supportive of this aspiration highlighted by the appointment of a Coastal Officer in 2018. National Trust signage at Kearney also reflects this aspiration.



Fig. 22: Coastal walk signage at Kearney

Rerouting the Ulster Way from Strangford to Dundrum to increase off road walking within the Quality section.

To improve this section, it is important to create more of road walking along the coast. This was also a recommendation of the Mourne and Strangford Lough Coastal Walking Path review.

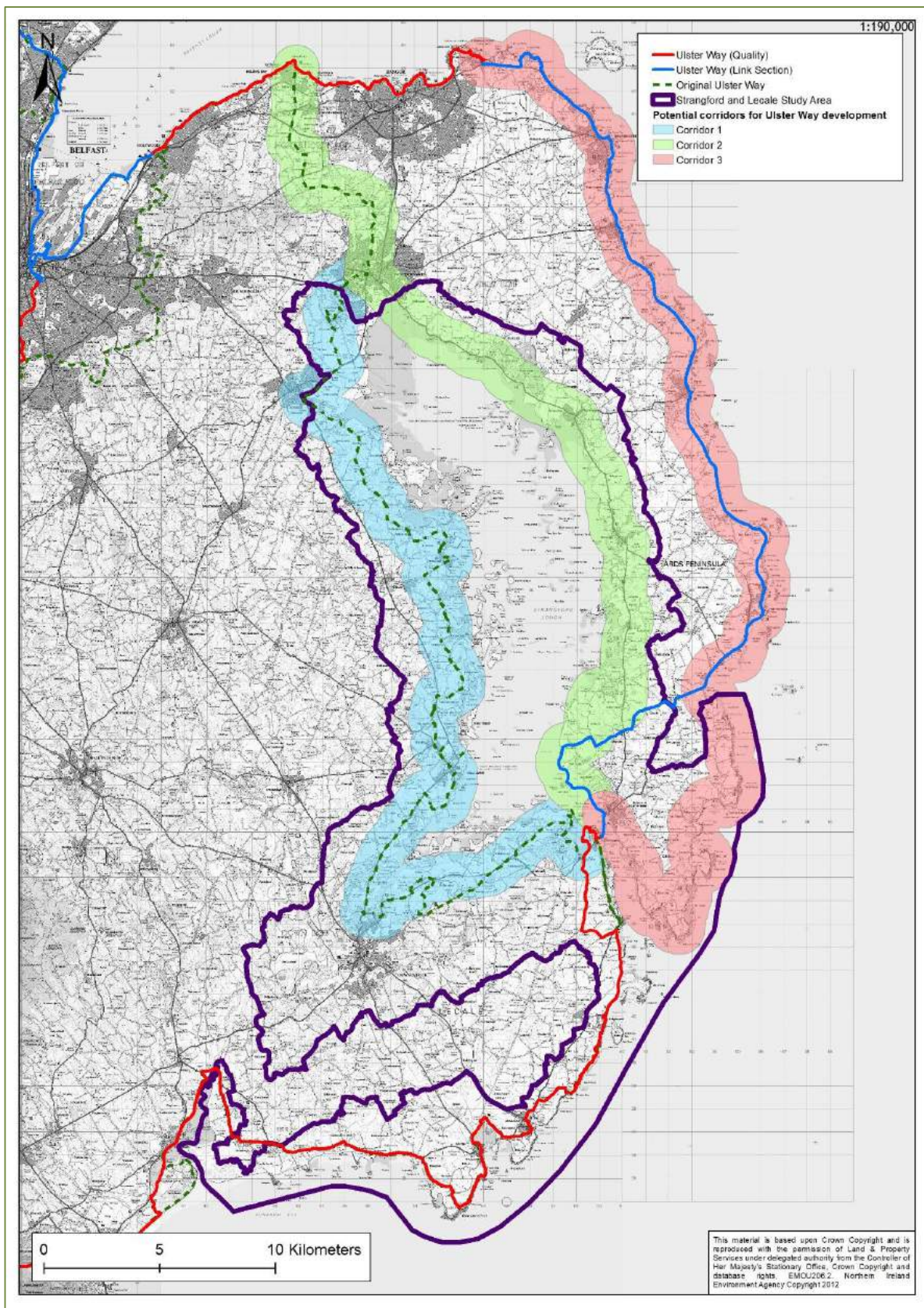


Fig. 23: Map of Ulster Way corridor options

6.2.1.8 Community Trails

A Community Trail is defined as a trail that –

- Connects communities to outdoor spaces and is therefore close to where people live and work
- Connects different communities, i.e. connects two villages together

Community trails are largely off-road (at least 70%) and come in a variety of different forms, from natural grass tracks to purpose built paths, dependent on the setting and needs of its users. Green lanes (see 6.2.1.3 Informal Walking) are incorporated within community trail network.

Community trails combine to form a 'community trail network' - a system of connected paths designed and developed to be used by local people and visitors for leisure, recreation and functional trips. They provide opportunities for walking, cycling, horse riding and other activities for people of different ages and abilities. (depending on local demand)

Consultation completed by ORNI throughout the course of this and previous studies, has identified a lack of doorstep walking opportunities and safe places to walk within many settlements throughout Northern Ireland. Therefore, delivery of Community Trail Plans can provide a valuable means of addressing this deficit.

In relation to the study area, over the past 5 years, ORNI has completed Community Trail Plans for –

- The Ards Peninsula - Feasibility Study for Community Trails on the Ards Peninsula Phase 1 (2014) and Phase 2 (2016)
- Community Trail Plans – completed for the 3 DEA's within Newry, Mourne and Down District Council (Rowallane, Downpatrick and Slieve Croob) (2017).
- Kilclief and Strangford Coastal Walk Trail (2016)

As there is a clear gap in terms of community trail planning for Newtownards & Comber DEA, a review of the following settlements was completed as part of this study to identify current and potential community trails -

- Lisbane
- Comber
- Killinchy
- Newtownards

Key findings of the above reports and research are included below.

Ards Peninsula Community Trails Phase 1 (2014) and Phase 2 (2016)

In 2014, Peninsula Healthy Living Partnership (PHLP) commissioned ORNI to complete a feasibility study for developing 'Community Trails' in nine villages on the Ards Peninsula: Ballyhalbert, Ballywalter, Carrowdore, Cloughey, Greyabbey, Kircubbin, Millisle, Portaferry and Portavogie.

The key findings of this report were –

- There is a significant need for safe, off-road community trails on the Ards Peninsula as many people living in villages are currently walking the country road network because of a lack of off-road walking provision and public footpaths
- The main barrier to trail development are securing formal access agreements with private landowners

23 potential community trails were identified, of which, 13 fall within or immediately adjacent to the study area. These are listed in Fig. 24.

No.	Village	Name	Length (kms)	Priority
1	Cloughey	The Warren Boardwalk	0.7	Y
2	Cloughey	Slan's Graveyard	0.2	Y
3	Cloughey	Cloughey to Kearney Coastal Walk	5.2	
4	Cloughey	Cloughey Coastal Walk	3.6	
5	Greyabbey	The Promenade	0.6	
6	Greyabbey	Skillins Point Wood	1.7	Y
7	Greyabbey	Foreshore link to Village Hall	0.3	
8	Greyabbey	Islandview Plantation	0.4	Y
9	Kircubbin	Nunsquarter	1.5	
10	Kircubbin	The 40 Steps	2.4	Y
11	Kircubbin	Monaghan Bank	1.9	Y
12	Portaferry	Portaferry House Estate	1.3	
13	Portaferry	Nugents Wood	1.5	Y
TOTAL			32.8	

Fig. 24: List of potential community trails within Ards Peninsula

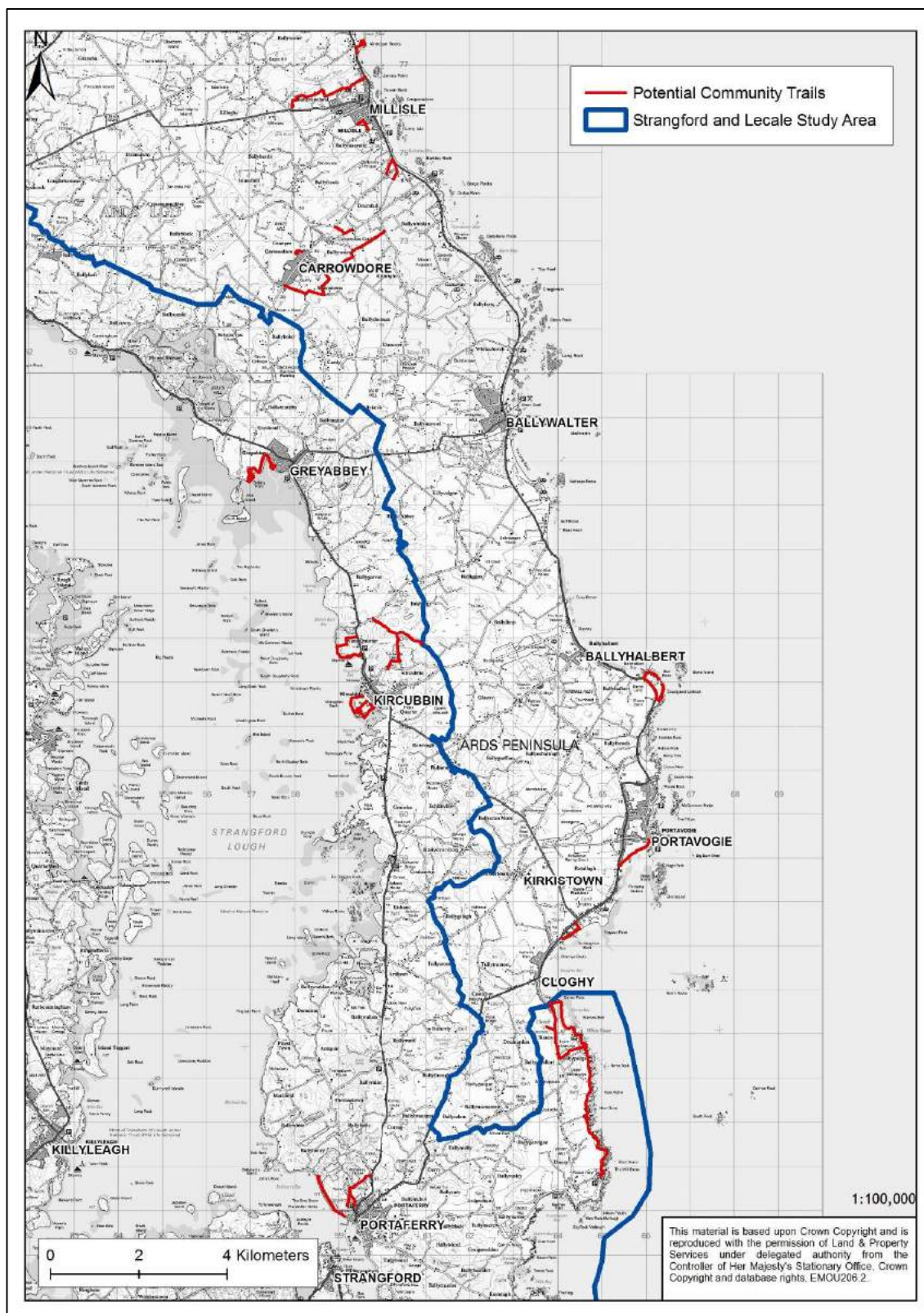


Fig. 25: Map of potential Community Trails within Ards Peninsula

Since the Phase 2 report was completed in 2016, there have been several developments:

- 1) Priority trail 'Slans Graveyard' has been developed and was opened to the public in Summer 2017.
- 2) Priority trail 'The Warren' in Cloughey is due for completion in Summer 2018.
- 3) ANDBC has secured funding for priority trail 'Nugents Wood' through Peace IV. It is planned that this project will be complete by 2020.
- 4) Priority trail 'The 40 Steps', was not taken forward for development due to private landowner issues.

Downpatrick, Slieve Croob and Rowallane Community Trail Plans (2017)

In 2016, ORNI was commissioned by NMDDC to complete Community Trail Plans for all seven of its DEA's. Three of these DEA's, Rowallane, Downpatrick and Slieve Croob are within the study area.

Current provision and issues identified within these reports are as follows –

Downpatrick DEA Community Trail Plan - current provision and issues

Popular off-road walking areas are largely based around the heritage sites in Downpatrick including Inch Abbey, Down Cathedral and the Mound of Down. Other popular linear routes include the Quoile River (Downpatrick linking with the Quoile Countryside Centre) and the Lecale Way (Downpatrick to Newcastle). Other sites include the Forest Service NI owned Hollymount at Ballydugan.

Rowallane DEA Community Trail Plan - current provision and issues

Consultation revealed that most current paths are used for walking and horse riding by individuals and organised groups. There are several active walking and cycling clubs in the area, in particular the Down Danderers who walk regularly in Ballynahinch, Saintfield Striders Running Club and Crossgar Cycling Club.

Popular off-road walking areas include Tobar Mhuire and Glasswater Wood, Crossgar and Rowallane Gardens, Saintfield. In addition, there is a PROW along the shoreline at Killyleagh (from the town heading north), that is very well used.

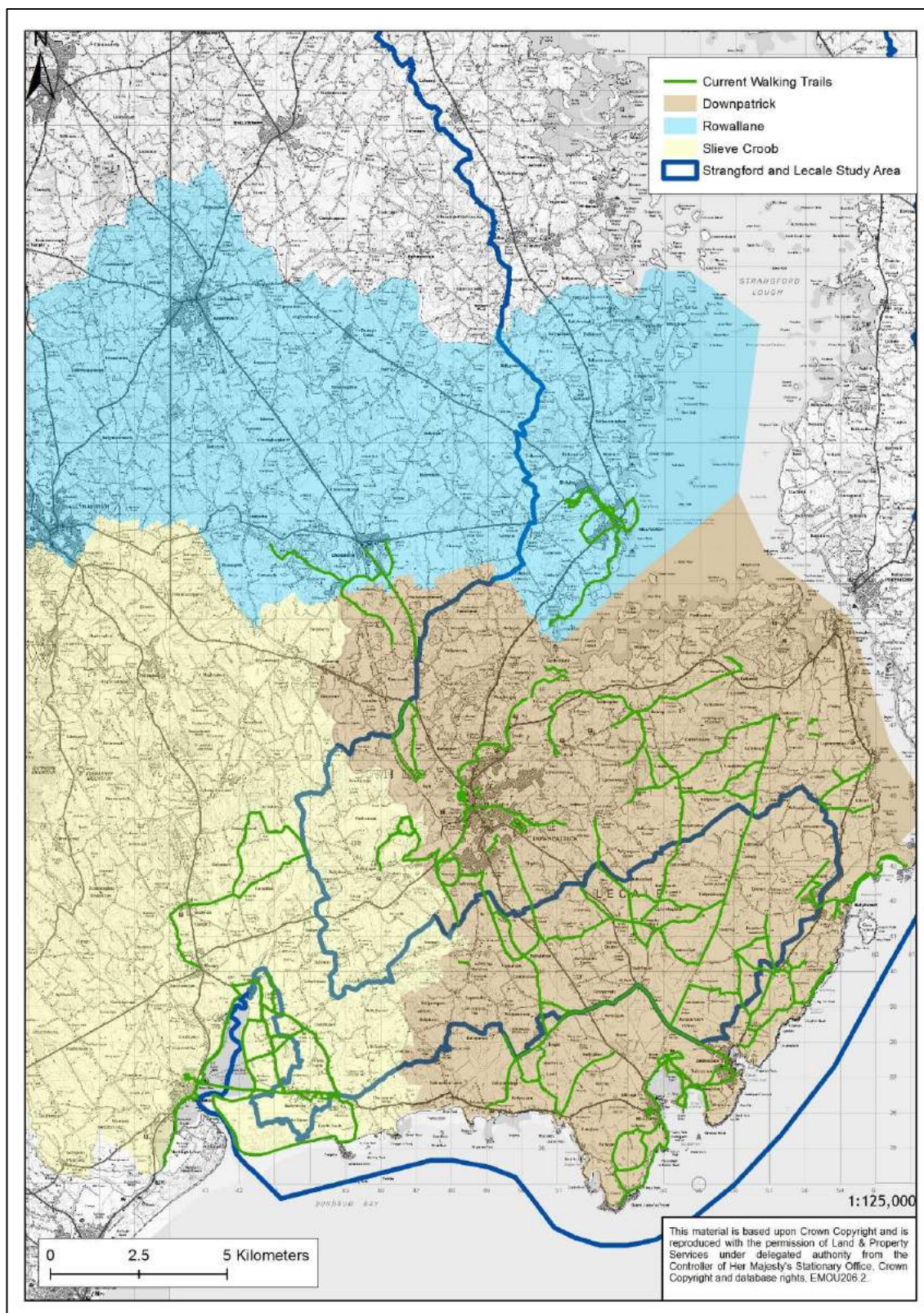


Fig. 26: Map of current routes walked - Downpatrick, Rowallane & Slieve Croob DEA's

Current issues relating to all DEA's include–

- Some asserted rights of way are blocked or are contentiously disputed
- The condition of some existing asserted public rights of way network is poor
- There is a lack of awareness about existing asserted rights of way
- There is lack safe off-road walking opportunities to access outdoor sites and green spaces
- Fear of aggressive landowners and fear of trespassing or intruding on private land by local community
- Lack of off-road provision particularly in the rural villages

Overall consultees reported that they were content with the areas currently used for walking but that the condition of and connectivity between routes could be vastly improved.

Gaps in provision include –

- Connectivity between existing public rights of way, settlements and forests
- Doorstep accessibility
- Accessibility for users with disabilities or mobility issues
- Looped walks
- Off-road provision in rural areas
- Promotion of existing trails and paths
- Poor or non-existent waymarking/signposting on the ground

Newtownards and Comber Community Trail Plans (2018)

Lisbane - is a small village lying 3 miles south of Comber on the A22 Comber to Killyleagh Road. The population was 430 at the time of the 2011 Census. The village boasts an acclaimed bar/restaurant and tearooms as well as a garage, surgery, and community centre. Lisbane and Lisbarnett Community Association confirmed that there is no off-road walking provision in or around the village.

The local community tend to use quiet country roads to create walking and running loops of varying lengths. Routes identified included the Quarry, Ardmillan, Lisbane and Lisbarnett Roads. Several of these routes are hilly in nature due to the local drumlin topography.

In the past, local walkers used an asserted PROW, also part of the original Ulster Way, to create a cross-country link between the Ardmillan and Lisbane Roads. It was noted that part of this route has now been encroached upon by local landowners thereby preventing its use.

Comber - situated 4 miles south west of Newtownards and close to the head of Strangford Lough, has a population of 9078 (2011 Census). The town is dissected by the Comber River, also known as the Enler River.

Whilst the Comber town itself lies outside the study area, there are current and future developments that are pertinent to the study area.

Island Hill and North Strangford Nature Reserve - this Council owned recreation site is within easy walking distance from the town however requires those accessing on foot to cross and walk alongside the A21 dual carriageway for several hundred metres.

The Comber Greenway linking East Belfast and Comber via Dundonald is an important link for the people of the village, but it terminates at the Belfast Road outside the village and is on road from that point.

As with most other settlements, residents create looped walks of varying lengths using the main roads and quiet country lanes around the town. These include the Mount Alexander, Darragh, Ballyhenry, Ballygowan, Old Ballygowan, Glen, Coach and Belfast Roads. The A21 dual carriageway is also used.

National Cycle Network National Route 99 and Regional Route 20 – both very popular cycling routes pass through Comber

Killinchy - situated 6.5 miles south of Comber on the A22 Comber to Killyleagh Road. The nearby settlement of Balloo is treated as part of Killinchy due to its proximity. The 2011 census recorded the population of Killinchy as 539. The village has a primary school, several churches, two convenience stores, a filling station and a bar/restaurant. The local community centre has a small municipal green space including children's playground and football pitch but there is no formal off-road walking provision within the village.

Locals use the main roads and quiet country lanes surrounding the village to create looped walks of varying distances. Keen walkers and runners incorporate the Strangford shorefront at Whiterock into longer routes. Once there, a popular walk on private property circumnavigates the island of Sketrick. Other routes from the village include the Ballymorran, Ballydrain and Craigarusky Roads and the small settlement of Ardmillan.

Newtownards - a large market town located 10 miles east of Belfast at the head of Strangford Lough. In 2011 the population was recorded as 28,039.

Whilst the majority of Newtownards town falls outside the study area, there are current and future developments that are pertinent to the study area.

Locals use a mixture of public recreation sites/trails and quiet country roads, often linking the two to create looped and linear walks of varying lengths.

Floodgates Walk – also known as the Embankment walk or Tide Bank, this linear walk starts at the junction between the Portaferry and Old Shore Roads and follows the raised flood embankment, leading to a 'dead end' approximately 3km south west at Ballyrickard WWTW. The route can be accessed at a couple of locations along its length allowing users to create a looped walk using the A21 Comber to Newtownards Dual carriageway as the outward or return leg. The flat, accessible nature of this walk combined with its coastal location make it very popular with locals.

Scrabo Country Park (incl. Killynether Wood) – these adjacent sites rise steeply from the town to Scrabo Tower on the summit of Scrabo Hill. The sites are criss-crossed by a network of steep paths which can be accessed from several locations off from roads around the base of the hill. Paths in Killynether Wood are noted as being particularly steep and uneven. There is a designated Quality Walk at each site.

Whitespots Country Park – also known locally as the 'Leadmines'. This small, Council owned recreation site backs on to the Somme Visitor Centre and the Clandeboye Estate. Although the Park can be accessed directly from the town at several locations around its perimeter (including an asserted PROW), it is used in a limited capacity by walkers. The reasons for this include the significant presence of scrambler/quad bike activity on site and the poorly defined path network which lacks any formal waymarking. Most walkers accessing the site do so to complete part of the Clandeboye Way, a Quality Medium Walk joining the site to the Clandeboye Estate, taking in Helen's Tower and finishing at Helen's Bay.

The local road system is used extensively by walking groups and individuals. These include the Ballybarnes Road, Old Belfast Road, Ballyrogan Road, Scrabo Road, Killynether Road, Ballyalton Road, Ballyrainey Road, Movilla Road, Ballyreagh Road, Old Shore Road, Botown Road, Mountain Road and Tullynagardy Road.

In terms of road cycling, National Route 99 of the National Cycle Network passes through Newtownards. This route is extremely popular with cycling clubs and individuals.

6.2.1.9 Mourne and Strangford Lough coastal walking path technical & feasibility study

In 2015, ORNI in partnership with Doran Consulting was commissioned to undertake a feasibility and technical study to assess the potential of developing a Mourne and Strangford Lough Coastal Walking Path to complement the existing Mourne Coastal Driving Route.

The aim of the study was to:

‘Assess the feasibility of developing a coastal walking path between Greencastle and Portavogie identifying tourism and business development opportunities that will enhance the visitor experience along the way by creating unique attractions and experiences’.

In terms of current provision and issues, the study identified –

- A proposed 131km/ 81-mile path stretching from Greencastle, near Kilkeel to Portavogie (see Fig. 27). It follows the coastline from Greencastle to Strangford, crosses Strangford Lough to Portaferry and continues along the coastline to Portavogie passing through the three fishing villages of Kilkeel, Ardglass and Portavogie.
- The total cost of path construction was estimated to be approximately £1.7 million.
- 85% of the proposed route was on ‘privately owned’ land
- 15% was on ‘publicly owned land’
- 22% was on beaches (most of which are controlled by the Crown Estate)
- 70% was within a landscape designated for nature conservation reasons.

Based on the knowledge of current walking product, market trends and user behaviour, it was anticipated that few walkers will walk long stretches of or the entire coastal path but rather, would access the path at various points along it to walk short sections in both directions and looped walks where developed.

Consequently, emphasis was placed on developing walking ‘hubs’ where the visitor experience would be enhanced. Market research identified that key experiences should be developed in association with the path including: food, maritime and access to the water, nature, built heritage and arts and crafts. It was anticipated that development of these experiences and other attractions along the path would allow the coastal path to fulfil its full potential as a tourism driver for the area.

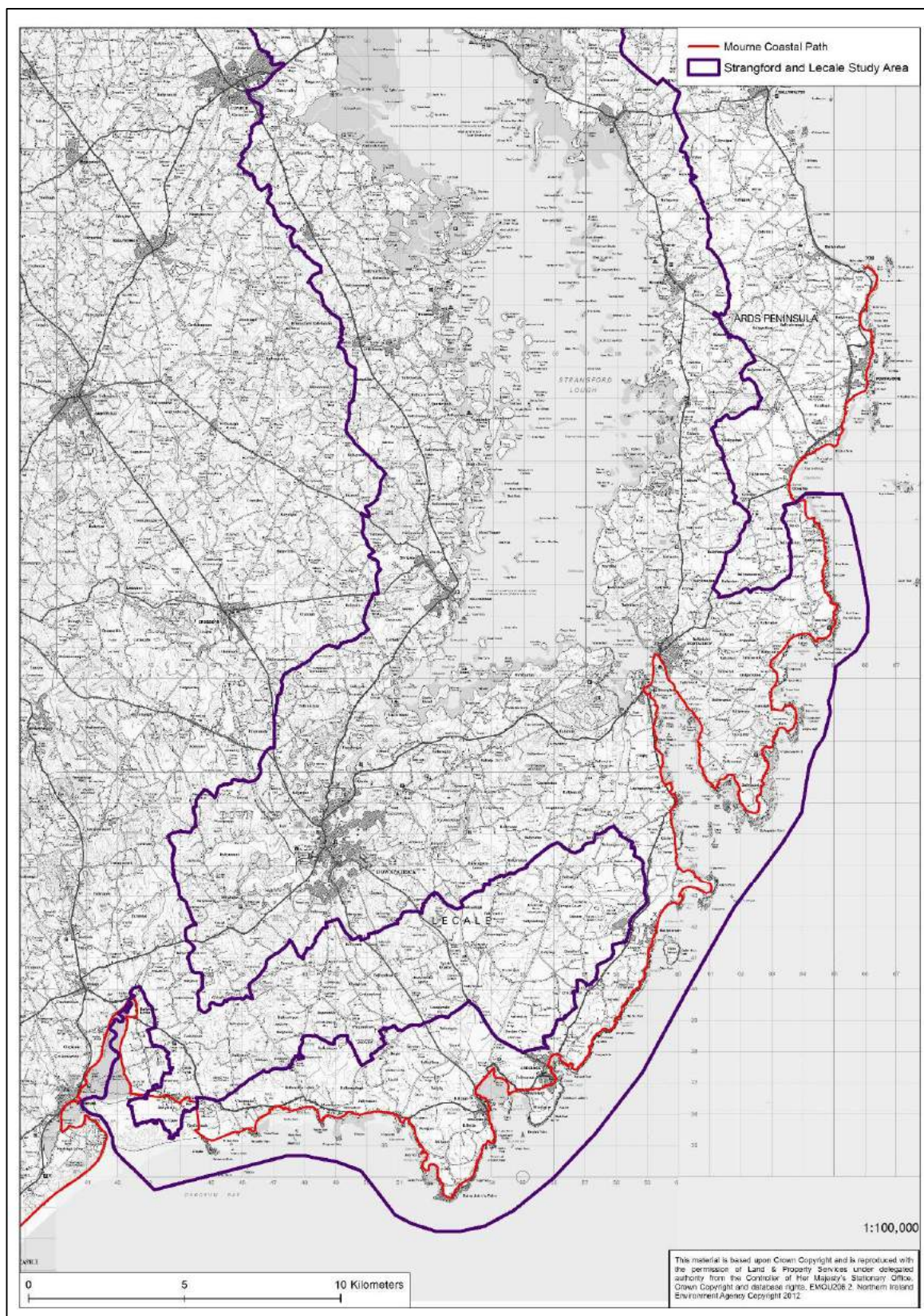


Fig. 27: Map of proposed Mourne & Strangford Lough Coastal Walking Route

6.2.1.10 Kilclief and Strangford Coastal walk trail design

In 2016, ORNI completed the above project on behalf of Strangford Community Association, Kilclief Residents' Association, Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership and Kilclief GAC.

The aim of the project was to produce a trail design for an off-road walk trail from the Council owned Kilclief car park to the Council owned tourist picnic area beside Kilclief GAC, and a combined foot and cycle path along the A2 Shore Road that provided a safe route between the two amenities, see Fig. 28 for details.

The project was part of a wider vision to link the two villages of Strangford and Kilclief by creating a safe, off-road walking and cycling path along the A2 with off-road walking sections along the coastline where feasible. If achieved this would address the 2.5 mile gap in the Ulster Way which currently diverts walkers inland at Strangford and re-joins the coastal road at Kilclief.

The Mourne Coastal Path Feasibility Study found that within the wider context of a Mourne and Strangford Lough Walking Path the section between Kilclief and Strangford would be one of the most difficult sections to develop because of constraints related to small land area, high proportion of private land, encroaching tide and multiple environmental designations. The feasibility study also found that it would be a priority section to develop for tourism and community reasons.

A concept trail design and trail prescription for a prescribed route was developed, resulting in the detailing of an off-road trail costing an estimated £60,788 to construct.

Securing permission from private landowners for public access was identified as the single greatest barrier. Furthermore, intrusion onto private land and may not even be possible and may result in opposition to the proposal from within the local community

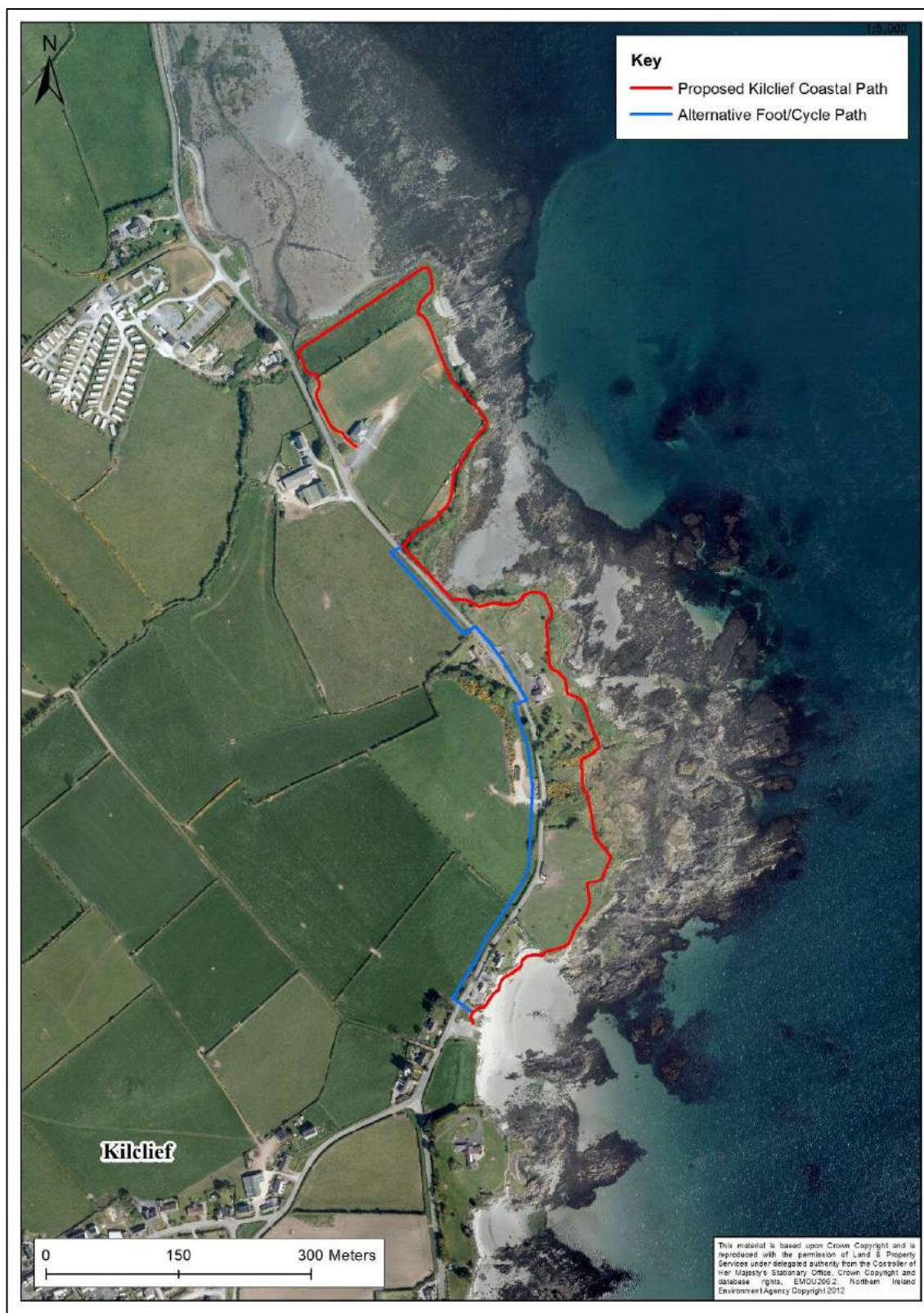


Fig. 28: Map of concept trail design for Kilclief coastal path

6.2.1.11 Greenways

In 2016, the strategic document 'Exercise, Explore, Enjoy: A Strategic Plan for Greenways' was produced by the Department for Infrastructure under the then Minister Chris Hazzard MLA.

This 25-year plan sets out proposals to develop a greenway network across N. Ireland through development of the mostly disused railway network. The aim is to give people access to a safe traffic-free environment for health, active travel and leisure.

The plan was developed following consultation with local Councils and other key stakeholders and based upon a report produced by Aecom and Sustrans in July 2016³⁰

Greenways are defined as *'Corridors of land recognised for their ability to connect people and places together. These ribbons of open space are located within linear corridors that are either natural such as rivers and streams, or man-made, such as abandoned railroad beds and utility corridors.'*

*Most greenways contain trails, which enhance existing recreational opportunities, provide routes for alternative transportation and improve the overall quality of life in the rural area'*³¹

Within the study area, proposed Greenways include –

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

- Downpatrick to Ardglass (13km)
- Downpatrick to Newcastle (21km)
- Downpatrick to Comber (29km)

NMDDC is currently working up a detailed design for the Downpatrick to Newcastle and the Downpatrick to Comber proposals, which will be eligible for consideration under the capital funding programme being developed by DfI.

Ards and North Down Borough Council

- Extension of the Comber Greenway to Newtownards

The proposed route would provide an extension to the Comber Greenway into Comber town centre by following the Enler River. The route would continue along the eastern side of the existing A21 Newtownards Road before joining up with the path on top of the flood protection bank along the shore of Strangford Lough. The preferred route is proposed to run parallel with the carriageway between Comber and Ballyrickard Waste Water Treatment Works. The path continues along the floodwall past Newtownards Airfield to the Floodgates at the Portaferry Rd in Newtownards, around Londonderry Park and along the canal path³²

- Donaghadee to Kinnegar via the coastal path
- Newtownards to Helen's Bay

Further information on the above greenways can be found at -

<https://www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/about-the-council/consultations/greenways-network>

Council is currently working up proposals for all 3 routes with a Project Board and full time Corporate Project Officer in place.

³⁰ July 2016, Department for Infrastructure Strategic Plan for Greenways

³¹ Definition taken from AECOM & Sustrans

³² This route is subject to change depending on outcome of landowner consultations.



Fig. 29: Map of proposed Comber Greenway extension

6.2.1.12 Quiet Lanes

The term ‘quiet lane’ refers to surfaced, rural minor roads, vegetation may or may not be present in the middle of the road.

The public road network in N. Ireland is owned and maintained by DfI, Transport NI, and as such all roads within the network are available for use by members of the public either by vehicle, bicycle or on foot ³³.

This study reviews quiet lanes identified throughout desk research and consultation and includes them in a potential network where –

- The lane receives relatively light vehicular usage defined as -
 - not being an arterial route
 - not radiating from or linking settlements
 - not being part of a promoted driving route or leading to a visitor attraction
- They are suitable for use by pedestrians and cyclists

Research identified a range of opportunities to improve walking and cycling provision through the use of quiet lanes (pedestrians and cyclists) and the connection of existing trails to create a series of looped walks. These are set out in 7.1.1.5.

³³ Transport NI was not able to provide mapping that displayed all adopted public roads, due to this detailed dataset not being available.

6.2.1.13 Participation

There is little data to quantify current participation in walking within the study area. However, there are snapshots for certain sites that provide useful indications of user numbers. The current trail system at Castle Ward Demesne was launched in 2011 when a visitor counter was installed on the Shore Trail. This counter has provided consistent data for the last 7 years. Annual trends show a general increase in walking numbers from 25,599 in 2011/ 12 to 54,314 in 2016/17.³⁴ Mount Stewart has also witnessed a vast increase in the number of visitors walking at the property over the last few years from 15,968 in 2016/17 to 56,771 in 2017/18 although this can be partly attributed to improvements on site including the installation of natural play. Other National Trust sites within the study area with data records are shown below.

Period	Kearney	Nugent's Wood	Gibbs Island	Ballyquintin
April 15 – March 16	/	/	/	10,471
July 16 – June 17	32,420	7,500	24,342	/

Fig. 30: Walk numbers at sites with visitor counters

Another source of data with regards walk user numbers is WalkNI.com. The figures below demonstrate the number of visitors to each page within WalkNI over the course of a year between April 2017-18. The total number of visitors to WalkNI during this year was 505,115. The data also shows that Castle Ward is the most popular site for those searching for walk related information, followed by Island Hill, the Lecale Way and Delamont Country Park.

Name	No. of page visitors
Castle Ward Demesne	5,346
Island Hill and North Strangford Nature Reserve	3,374
Lecale Way	3,031
Delamont Country Park	2,561
Scrabo Hill	2,150
Quoile River Walk	1,937
Mount Stewart	1,898
Killard National Nature Reserve	1,487
Killynether Wood	1,457
Castle Espie	1,221
Ballyquintin Farm	1,191
Kearney	1,010
Corrog Wood	676
Portaferry Windmill Hill	440
Greyabbey Heritage Trail	337
Slans Graveyard	145

Fig. 31: Participation figures within study area

³⁴ Part of this increase can be attributed to Game of Thrones Tours, it is not possible to extrapolate numbers.

There is no current up to date data for the number of users walking either the Ulster Way or the Waymarked Ways.

6.2.1.14 Summary

Provision - There is a good range of over 40 walking trails within the study area including quality walks, PRoW's and informal walk trails. The majority of these are short walks i.e. not more than 5 miles in length and tend to be site based. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the majority of these are well used and popular among repeat visitors and for many are part of their everyday lives.

However, there is a lack of medium and long-distance walking opportunities within the study area, particularly along the shore of Strangford Lough and the Irish Sea coast along the Ards Peninsula.

Large sections of the Ulster Way/ Lecale Way are on-road with some road sections deemed to be unsafe. In relation to off road sections, issues include poor maintenance and obstructions.

The Mourne Coastal Path Feasibility Study identified the potential to develop a long-distance walking route along the Irish Sea Coast.

Access legislation – Consultation identified an inconsistent approach to access legislation across the study area. This relates to both development and maintenance.

Doorstep opportunities - There is currently a lack of doorstep walking opportunities and safe places to walk within many of the towns/villages within the study area. Consultation with local community groups revealed the importance of walking for health. Newry, Mourne and Down District Council is addressing this through the development of Community Trail Plans³⁵.

All ability trails - These are in place at Castle Ward Demesne and Mount Stewart. Consultation revealed that there is a perceived lack of 'all ability' trails in the area. These trails are defined as those that can be accessed by any user including those with limited mobility.³⁶

Entry charges - While many of the sites within the study area are free to access, access charges do apply at the main walking hubs. Consultation identified that admission charges to Castle Ward Demesne and Mount Stewart are perceived by some as a barrier to access, however, the Trust has stated that these are set at a rate that encourages visitors to take out annual memberships.

³⁵ These are being developed and delivered through a Service Level Agreement with Outdoor Recreation NI.

³⁶ Principles and Standards for Trail Development in Northern Ireland, Outdoor Recreation NI, 2011.

6.2.2 Cycling

For the purposes of this study, 'cycling' is split into two categories, road cycling and off-road cycling. Fig. 33 shows the current cycling provision for the study area.

6.2.2.1 Road cycling

The National Cycling Network (NCN) is managed by Sustrans. Within the study area there are 2 NCN routes, (both waymarked on road) –

- Route 99 travels from Belfast to Newcastle via Newtownards. The route takes in the outer Ards Peninsula, crosses on the ferry from Portaferry to Strangford, leads through Castle Ward Demesne and onto Downpatrick before linking to Newcastle via Ballynoe, Tyrella and Dundrum.
- Route 20 travels from Comber to Downpatrick through Whiterock and Killyleagh.

By combining parts of Route 99 and Route 20, cyclists can complete a circuit of Strangford Lough on a waymarked route.

Additional routes are promoted e.g. on cycleni.com and as part of the Armagh and Down³⁷ Cycling booklet. However, these are not waymarked on the ground. This includes -

- Whiterock to Mahee Island – a 27-mile circular route starting and finishing in Comber and taking in Castle Espie, Whiterock and Nendrum.
- Portaferry Cycle Trail – a 22-mile circular route starting and finishing in Portaferry and includes settlements of Kirkistown, Cloughey and Kearney.
- Lecale Cycle Route - A 37-mile circular route starting and ending in Downpatrick.

Cycle hire is currently offered by:

- Kayak Shack, Newtownards
- Iron Donkey, Saintfield

6.2.2.2 Off-road cycling

Off road cycling takes place at several locations within the study area –

6.2.2.2.1 Castle Ward Demesne

Castle Ward Demesne provides a series of purpose designed and built off-road cycling trails. The trails have been very well used by families and mountain bikers throughout the year since the official opening in June 2011 as Fig. 32 shows with on average between 500 and 1000 cyclists using the trail each month.

³⁷ Armagh and Down Marketing Consortium who developed these routes no longer exists.

Date	Number of cyclists
Q2 July – Sept 2011	3128
Q3 Oct-Dec 2011	808
Q4 Jan-Mar 2012	1257
Q1 - Apr-June 2012	1672
Q2 July – Sept 2012	2830
Q3 Oct-Dec 2012	1183
Q4 Jan-Mar 2013	922
Q1 Apr-June 2013	1457
Q2 July – Sept 2013	2044
Q3 Oct-Dec 2013	1202
Q4 Jan-Mar 2014	1027
Q1 -Apr-June 2014	2011
Q2 July – Sept 2014	2116
Q3 Oct-Dec 2014	877
Q4 Jan-Mar 2015	1072
Q1 -Apr-June 2015	2069
Q2 July – Sept 2015	2326
Q3 Oct-Dec 2015	1143
Q4 Jan-Mar 2016	1475
Q1 -Apr-June 2016	2012
Q2 July – Sept 2016	3208
Q3 Oct-Dec 2016	1066
Q4 Jan-Mar 2017	1224
Q1 Apr-June 2017	2376
Q2 July – Sept 2017	3432
Q3 Oct - Dec 2017	1721
Q4 Jan-Mar 2018	2056

Fig. 32: Castle Ward Demesne - cycle trail counter data

Several issues were identified relating to the use of the cycling trails at Castle Ward Demesne –

Many users park unofficially on the Audleystown Rd and access the trail system from here without passing a pay point. This means that the National Trust is losing income from entry fees. In addition, there are issues relating to parking congestion and the high numbers of vehicles using the Audleystown Rd (which was not designed for high levels of traffic).

The bike wash located close the Shore car park is not thought to be well used. Evidence suggests that many cyclists do not know that the facility exists.

6.2.2.2.2 Delamont Country Park

Off-road cycling is permitted within the Park, however, there are no formal cycling trails i.e. trails that have been designed and constructed with cyclists in mind. The trails are well used particularly by families with young children. However, the steep nature of many of the trails does not lend itself to family cycling.

6.2.2.2.3 The Quoile

Many family cyclists use this flat surfaced path for cycling. However, the trails are well used by walkers so often cyclists or walkers will have to pull over to allow others to pass.

6.2.2.2.4 Cycle Hire

Off-road cycle hire is currently offered by Clearsky Adventure Centre based within Castle Ward Demesne.

6.2.2.3 Cycling Clubs

Active cycling clubs within the study area have both road and off-road cycling sections within the club although the number of road cyclists tend to be larger.

Clubs include:

- Ards Cycling Club – Saturday and Sunday runs, mid-week evening club runs during the summer months, annual race calendar, annual Tour of Ards event
- Killinchy Cycling Club - weekend and weeknight club road cycles, leisure sportive/charity events, road racing, TT's and off-road biking, annual charity cycle the 'K150'
- North Down Cycle Club – have sanctioned club runs every day of the week, at different times and to various locations, annual race calendar, organise the annual North Down Grand Prix and the Bangor Coastal Challenge
- La Lanterne Rouge Cycle Club – Saturday and Sunday morning club runs, mountain biking on Tuesday and Wednesday nights

6.2.2.4 Summary

The study area is a popular location for road cycling, especially the Ards Peninsula given its flat terrain and scenic landscapes. In addition, the ability to complete a circular trip around the Lough on bike is a popular attraction with the National Cycle Network, providing a waymarked route (combination of route 20 and 99).

There are already substantial issues relating to the number of road cyclists regularly using the route (particularly large groups taking part in Club runs). This impacts on traffic flow particularly on the Ards Peninsula when traffic queues frequently develop behind cycling groups.

In terms of off-road cycling, there are opportunities to improve family trail provision for example at Delamont Country Park.

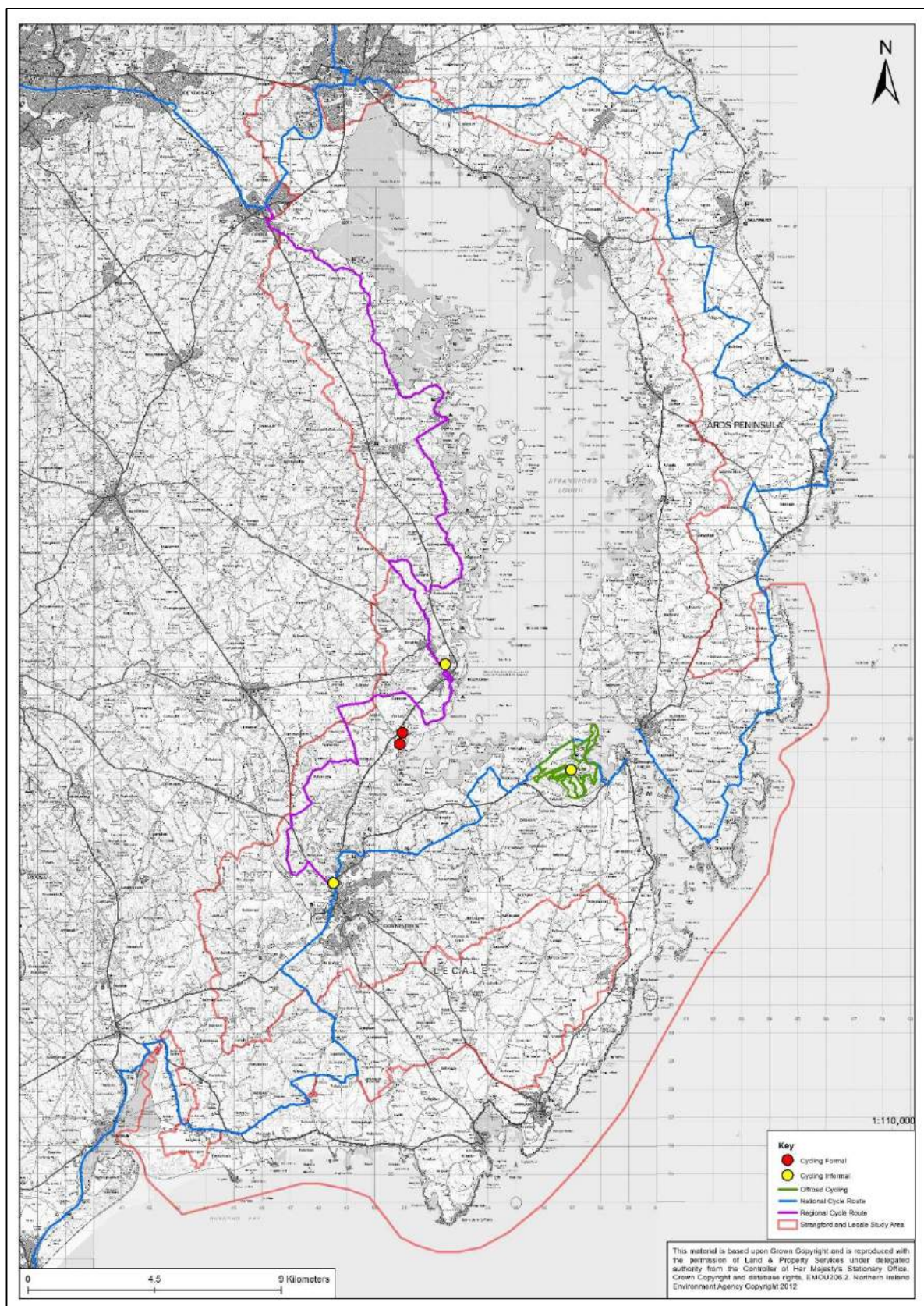


Fig. 33: Map of current cycling provision

6.2.3 Horse riding

Formal off-road horse riding currently takes place at the following locations:

Castle Ward Demesne - dedicated trail – ‘Hoof Trail’, 7.5 miles long, user numbers can be seen in Fig. 34.³⁸ This data shows a steady use of the trail since 2012, with very little change in numbers other than a slight dip in 2017. The Hoof Trail is used on average 6 – 7 times each week.

Year	Users (equestrian)
2011-2012	84
2012-2013	346
2013-2014	340
2014-2015	342
2015-2016	367
2016-2017	337
2017-2018 Q1-Q3	289

Fig. 34: Equestrian user numbers - Castle Ward Demesne

Fees for equestrian use at Castle Ward are as follows:

- Annual horse riding membership fee - £35
- Daily horse riding permit - £5
- One-off horse riders hat band deposit - £5

Castle Ward Demesne also hosts annual horse riding events organised by groups such as the Ulster Rural Riders Association and the Irish Long-Distance Riders Association.

Greyabbey Estate Toll Ride is situated in the privately-owned grounds of the Montgomery Estate. In 2006, this 6.5km one-way purpose-built horse riding trail was opened³⁹. This trail operates as a British Horse Society (BHS) ‘Toll Ride’, as such it is administered by the BHS and is open to all BHS gold members and all BHS approved riding schools. Fees are as follows:

- Annual Membership Fee - £35
- One-off Hat Band Deposit - £10

The trail is self-policing with members and estate workers etc. being aware that any rider accessing the trail should be wearing a hat band.

The trail has a relatively low uptake with average annual membership approximately 46. Members live mainly within a 10-mile radius of Greyabbey and use the trail on average once or twice a week.

Delamont Country Park – there are five looped multi use trails within the Park ranging in length from 1-7km, all trails are open daily to walkers, cyclists and horse riders. Horse riders are not permitted access during busy times such as Bank Holidays and after 12.00 noon on Sundays.

A current horse riding permit for Delamont costs:

- £8 per day (this includes parking fee) or
- £64 for an adult horse rider per year / £30 child

³⁸ This data is collected quarterly by Outdoor Recreation NI as part of the trails development project completed in 2011.

³⁹ This project was funded by Ards Borough Council and East Border Region Partnership funding (INTEREG IIIa).

Equestrian event permits for annual events such as the Ulster Rural Riders Association and Irish Long-Distance Riders Association can also be purchased at a group rate, (which may be £4 per horse depending on the specific event)

The number of horse riding permits are as follows -

- Average annual permits – 4 or 5 horse riders
- Average daily permits – 90-100 horse riders per year

Consultation with management revealed that if riders behave sensibly there are few constraints on their behaviour – i.e. can park anywhere in the car park, ride most places, etc. If current arrangements are not abused there is no reason to change things.

Tyrella Beach – This is a Council owned and managed facility. There is no permit required to horse ride on the beach. There is some demand for horse riding and no identified conflict, however, to manage use, the beach is closed to horse riding 10am to 6pm during May-September. Numbers have increased since the ban on horse riding at Murlough (see below).

Mount Stewart – The National Trust permits events ‘after hours’ only. This includes events organised by the British Horse Society Ireland with four evening rides organised for 2018.

Murlough Nature Reserve - The decision was taken by the National Trust in 2018 to discontinue horse riding permits due to concerns relating to the conservation of the fragile dune system for the long term. However, there was not previously a high demand for horse riding with only 1 active permit. Horse riders can still use the beach and the National Trust is actively supporting Council and other stakeholders to help find solutions to accessing the beach.

Public Rights of Way for horses exist in the form of Bridleways. There are three bridleways within the study area, as can be seen in Fig. 35.

Location	Distance (kms)
Raholp To Loughmoney	1.18
Ballydrain Rd to shore beside Castle Espie Pier	0.5
Ballyblack Church to Cunningburn Road	0.76

Fig. 35: Bridleways within the study area

Informal horse riding currently takes place at the following locations:

- Open mud flats at Newtownards
- Ballyhornan Beach
- Knockinelder Beach

Riding schools within the study area include:

- St Patricks Way Stables, Downpatrick
- Peninsula Equestrian Academy, Carrowdore

6.2.3.1 Summary

Horse riding is well catered for within the study area, with several dedicated sites, trails and public rights of way.

Current permit and user numbers discussed above do not highlight a high demand for horse riding trail provision at present.

6.2.4 Orienteering

There are two permanent orienteering courses within the study area:

- Delamont Country Park - there are white and/or yellow standard controls suitable for beginners, orange and/or light green standard controls suitable for people with some experience and green colour standard or above controls available for experienced orienteers. However, there is no up to date map in place.
- Castle Ward Demesne - there are white and/or yellow standard controls suitable for beginners and orange and/or light green standard controls suitable for people with some experience. The course is managed by Lagan Valley Orienteers.

Lagan Valley Orienteers also use the Tyrella sand dunes for club championship and colour series events (i.e. with multiple levels of use). There is also an orienteering map of the site.

The NI Orienteering Association (NIOA), the governing body for the sport, has an NI-wide access agreement in place for use of military land e.g. Ballykinlar.

Mount Stewart is not currently used for orienteering although this option is currently under discussion between the National Trust and representatives from Lagan Valley Orienteers.

Orienteering is currently offered by Clearsky Adventure Centre based in Castle Ward Demesne.

6.2.4.1 Summary

There is currently good provision for orienteering within the study area in relation to the opportunities i.e. the sites that are physically suitable and available.

6.2.5 Potential environmental impact of land based recreation


As shown above, Strangford Lough and Lecale AONB is an attractive and popular venue for land-based outdoor recreation. However, individuals and groups can cause disturbance to wildlife. Most of the time this is unintentional with users being unaware of the impact that their activity is having.

The main impacts are noted below –

- Dogs (off leads) are noted as a consistent problem causing disturbance to birds both feeding and nesting and seals. Within the study area, the impact is greatest at the northern end of Strangford Lough especially at low tides where overwintering birds congregate. In addition, there are incidents of localized disturbance for example– nesting birds at Killard National Nature Reserve, seals and nesting birds at Murlough National Nature Reserve.
- Litter included discarded angling materials is unsightly and does cause injury to wildlife.
- Charter boats including those delivering wildlife watching trips, may cause disturbance to the protected species that they are coming to view.
- Boats including cruisers, kayaks and canoes can lead to wildlife disturbance due to their physical presence. This can be exacerbated by smaller craft landing on shorelines where species are present and accessing sites only accessible by water e.g. islands.
- Newtownards, Mount Stewart and Ballyhornan are popular areas for horse riding on the foreshore. Firm beaches provide uninterrupted gallops for exercising horses. The area's most sensitive to horse riding are wildlife refuges over the winter months and areas supporting Eelgrass. Birds may not be unduly disturbed by riders hacking across the shore but are more likely to move where several horses are using the same stretch of shore as a gallop.

To address the issue of dogs disturbing wildlife, SLLP has delivered the '*Share the Shore*' campaign. The aim of this is to inform and educate dog owners and encourage them to keep dogs on leads. Fig. 36 shows a postcard that was used as part of this campaign.






Advice for Winter Shore Visits


Every winter we are treated to the spectacle of thousands of over-wintering birds coming to our shores from colder climes. They arrive with their young, tired and hungry and they need to feed. The birds have a small window to do this as they can only feed on the shore as the tide goes out. Every time they are forced to take flight they expend a great deal of energy and lose valuable feeding time. So remember...

1. **Keep your distance**
The birds will continue to feed as long as you keep a reasonable distance from them.
2. **Keep your dog under control**
Dogs are the greatest cause of disturbance to over-wintering birds. The best way to avoid disturbance is to keep your dog on a lead and away from the feeding birds in winter.
3. **Watch and enjoy!**
If you follow the advice above you can enjoy the experience without causing harm. It is up to all of us to look after our wildlife and ensure they will return to our shores for the enjoyment of future generations.




Strangford Lough & Lecale Partnership

Produced by the Strangford Lough & Lecale Partnership




Northern Ireland Environment Agency



DOE

Department of the Environment



National Trust

Fig. 36: Share the Shore postcard

6.3 Water based recreation

The following activities are included within water-based recreation –

- Angling
- Canoeing (including kayaking)
- Coastal rowing
- Sailing and cruising
- Boat trips
- Jet skiing
- Windsurfing and kitesurfing
- Stand up paddle boarding
- Coasteering
- Diving
- Swimming (including triathlon)

In parallel to this report, ORNI was commissioned by SLLP to complete an audit of access to Strangford Lough for water-based recreation. This audit included an assessment of 36 sites (75 access points), identification of opportunities for the development of water-based recreation and an action plan for future development⁴⁰. This Outdoor Recreation Plan will not duplicate the water-based access report but provides a complementary audit of a further 10 sites and 13 access points and a summary of the key issues relating to water based recreation across the whole study area.

6.3.1 Angling

The study area provides a variety of opportunities for those wishing to participate in angling; these include inland fisheries (e.g. small loughs), river-based fishing and sea fishing.

To fish legally in Northern Ireland anglers need:

- A rod licence for the fishing rod and the game or coarse fish that are caught.

The rod license system is managed by DAERA with licences available to buy online or from a local distributor e.g. tackle shop. There is no requirement to have a rod licence for sea angling, except when fishing for salmon or sea trout.

- A permit or day ticket. This gives the holder the right to fish in a specific fishery i.e. lake or river and are obtained from owner of the fishing rights. This can be -
 - A private individual
 - A company
 - An angling club
 - DAERA

Clubs within the study area own fishing rights to certain rivers for example Dundrum Angling Club for the Moneycarragh River and the Inler Angling Club for the Inler River.

Some small rivers in the study area are not be managed by a club and fishing is at the discretion of the private landowner.

⁴⁰ The audit of water-based access on Strangford Lough did not include angling

As there is no right of access to river banks in N. Ireland, clubs also work directly with private landowners to establish informal access to the river banks.

The table below shows formal angling locations within the study area.

Site & management body	Nearest town	Type	Access/ facilities	Permit required
Quoile River (DAERA)	Downpatrick	Brown trout and Sea trout.	Easy access on south side near to road, path and stands are provided, disabled anglers' car park is available at the old flood gates.	DAERA game fishing rod licence and permit.
Quoile Basin (DAERA)	Downpatrick	Pike, Perch, Rudd, Eels Rainbow and Brown Trout.	Car park at the water's edge with a designated disabled bay from which fishing is possible, two other tarmac car parks connecting to a water's edge path.	DAERA coarse fishing rod licence and permit.
Lough Cowey (DAERA)	Portaferry	Brown trout and Pike.	Car park on the south shore.	DAERA game fishing rod licence and permit.
Lough Money (DAERA)	Downpatrick	Rainbow trout, Pike and Perch.	Three wheelchair accessible, disabled fishing stands, tarmac car park.	DAERA game fishing rod licence and permit.
Ballynahinch, Annacloy and Quoile Rivers – from Strangford Lough new barrier to Lyon's Bridge (DAERA)	Downpatrick	Brown trout and Sea trout.	Downstream of Lyon's Bridge to Drumaghlis Bridge fishing is from the north bank. Kilmore to Annacloy fishing is on the eastern bank. There is a mixed fishery from Steamboat Quay upstream to the railway bridge above Inch Abbey. Above the railway bridge is a game fishery.	DAERA game fishing rod licence and permit.
Moneycarragh River	Dundrum	Sea trout and Salmon.	River bank access	Licences from DAERA day permits available.

Fig. 37: Formal angling sites within study area

Sea angling takes place around the Lough shore and from boats on the Lough itself and in the Irish Sea.

Angling is currently offered by the following activity providers:

- Stephen Kennedy - Strangford Guiding Company
- Terry Jackson - game angling instructor and game and sea angling coach
- John Murray – sea fishing on the St Brendan
- Des Rodgers – sea fishing on the Cuan Shore

The study area provides ample opportunity for fishing, both on rivers and for sea fishing. Consultation revealed that the development of more angling facilities for those with limited mobility would be appreciated, but specific locations were not identified.

6.3.2 Canoeing

Sea canoeing and kayaking takes place within the study area on a regular basis with users accessing the water from both formal and informal access points around the Lough and the Irish Sea coast. Canoeing activity is most concentrated on the Lough's western shores. The flat water within the Lough provides excellent conditions for both open boating (Canadian Canoes) and kayaking whilst the challenging nature of the 'Narrows' and bar mouth attract the most experienced paddlers.

The governing body for canoeing is the Canoe Association of Northern Ireland (CANI). CANI has indicated that trends show a general increase in membership over the last 10 years.

Canoeing and kayaking takes place individually or in groups organised by clubs or activity providers. Clubs include –

- Belfast Canoe Club
- Sit on Top Touring Club (Newtownards)

Activity providers includes –

- Clearsky Adventure Centre who offer guided trips on Strangford Lough
- Mobile Team Adventure offer night kayaking courses on Strangford Lough
- Tollymore National Outdoor Centre

6.3.3 Canoe Trails

There are 3 canoe trails within the study area.

The Strangford Lough Canoe Trail, launched in 2010, stretches for 72.6 km around Strangford Lough and has 11 formal access/ egress points. It is suitable for canoeists of all abilities with some areas imposing greater challenges than others. For less experienced canoeists the western side of the Lough between Whiterock and Killyleagh is more suitable. The group of islands in this area offers interesting paddling with a range of channels and routes to explore. The south west area around Delamont Country Park and Salt Island also offers sheltered waters for paddling.

'The Narrows' part of Strangford Lough between Strangford and Portaferry is the place with the strongest currents which can provide challenges for paddlers.

The East Coast Canoe Trail runs from Waterfoot to Portaferry with three access/ egress points within the study area.

The South East Coast Canoe Trail runs from Strangford to Greenore in Carlingford Lough and has seven access/ egress points within the study area. This trail provides opportunities for sea kayaking for all abilities.

Access points for the 3 canoe trails are shown in Fig. 38.

Canoe Trail	Access/ egress points within study area
Strangford Lough Canoe Trail	Portaferry, Kircubbin, Cuningburn, Island Reagh, Whiterock, Killyleagh, Delamont, Salt Island, Castle Ward, Strangford and Kilclief
East Coast Canoe Trail	Cloughey, Knockinelder and Portaferry
South East Coast Canoe Trail	Strangford, Kilclief, Ballyhornan, Ardglass Harbour, Killough, Tyrella and Black Rock

Fig. 38: Canoe Trail access and egress points within the study area

In addition to the formal canoe trail access points, paddlers access the water in the study area from a variety of other locations. This includes any site where they can get their boat to the shore. The choice of access point is influenced by a range of factors including tide, winds and ability of users. It is worth noting that the availability of facilities is not necessarily a contributory factor when deciding where to access the water.

Requirements for access to the water for canoeing and kayaking include -

Essential	Desirable
Access/ egress <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Slipway - Shore 	Toilets
Secure car parking close to access point	Places of interest to visit/ stop off including places to camp (for overnight trips)
	Refreshments/ potable water
	Boat storage (if doing overnight trips)

Fig. 39: Requirements for canoeing/ kayaking

As well as day trips, paddlers often take part in overnight trips camping at various islands or quiet locations within the study area. This includes Salt and Taggart Islands. Salt Island Bothy was developed as part of the Strangford Lough Canoe Trail and following a recent period of closure reopened in 2018.

The Bothy is owned and managed by the National Trust through the Mount Stewart office.

Issues identified include –

- Very few paddlers use the same spot repeatedly as there are many variables that influence where paddlers go. This includes tides, wind and the experience of the individual or group. Therefore, access points can be anywhere where a boat can access the shore.
- There is a lack of suitable access points that are –
 - not affected by the tidal conditions
 - Open to all as opposed to being under the control of a private organisation or individual.

- There is a lack of information on how to access the water or how to get started with the sport, for those who are not members of clubs or for those who are not familiar with the study area.
- More opportunities for wild camping would be welcomed.

6.3.4 Coastal rowing

Down Coastal Rowing Club was established in 2014 by the Strangford Lough & Lecale Partnership (SLLP), working with the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). The aim was to develop community coastal rowing as part of a wider effort to regenerate communities through their maritime heritage. People living along the Co. Down coast from Donaghadee to Dundrum built 9 coastal rowing boats, known as the St Ayles' skiffs and raced in the 'Narrows Challenge'.

Coastal rowing has developed at the following 9 villages –

- Portaferry, Kircubbin, Killyleagh, Strangford, Ardglass
- Ballywalter, Portavogie, Donaghadee and Dundrum (outside the study area)

The World Championships, Skiffie Worlds were held in Delamont Country Park, Killyleagh in 2016. The event was hosted by SLLP working closely with the Scottish Coastal Rowing Association (SCRA), and with the support of local councils and communities along the Co. Down coast.

The Strangford Lough rowing festival took place in June 2017 again at Delamont Country Park.

To facilitate both events, Council purchased and installed a temporary pontoon on the Lough shore. This provided access to the water for numerous boats and enabled crews to change over safely. The site provided a wide stretch of calm water that could facilitate such competitive events. *Delamont and the temporary pontoon is considered in greater detail in the water-based recreation audit.*

Requirements for coastal rowing include -

Essential	Desirable
Access <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Slipway - Shore - Pontoon 	Toilets
Parking close to access point – this includes boat trailers (where boats are not stored locally) and parking for rowers	
Sheltered, even stretch of water	
Boat and equipment storage – ideally close to launch site	

Fig. 40: Requirements for coastal rowing

Coastal rowing is a relatively recent development within the study area. Of the nine villages that formed coastal rowing clubs, five are within the study area. Training, competitions and activities happen all year round and a sense of community and friendship has been fostered and enhanced. Issues highlighted with regards to coastal rowing include a lack of boat storage facilities plus a lack of fully accessible access points that can be used at all stages of the tide.

6.3.5 Sailing/ cruising

Sailing takes place on a formal basis within the study area. There are 12 sailing and boat clubs situated within the Lough, which is more than anywhere else in Northern Ireland. There are no sailing clubs along the Lecale Coast.

Within the Lough, sailing takes place both recreationally and competitively. Frequent regattas are organised by the Yacht and Sailing Clubs. DAERA estimates that there are about 2,000 yachts located around the Lough and approximately 5,000⁴¹ active boaters. In addition, many of the clubs run their own Royal Yachting Association (RYA) training courses from beginner to advanced level.

In terms of mooring, most cruisers are moored on permanent swing moorings close to club premises. The majority of these are owned by individuals i.e. club members, rather than the Sailing/ Yacht Clubs. There are also a few public moorings and scattered private moorings elsewhere.

Consultation identified that most sailing, and to a lesser degree motor cruising, activity within the study area is undertaken within the Lough itself. However, whilst no specific research is available, anecdotal evidence would suggest there is an increasing volume of visitors to the marinas/ pontoons within Strangford, Portaferry and Ardglass and indeed visitors to Clubs such as Down Cruising Club based at Whiterock.

The facilities at Strangford Yacht Haven and Portaferry Marina offer formal facilities for visitors near the entrance of Strangford Lough, however facilities for visiting cruising yachts further north in the Lough are much more limited. Ardglass Marina provides facilities for cruising yachts on the Lecale Coast. Cruising yachts currently avail of the hospitality of yacht clubs or sheltered anchorages many of which are identified through Irish Cruising Club publications, online forums and word of mouth.

Sailing clubs include –

- Portaferry Sailing Club
- Kircubbin Sailing Club
- Newtownards Sailing Club
- Comber Cruising Club
- Down Cruising Club
- Ringhaddy Cruising Club
- East Down Yacht Club
- Strangford Lough Yacht Club
- Killyleagh Yacht Club
- Quoile Sailing Club

⁴¹ Strangford Lough SAC, Conservation Objectives 2017, DAERA

Requirements for access to the water for sailing/ cruising include –

Essential – clubs	Desirable
Access/ egress <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Slipway - Pontoon - Berth - Mooring (with tender to get to boat) 	Toilets Showers Visitor services e.g. food, pubs etc.
Sufficient water depth to reach access facility	
Essential - visiting boats (as above plus)	Desirable
Sheltered anchorages	Facility to empty toilets
Marina with associated facilities	

Fig. 41: Requirements for sailing

Issues include –

- There are also environmental concerns regarding the non-regulation of moorings within the Lough.
- In relation to the conservation objectives in relation to the SAC, DAERA⁴² recognises that -
“Although generally a benign activity, boating may result in a number of potentially harmful impacts on the Lough and its wildlife. It may cause physical disturbance to the seabed and shore, particularly at moorings and where slipways and jetties are built. It is often difficult to maintain water quality at anchorage’s and harbours. Boating may also cause noise and general disturbance to wildlife, particularly to breeding or over-wintering birds. Fast powered craft including jet-skis tend to be the worst in this regard”.
- Consultation identified a demand for more moorings for visiting boats, particularly within Strangford Lough and the lack of current visitor moorings as a barrier to access. There are numerous cruisers and yachts that pass by the Lough in the Irish Sea. Many are ‘commuting’ through the area on a journey to get from the South of Ireland to the north coast of Ireland or Scotland. Some stop at Ardglass Marina.

6.3.6 Boat trips

The striking natural and built heritage of Strangford Lough and the Lecale Coast provides an ideal location for boat trips. Currently, there are 3 private operators offering trips within the study area. These include -

- Strangford Yacht Charter
- John Murray Boat Tours

Both private operators offer boat trips to explore many ancient monastic sites and castles of Strangford.

- Clearsky Adventure Centre based at Castle Ward, offering the Strangford Sea Safari, a 12-seater high speed RHIB trip around Strangford Lough. In recent years, the Game of Thrones Boat Tour (Winterfell Tour) has also become particularly popular.

⁴² Strangford Lough SAC, Conservation Objectives 2017, DAERA

In addition, NMDDC hosts a regular programme of summer boat trips leaving from Mullagh Quay (to the south of Delamont Country Park). A private boat owner is employed to deliver these. Requirements for access to the water for boat trips include -

Essential	Desirable
Somewhere for boat to access the shore that passengers can alight at a range of tide times	Toilets
Secure parking close to access point	A range of places to stop off and explore
A range of places to view by boat around the Lough	

Fig. 42: Requirements for boat trips

Boat trips are currently demand led within the study area i.e. trips need to be pre-booked before the trip will run. There are no options for turning up on the day for a boat trip, so some chances for sales may be missed. However, the main issues identified regarding the potential for boat trips is the lack of accessible locations for passengers to get on and off the boat. This is partly due to tidal and other restrictions in relation to access points. For example, agreements would need to be made between a boat operator and a sailing club or private marina to use the facilities.

6.3.7 Jet Skiing

Jet skiing happens at the following locations:

- Island Hill
- Tyrella/ Minerstown beaches
- Whiterock (Braddock Reach)

While anecdotal evidence suggests that the number of jet skis within the study area is low, the impact of jet skis has the potential to be high. For example, the northern end of Strangford Lough is where the highest concentration of overwintering birds are, therefore, jet skiing from access points such as Island Hill during the winter months could have a very detrimental effect.

This is due to noise disturbance (to both other users and wildlife) and because jet skis can get close to the nesting or feeding sites of many species. i.e. they can operate in shallow water.

However, while concern was raised that jet skis are damaging the environment, no evidence of this has been documented within the Lough.

Jet skis are being used adjacent to Ringboy Rocks and Minerstown Beach and this has been documented as having a detrimental impact to the numbers of Common seal pups being born at this colony. There is evidence, from carcasses being washed up, that seals are being fatally wounded by the propellers of jet skis⁴³. To address this issue, in 2016, Council introduced byelaws preventing vehicle access to Minerstown Beach. While this was met with opposition from many local residents, environmentalists supported this approach.

⁴³ 'The impact of human disturbance at seal haul-outs - A literature review for the Seal Conservation Society', Susan C. Wilson, Tara Seal Research

Requirements for jet skiing include-

Essential	Desirable
Access to the water - slipway	Toilets
Secure parking close to access point	Changing
Area mostly without other craft	

Fig. 43: Requirements for jet skiing

Jet skiing within the study area is at a low level with only 3 regular access points identified. No demand was identified for improved facilities or greater management of use.

6.3.8 Windsurfing/ Kitesurfing

Generally, participation in wind surfing has experienced some decline over the last 10 years. Many participants have moved away from windsurfing to newer activities such as kitesurfing and more recently stand up paddle boarding. As little depth of water is required, and new wet suits are very insulated, enthusiast can take part in the activity throughout the year.

Each activity has different governing bodies, the national governing body for windsurfing is the Royal Yachting Association (RYA) and for kitesurfing the British Kitesurfing Association (BKSA).

Within the study area, windsurfing is mainly confined to the Upper Lough, especially around Cunningburn and Warden's Bay (to a lesser extent) where the water is relatively shallow and calm. The horse shoe beach at Cunningburn provides excellent conditions in a southerly wind but is very patchy in a northerly wind.

A windsurfing community is also based at Newtownards Sailing Club with many club members being windsurfers.

Tyrella Beach is also used regularly. As the main requirement for these activities is shore access and wind, there are currently sufficient opportunities within the study area to enable these activities to take place.

Requirements for access to the water for windsurfing and kitesurfing include -

Essential	Desirable
Somewhere to prepare and assemble equipment	Toilets
Access to the water from the shore i.e. ability to walk in	Changing
Secure parking close to access point	
Good reliable winds over a long stretch of water	
Shallow water to relaunch	
Area mostly without other craft	

Fig. 44: Requirements for windsurfing and kitesurfing

The only issue identified during consultation was a demand for improved facilities at Tyrella Beach.

6.3.9 Stand-up paddle boarding

A relatively new activity, stand up paddle boarding (SUP) takes place at a low level on the Lough and particularly at Jane's Shore on the Quoile River. Paddlers require relatively flat, stable water to board.

Two providers were identified during consultation –

- Clearsky Adventure Centre based at Castle Ward

- Tollymore Mountain Centre

The sport is regulated through the Canoe Association of Northern Ireland (CANI). Requirements for access for paddle boarding include –

Essential	Desirable
Somewhere to prepare and assemble equipment	Toilets
Access to the water from the shore i.e. ability to walk in	Changing
Secure parking close to access point	
Shallow water to relaunch	
Area mostly without other craft	

Fig. 45: Requirements for stand-up paddle boarding

No issues were identified through consultation with regards to this activity.

6.3.10 Coasteering

Coasteering is a rock and water-based activity that involves elements of swimming, rock climbing and scrambling along a shoreline with participants then jumping from the rocks or cliffs into the water. Participants generally wear sturdy footwear, wetsuits, buoyancy aids and helmets. Generally, this activity takes place in organised groups.

Ballyhornan is the only access point within the study area identified for coasteering. Participants disembark in the car park and walk along the coastal path to the south to access the coasteering sites. This activity is organised by Clear Sky Adventure Centre.

Requirements for coasteering include –

Essential	Desirable
Elevated coastline	Toilets
Access to the coastline i.e. ability to walk in	Changing
Secure parking close to access point	Qualified instructor
Area without other craft	

Fig. 46: Requirements for coasteering

The main requirement for coasteering is access to suitable environment. Therefore, lack of suitable sites and access to these, is the main barrier to the activity taking place.

Consultation revealed that the height restrictors at the car park at Ballyhornan prevent some minibuses accessing the car park to drop of participants.

6.3.11 Diving

Strangford Lough is popular for diving all year round. Even during the worst weather conditions, a reasonably sheltered site can normally be found where visibility remains good enough to dive.

There are 15 dive sites in the Lough which are explored by both individuals and members of clubs. DV Diving Club, based outside Newtownards, is the most active club.

Most diving takes place in the southern end of the Lough (from Ringhaddy south). This is for a variety of reasons –

- Access for dive boats (RHIB's) to Strangford Lough is limited with Strangford and Portaferry the most frequently used slipways. There are also sites where divers can walk into the water including Ballyhenry Bay.
- Diving is not permitted within the Modiolus Exclusion Zone (see DAERA advice below).
- The water is shallow to the northern end of the Lough and not of great interest to the general diver. The northern end may be more attractive to marine biologists.

There are good wrecks to the southern end of the Lough including –

- Lees Wreck (also known as Empire Tana), one of the favourite dives in Northern Ireland. This is a sunken liberty ship which was part of the World War II Mulberry harbour and was brought to Strangford Lough to be scrapped but struck a reef in Ballyhenry Bay and has since broken into 2 large pieces. The wreck is at a depth of 15m and breaks the surface. It is suitable for novice divers.
- The Zarina Dive Site (also known as 'The Pins') is located between Ballyhenry and Portaferry and is also popular. MV Zarina was lost in approximately 1700 and the wreck is still discernible today. It is suitable for novice divers. The wreck is at a depth of 12m and has a height of 2m.
- The Alasdair Wreck is another popular dive whereby a large motor yacht caught fire and sank at its mooring in Ringhaddy Sound in March 1946. The wreck is at a depth of 23m and has a height of 7m. It is suitable for experienced novices.

In relation to the conservation objectives in relation to the SAC, DAERA recognises that

"Strangford Lough is one of the principal areas in Northern Ireland used by recreational divers for training, exploring wrecks and observing marine life. The Lough's sheltered waters are ideal as training areas for novice divers, while also affording some of the most challenging dives to be found in Northern Ireland for the more experienced."

*The study of the seabed by divers is in harmony with conservation interests provided no damage is done. Over-collection of marine life could, however, prove damaging to the populations of certain species. The Strangford Lough Regulation of anchoring, mooring and diving byelaws 2012 prohibits anchoring, mooring or diving within a restricted zone at any time. This byelaw applies to all waters deeper than 10m below chart datum in the restricted zone which is bounded by a Northern Limit and a Southern Limit. Diving for the purposes of monitoring condition and recovery of the designated features within the zone may be permitted by the Department following an assessment of the proposed methodology and qualifications of the Dive Team. Any such Permit will be time bounded and require the production of a detailed survey report."*⁴⁴

The Northern Ireland Federation of Sub Aqua Clubs is the national governing body for the sport and the British Sub Aqua Club is the governing body of sport for recreational diving.

⁴⁴ Strangford Lough SAC, Conservation Objectives 2017, DAERA

Requirements for access to the water for diving include -

Essential	Desirable
Dive site of interest – marine life, wreck, cliffs	Toilets
Slipway to access the water by boat (RHIB) or Access point on foot close to dive site	Places to stop off by boat for lunch, drinks etc.
Parking close to access point	Changing – if diving in wet suits (rather than dry suits)
Good visibility i.e. sheltered site	
Safe conditions to use boat i.e. not big waves	

Fig. 47: Requirements for diving

6.3.11 Swimming including triathlon

Both wild swimming and club swimming take place on Strangford Lough as well as casual swimming by individuals. In addition, many people enjoy paddling within the waters of the Lough and spending time on the beaches. The main access points for these activities identified through consultation are Cunningburn, Island Hill, Kilclief, Ballyhornan and Castle Ward Bay.

Ards Sailing Club hosts swimming lessons twice a week in Strangford Lough and lets out facilities to Peninsula Triathlon Club who regularly swim at Cunningburn during the summer months. Triathlon events regularly take place in Strangford Lough, with the Narrows Tri Club hosting the Portaferry Sprint Triathlon in August 2018. It is tradition to hold an annual New Year's Day Swim at Strangford which includes an 80m dash in the water.

In relation to the conservation objectives in relation to the SAC, DEARA recognises that

“Efforts to keep beaches suitable for recreation often include the removal of drift seaweed along with litter. Seaweed is an important component of the marine ecosystem and in most instances is better left in place unless there are compelling reasons for its removal. There have been proposals to create or extend sandy beaches for bathing. In addition to loss of natural foreshore, such efforts can be counterproductive if they fail to take account of the local sediment regime. There may also be a desire to provide amenities such as promenades and car parking areas. These are likely to increase the numbers of people using the area with the consequent risk of increased disturbance”.

Requirements for access to the water for swimming include -

Essential	Desirable
Any type of access including shore-based access i.e. ability to walk in to the water	Toilets
Safe bathing water e.g. no strong current	Place to swim to e.g. island or other shore to rest before return swim
Parking close to access point	
Somewhere safe to leave clothes/ towel close to access point	

Fig. 48: Requirements for swimming

6.3.12 Potential environmental impact of water based recreation

The previous section has highlighted the range and level of water-based recreation that is currently taking place within the study area. The main impacts are as follows –

- Disturbance to wildfowl particularly in the winter months when overwintering birds congregate at the northern end of the lough to feed.
- Disturbance to seals – e.g. at Minerstown

Disturbance can be in the form of noise craft e.g. cruisers or jet skis, physical presence from walkers or dogs or boats including boat trips.

- Moorings within Strangford Lough – physical disturbance to the sea bed resulting in localised sterile areas.

In some cases, the mooring is anchored down by a large concrete block which rests on the seabed. A long chain is then attached to a buoy on the surface. The boat is then attached to the buoy. The chain must be sufficiently long enough to reach a boat at high tide when the chain is taut. However, the issue arises then the tide goes out and the chain becomes slack, the chain can then rotate with the tide (or wind). The greatest impact is when there is no boat on the mooring. This creates a circular dredging motion on the sea bed which can lead to a sterile environment for both flora and fauna. This could potentially create a sterile circle with a diameter dependent on the length of the chain. Due to insurance, mooring buoys are typically vacated between October and March.

While the chain can cause degradation of the environment, the concrete block can act like an artificial reef and provides an additional habitat for both flora and fauna.

A Defra⁴⁵ review of the impacts of unlicensed marine activities included impacts resulting from mooring in coastal waters. The review identified motorised water-based recreation and any anchoring of recreational craft as one of the three unlicensed activities (alongside bait-digging and unlicensed commercial fishing) of highest risk to marine biodiversity. The review listed loss of seabed area, smothering of seabed plant and animal communities with sediment, changes in suspended sediment, changes in turbidity, noise disturbance, visual presence, physical disturbance, displacement and synthetic compound contamination as probable environmental pressures arising from boat moorings, and loss of water column volume, heavy metal contamination and introduction of microbial pathogens, parasites and non-native species as possible pressures. Impacts may affect a wide range of taxa. A major concern in many sheltered moorings is loss of seagrass due to swinging chain moorings, which in one study were found to eliminate an average of 122 m² of seagrass. Seagrass beds function as important nursery and foraging habitat for fish, shellfish and wildfowl. They are also thought to oxygenate and stabilise sediments, provide shoreline stabilisation and protection from erosion, and are natural hotspots for carbon sequestration and nutrient cycling. Finally, they are considered a foundation species, i.e. a species that provides habitat and enhances ecosystem biodiversity and are an important bio-indicator of system health. In Strangford Lough, seagrass is critical for the maintenance of the pale-bellied Brent goose wintering population.

Direct physical pressures such as anchoring and propeller scarring, are increasingly resulting in further losses and fragmentation of many beds. Anchoring in deeper waters can also result in indiscriminate damage to benthic flora and fauna and infauna, and erosion of the sea bed. Incidental effects of moored boats may include disturbance of birds and seals due to proximity to roosts, nest sites and seal haul outs. Light pollution may influence the nocturnal behaviour of marine animals, and littering is also likely wherever people are present. Biocide leaching from antifouling paints may have complex impacts on marine organisms, particularly in moorings with little water movement. Effects may

⁴⁵ *Unlicensed Activities: A review to consider the threats to marine biodiversity. Building the evidence base for the Marine Bill. November 2006. A report for DEFRA by Suzanne Boyes, Daryl Burdon and Michael Elliott, Institute of Estuarine & Coastal Studies, University of Hull.*

include direct toxic effects and reduced viability and fitness in some invertebrates and fish, and toxins may accumulate in bottom sediments, with a potential for concentrated effects if sediments are disturbed.

6.4 Water based recreation site assessments

A comprehensive and detailed audit of water-based recreation on Strangford Lough was completed by Outdoor Recreation NI in March 2018 on behalf of SLLP, NMDDC and ANDBC. This report considered 36 sites around the Lough. The resulting report completed the following objectives:

- An audit of current and potential access to the Lough for water-based recreation
- Site based recommendations relevant to potential development of sustainable water-based recreation.
- Strategic recommendations relevant to the holistic development and management of sustainable water-based recreation.

The sites that were assessed under the water-based audit, lie entirely within the study area for the Outdoor Recreation Plan. This report includes an assessment of an additional 9 sites located along the Lecale Coast. These have been assessed using the same methodology as the previous audit. The results are set out below and include a summary a current use and an identification of current issues and opportunities identified through desk research and/ or consultation.

Site number	Name
1	Dundrum Bay
2	Tyrella
3	Minerstown
4	Killough
5	Ardglass
6	Port Kelly
7	Knockinelder
8	Kearney
9	Cloughey

Fig. 49: Water based recreation sites

6.4.1 Dundrum Bay

6.4.1.1 Description of current provision and use

Located adjacent to Dundrum village, Dundrum Bay is a tidal estuary into which the Blackstaff and the Carrigs River empty. The estuary links with the Irish Sea via a narrow channel between Murlough Nature Reserve (to the south) and the MOD site at Ballykinlar (to the north).

There is a large seal colony that regularly haul out on the sand at Ballykinlar.

The Inner bay is divided into a southern and northern part dissected by the Keel Point Rd at the Downshire Bridge. At this location there is a small Council owned car park (space for up to 10 cars) that is very well used. At low tide the estuary is characterised by mud flats and a range of wildfowl that feed in the mud.

Dundrum is identified as an access point on the South East Coast Canoe Trail. The access point is located within the town at the Council owned slipway, adjacent to the Council owned 'Black Rock' car park (at the recycling centre) at the northern end of the village.

However, consultation identified that paddlers are more likely to access the Bay informally at the Downshire Bridge either beside the bridge or from the car park. Depending on which way the tide is running this influences where users access the water. It was noted that Downshire Bridge is a good location for developing moving water skills as the tide flows between its stanchions at rates of up to 6 knots.

The Bay is also very popular among walkers and fishermen who generally park in the Downshire Bridge car park.

Murlough House at the northern end of Murlough Nature Reserve is accessed via the Downshire Bridge. Parking for National Trust visitors is provided at Keel Point Car Park for c60 cars. The National Trust is currently working on a 'Murlough Project' where a review and possible upgrade of visitor facilities at Murlough (including improvements at Keel Point) may take place. The National Trust is also introducing pay and display at Murlough Main car park (outside of the study area).



Fig. 50: Dundrum Bay site map

Issues

- Downshire Bridge car park is small and becomes busy at times, users then park on the road/ bridge. Bollards have been put in place along the road and double yellow lines marked along the road as shown in Fig. 54.
- The army firing range off Ballykinlar is a no-go area (for safety reasons). Users should contact the Belfast Coastguard before crossing this area.

Site ID	Access facility	Access type	Current usage	Facilities	Services on site	Capacity measures	Biosecurity measures	Signage (fit for purpose unless otherwise stated)
1	Shore	Public	Paddling Angling	Formal car park at Downshire Bridge	None	Limited parking	None in place	National Trust name sign
	Slipway	Public	Small water craft Kayaking	Black Rock car park		Parking for up to 30 cars		

Fig. 51: Summary of water-based access at Dundrum Bay



Fig. 52: Council car park



Fig. 53: Informal access to water – south end of bridge



Fig. 54: Parking restrictions on road

6.4.2 Tyrella

6.4.2.1 Description of current provision and use

Owned and managed by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, Tyrella beach is a wide, flat, sandy beach two kilometres long. The beach is backed by 25 hectares of mature dunes. The beach has been awarded the Seaside Award annually since 1997 and has also maintained the Blue Flag award in 2011. It has also retained the Green Coast Award since 2008.

The beach is open every day of the year. During the summer season car parking charges apply (£4 per car) and there is a beach centre and life guards on duty. Facilities include a car park, two sets of toilets and a kiosk for paid entry. It is staffed every weekend from Mayday weekend until into September. Manned weekdays from 20th June through 1st Sept (10-6pm). This means lifeguarding, toilet blocks open, manned kiosk to charge for car parking. Problems emerge when there are prolonged periods of really good weather correlating to high levels of use.

When Council parking is insufficient, a farmer opposite the site opens his field and charges to park. Council is also looking into mega bins with solar panels that compact waste and alert Council staff when they need emptied.

In terms of water-based recreation, the site is popular among families etc. as a beach destination and is therefore used for paddling (on foot) and swimming.

However, the beach does suffer from litter being washed up by the tide which can make it unsightly. In addition, the beach is also exposed and can become windy at times. While the wind can dissuade families etc. from using the beach, it does attract wind and kite surfers who regularly use the beach throughout the year.

Tyrella is one of the most popular sites for both windsurfing and kitesurfing within NI. While the activity takes place all year round, the winter months tend to be busier with up to 40 boards on the water in the right conditions. Winds throughout June to August tend to be light but there are some good wind days. Surfers will check weather forecast for wind before deciding where to go e.g. windguru. Surfers look for winds of at least 12 knots and up to 30-40 knots. Generally, the higher the wind the smaller the kite and the sail.

Tyrella is popular as it can be used in all wind directions from south west to easterly. It is particularly good for kitesurfing with participants using the waves to 'get air' and jump. It is estimated that there are up to 100 people taking part in these activities within N. Ireland. These surfers travel all over Ireland to get good wind with many knowing each other and being part of a community. The beach is avoided by surfers during busy periods. With lines 20-27m long, kitesurfers need to stay away from people for safety. There are 'unofficial' areas of use i.e. surfers tend to stay away from people on the beach and in the water and the zone covered by life guards.

Tyrella is also an access point on the South East Coast Canoe Trail providing coastal access to the Irish Sea. However, anecdotal evidence suggests a low level of use.



Fig. 55: Tyrella site map

Issues

- While Tyrella is a very popular site among locals, the site is not as popular as other beaches in the area such as Murlough. Consultees stated that facilities feel outdated.
- Litter including broken glass was identified as an issue.
- Toilets not always open and can be unclean at busy times.
- Car park is in poor condition and in need of repair.
- Shortage of parking at busy times.
- Cars have been broken into all year around.
- Dog fouling is an issue all year around.

Opportunities

- Upgrade of car park – infill potholes etc.
- There is a demand for improved facilities including toilets, showers and a changing facility on site. A good example of this is the Council owned and managed facility at Whiterocks on the North coast.

Site ID	Access facility	Access type	Current usage	Facilities	Services on site	Capacity measures	Biosecurity measures	Signage (fit for purpose unless otherwise stated)
2	Beach	Public	Swimming Kitesurfing/ windsurfing	Large car park – up to 100 cars Beach Centre (seasonal) Life guards (seasonal)	Toilets	None	None in place	Various Council signage

Fig. 56: Summary of water-based access Tyrella



Fig. 57: Tyrella beach and car park

6.4.3 Minerstown

6.4.3.1 Description of current provision and use

The beach is popular among local people who historically have driven onto the beach via 2 alleged rights of way off the Lisoid Road.

In 2016, Council introduced bye-laws designed to help protect a seal colony and sea life at the beach. These include a ban on cars, motorcycles and people flying kites on the beach, with no boats or other water craft permitted between May 1 and October 31. No horses are allowed on the beach between April and November.

The local Down Recorder newspaper reported that residents were hugely opposed to this at the time and stated that concerns related to the loss of the alleged rights of way and people parking on the road as they can no longer access the beach in a vehicle.⁴⁶

Minerstown is noted on the South East Canoe Trail as a location for seals, as such it is not an access or egress point on the trail.

⁴⁶ *Down Recorder, 6th July 2016*



Fig. 58: Minerstown site map

Issues

- Cars driving onto Minerstown beach given that Tyrella Beach is now closed to vehicles. Sabellaria alveolata reefs are present here which consist of tightly packed honeycomb structures which provide a high level of biodiversity - the weight of vehicles crushes these structures, as does recreational activities such as horse riding.
- Jet skis being used adjacent to Ringboy Rocks and Minerstown Beach have been highlighted as having a detrimental impact to the numbers of Common seal pups being born at this colony. There is evidence, from carcasses being washed up, that seals are being fatally wounded by the propellers of jet skis⁴⁷. The byelaws for Minerstown Beach already include requirements that requires the sensitive usage of the site but policing of the byelaws is difficult and consultation highlighted that signage erected to inform public users, is deemed inadequate.

Opportunities

- Some consultees suggested that an exclusion zone for motorized craft should be introduced around Ringboy Rocks to protect seal haul out and pupping site. However, this was discounted as enforcement would not be practical. However, there is an opportunity to improve communication to beach users to ensure that the bye-laws and the reasons for these being in place are more widely known.

Site ID	Access facility	Access type	Current usage	Facilities	Services on site	Capacity measures	Biosecurity measures	Signage (fit for purpose unless otherwise stated)
3	Shore/ beach	Public	General beach use	Roadside parking	None	Limited parking	None in place	Council signage

Fig. 59: Summary of water-based access at Minerstown

⁴⁷ 'The impact of human disturbance at seal haul-outs - A literature review for the Seal Conservation Society', Susan C. Wilson, Tara Seal Research



Fig. 60: Minerstown Beach

6.4.4 Killough

6.4.4.1 Description of current provision and use

Killough is a historic village with a strong maritime history. The historic quay once used for the transportation of goods and was also a stopping place for a weekly sailing between Downpatrick and Liverpool in the first part of the nineteenth century.

The Quay and surrounding area is now owned by Council. Adjacent to the quay is a large concrete slipway with a concrete area suitable for parking. There is a metal gate at the entrance that was open at the time of the site visit. The surrounding area can dry out at low tide.

Killough is part of the South East Canoe Trail; the access point is just south of the town on a small shingle beach at Long Plate. This provides sheltered shore access with adjacent parking for paddlers. The reason for using this location rather than the slipway at the quay is due to tides.

A google search identifies Killough as a stop off point for cruisers/ sail boats. However, it is described as follows - '*Killough Harbour is a fishing harbour encumbered with dangers*'⁴⁸.

The level of use by cruisers/ sailing boats is not known.

⁴⁸ https://eoceanic.com/sailing/harbours/200/killough_harbour



Fig. 61: Killough site map

Issues - None identified

Opportunities – None identified

Site ID	Access facility	Access type	Current usage	Facilities	Services on site	Capacity measures	Biosecurity measures	Signage (fit for purpose unless otherwise stated)
4	Shore/ beach	Public	Paddlers	Parking in the town and at Long Plate	Within the village	None	None in place	Council signage and life rings in and around the harbour
	Slipway	Public	Not known					

Fig. 62: Summary of water-based access at Killough



Fig. 63: Killough harbour and slipway, Canoe Trail car park and shore access at Point Road

6.4.5 Ardglass

6.4.5.1 Description of current provision and use

Ardglass has been a fishing port for more than two thousand years and developed as such due to its location on the Irish Sea coast by a natural inlet. It has one of the few harbours which is accessible at all states of the tide and has two fishing piers, the North Pier and South Pier, several fish processing factories and a marina. The port is not as busy today as it has been in the past when it was the main driver of the local economy.

Ardglass Marina, adjacent to the harbour (also known as Phennick Cove), has been in operation since 1996. The Marina has a capacity for approximately 83 craft and deep-water basin open 24 hours a day all year round. The marina is noted as one of the safest small harbours on the east coast of Ireland due to its two breakwaters and deep water. Facilities include water and electricity, toilets, showers, telephones, boat storage, fuel (in containers), car parking and launderette. Most marina berths (52) are occupied in season by locally owned craft whilst the remaining are reserved for visiting yachts with typical visitors coming from Scandanavia, Netherlands, Germany, Belgium and even America. There is no restriction on how long visiting yachts can berth for, however the majority stay overnight whilst on passage north or south along the Irish Sea and en route from either Bangor or Howth.

In total, the marina welcomes approximately 700 visiting yachts per year with users paying on average £25 per night, with exact fee calculated based on boat length. During peak summer months the marina operates at capacity with up to 15 visiting yachts per night. Additional requests to stay are never refused as multiple boats can raft up at individual berths. Visitors make use of the local services in the village to restock supplies while they stay.

In April 2018, a new dedicated parking area (with automated gate) was opened at the Marina for motorhomes.

Ardglass Harbour is an access point on the South East Canoe Trail with access possible at all states of tide. Canoeists launch from a small slip in the south west corner of the South Harbour.

The 2012 Village Plan identified the need to provide water recreational activities at harbour.



Fig. 64: Ardglass site map

Issues – none identified

Opportunities – the Marina has recently completed refurbishment to realise opportunities.

Site ID	Access facility	Access type	Current usage	Facilities	Services on site	Capacity measures	Biosecurity measures	Signage (fit for purpose unless otherwise stated)
5	Slipway	Public	Canoeing	Disabled parking, toilets including disabled toilets	None	On street parking	None in place	Council signage and life ring
	Marina	Private	Cruisers, based here and visiting	Secure parking, showers, launderette, electricity, disabled facilities	Boat repair	83 berths, adequate parking		Various signage relating to the marina

Fig. 65: Summary of water-based access at Ardglass



Fig. 66: Ardglass - Phennick Cove Marina and public slipway

6.4.6 Port Kelly

6.4.6.1 Description of current provision and use

Port Kelly is located on the eastern shore of the Ards Peninsula, adjacent to Ballyquintin Farm. The site is owned and managed by the National Trust.

It is an egress point on the East Coast Canoe Trail. The site offers shore access and somewhere to pitch a tent if staying overnight.

It is popular among walkers visiting Ballyquintin, however, levels of water-based recreation here are thought to be low.



Fig. 67: Port Kelly site map

Issues - None identified

Opportunities - None identified

Site ID	Access facility	Access type	Current usage	Facilities	Services on site	Capacity measures	Biosecurity measures	Signage (fit for purpose unless otherwise stated)
6	Shore/ beach	Public	Canoeing – infrequently	Informal parking on grass	None	Limited parking	None in place	National Trust name sign

Fig. 68: Summary of water-based access at Port Kelly



Fig. 69: Port Kelly shore access

6.4.7 Knockinelder Bay

6.4.7.1 Description of current provision and use

Owned by the National Trust, Knockinelder is a relatively sheltered bay to the south of Kearney village. The long beach provides informal shore access to the Irish Sea. There is a slipway to the southern end of the Bay and two National Trust car parks.

Consultation did not identify any use for water-based recreation, however, it is thought that the slipway, in a good state of repair, is used by local small boat owners as a coastal access point.

Like many of the beaches in the study area, the beach is also used for paddling on foot and swimming during the warmer summer months.



Fig. 70: Knockinelder site map

Issues - None identified

Opportunities - None identified

Site ID	Access facility	Access type	Current usage	Facilities	Services on site	Capacity measures	Biosecurity measures	Signage (fit for purpose unless otherwise stated)
7	Shore/ beach	Public	Swimming & paddling infrequently	Parking at 2 National Trust sites	None	Limited parking	None in place	National Trust name sign Out & About on Strangford Lough
	Slipway	Public	Local boats	Picnic tables				

Fig. 71: Summary of water-based access at Knockinelder



Fig. 72: Knockinelder Bay slipway and shore access



Fig. 73: Knockinelder car parks (x2)

6.4.8 Kearney

6.4.8.1 Description of current provision and use

Owned by the National Trust, Kearney sits at the southern tip of the Ards Peninsula. In the nineteenth century Kearney was a flourishing community with fishing as the central occupation. Kearney is now a place of recreation including walking and bird watching with a cluster of whitewashed cottages.

There is a section of coastal path at Kearney with a solid grassy surface. Signposting encourages users to walk to the north and south as shown in the photos below.

It is an egress point on the East Coast Canoe Trail with shore access across the rocky foreshore beside the most northerly of the National Trust cottages. The National Trust information building is one of the unoccupied cottages.



Fig. 74: Kearney site map

Issues - Local communities at Cloughey e.g. Cloughey Development Association, are keen to see the coastal path extended from Kearney to Cloughey. This has been investigated in the past with the main barrier to development being an ability to secure landowner agreement.

Opportunities – There is an opportunity to extend the coastal path to both the north (to Cloughey) and the south (Knockinelder). The recently appointed National Coastal Officer is an asset to take this forward with the local community and Council support.

Site ID	Access facility	Access type	Current usage	Facilities	Services on site	Capacity measures	Biosecurity measures	Signage (fit for purpose unless otherwise stated)
8	Shore/ beach	Visitors to National Trust site	Canoeing and kayaking	Parking	Toilets and information in village None	None	None in place	National Trust name sign and walk signage

Fig. 75: Summary of water-based access at Kearney



Fig. 76: Kearney – shore access from coastal path



Fig. 77: Walk signage for coastal route

6.4.9 Cloughey

6.4.9.1 Description of current provision and use

The village of Cloughey is characterised by the long sandy beach and sand dune system. There is a large Council owned car park to the rear of the dunes with public toilets and picnic benches.

The northern end of the Bay provides an access point for the East Coast Canoe Trail with a short walk from the car park to the beach along a section of boardwalk.

For many years Cloughey Bay has been popular for wind surfing and water-skiing, and recently kite surfing has become more popular, especially when the wind is blowing from the south or east.

The existing boardwalk through the dunes has recently been extended (Summer 2018). The project also includes installation of a visitor counter, seating at the standing stone and installation of waymarking and a dog fouling bin. This project has received funding from Peninsula Healthy Living Partnership (PHLP), the Housing Executive, Council and the Rural Development Programme. The project is being delivered by Outdoor Recreation NI.



Fig. 78: Cloughey site map

Issues – Dog fouling is a persistent problem with one dog bin on site.

Opportunities – None identified.

Site ID	Access facility	Access type	Current usage	Facilities	Services on site	Capacity measures	Biosecurity measures	Signage (fit for purpose unless otherwise stated)
9	Shore/ beach	Public	Canoeing and kayaking Swimming Kite and windsurfing	Parking	Toilets	None	None in place	Various Council signage

Fig. 79: Summary of water-based access at Cloughey



Fig. 80: Cloughey car park and seating



Fig. 81: Cloughey shore access

6.5 Air based recreation

Air based activities include recreation in helicopters, light aircraft and microlite. Newtownards Airport is the primary location for these activities within the study area. While the airfield lies adjacent to the study area, many flights take place over the study area.

Light aircraft

The Ulster Flying Club was founded in 1961 and is now Northern Ireland's largest flying school. The Club manages the airfield's facilities and many private pilot owners base their aircraft in the several hangars on the airfield.

Facilities include an extensive runway and hangar facilities, members clubroom and Cloud 9 restaurant which is open to the public for snacks and for viewing activities at the airfield.

The airfield has previously been used for events including air display days and motorsport events such as Car Culture Live.

Microlights

N. Ireland Microlights operates from the airfield. It is primarily a flight training school but also offer recreational tours of the area. There are 3 sightseeing tours within the study area with the flight instructor acting as the tour guide -

1. Ards Peninsula Flight
2. Circumnavigation of Strangford Lough
3. Flight to the Mourne

Helicopters

Helicopter flights from Newtownards Airport are operated by Helipower. The company owns two helicopters and has the use of a third helicopter as and when required. It offers trail flight experiences, sightseeing heli-tours, helicopter charter and pilot training and testing. Flight tours include themed flights that cover Belfast, the Ards Peninsula, Game of Thrones filming locations and Titanic Belfast.

Research to date suggests that birds generally become accustomed to the movements of light aircraft with microlites and helicopters causing greater disturbance. In the past, a member of the flying club was actively interested in natural heritage and biodiversity and would relay environmental responsibility information to the club. This was particularly important in relation to overwintering birds on the mud flats near to the airfield at the northern end of the Lough. This contact is no longer a member of flying club.

Drones

Although drone flying was not included within this study within its own right, it is recognised as an activity that is growing in popularity. It is not possible to know when, where or how many users are engaged with this activity, but the potential for irresponsible use to cause disruption to wildlife, coupled with health and safety as well as liability issues, merit further attention going forwards e.g. the development of a voluntary code of conduct.

6.5.1 Summary

There are opportunities –

- To expand the offering of sightseeing tours from the sky. This would need to be demand led.
- For liaison and education with the Club regarding responsible flying in relation to wildlife disturbance.

PART 3// OPPORTUNITIES & RECOMMENDATIONS

An extensive process of consultation was carried out with individual Council Officers, national governing bodies of sport (NGB's), public and statutory agencies, public and private landowners, outdoor activity providers, community associations and members of the public (for the Comber and Newtownards DEA part of the study area) (see Appendix 1 – for a full list of consultees).

Part 3 of this report includes a synopsis of the potential opportunities and recommendations relating to the development of land, water and air based outdoor recreation that have been identified throughout the course of this study.

The opportunities and recommendations are divided into:

- Development – refers to both outdoor recreation infrastructure required to do an activity e.g. trails, canoe steps etc. and the supporting visitor services and facilities which enhance the product and tourism offering e.g. toilets/ signage
- Management – refers to the structures that are required to ensure a high quality and a consistent experience for all outdoor recreation users to the area
- Communication – refers to the wide range of communication methods required to heighten the awareness of the local population and visitors to the area of the opportunities that exist for taking part in a wide range of outdoor recreation activities.

7 DEVELOPMENT

7.1 Land based development

7.1.1 Walking

Several overarching issues became apparent throughout the consultation process -

Legislation – Without doubt the greatest barrier to delivering meaningful improvement in the opportunities for walking within the study area moving forward relates to the interpretation and implementation of N. Ireland’s Access Legislation.

It became apparent throughout the consultation process that there is a lack of consistency across the study area relating to the assertion, management and maintenance of PRowWs, permissive paths and Public Paths. Differing interpretations of the Access Order and related legislation along with differing priorities within the legacy Council areas, has resulted in a non-uniform approach to access across the study area.

There is a clear need for Councils to take a proactive and uniform approach to their duties in relation to the relevant legislation. In addition, a concerted effort is required to raise awareness and inform private landowners of the potential access arrangements that can be entered into when creating public access (e.g. permissive path agreements) and the *perception* of liability versus the *reality* that no successful liability cases have been brought in Northern Ireland in the last 20 years.

A summary of the access legislation is provided in Section 3.4.

Provision - There is a good range of over 40 formal walking routes within the study area. The majority of these are short walks i.e. not more than 5 miles in length and tend to be site based. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the majority of these are well used and popular among repeat visitors and for many people are part of their everyday lives.

However, there is a lack of medium and long-distance walking opportunities within the study area, particularly along the shore of Strangford Lough and the Irish Sea coast along the Ards Peninsula.

As the Lough is one of the main attractions within the area, the opportunity to develop a medium or long-distance walk along its shore line should be investigated. Short trails along the shore exist at Strangford village, Castle Ward Demesne, the Quoile, Delamont, Killyleagh, Castle Espie, and at the floodgates in Newtownards. Current investigations by Council into creating walk trail between the Quoile and Delamont should be supported and encouraged.

All ability walk trails - There is a lack of access to and awareness of, walking routes that are suitable for those with limited mobility. Trails at Mount Stewart, Castle Ward and Castle Espie are promoted as being suitable for those with limited mobility. It is recommended that any new walk trail developed should consider the potential to be designed and developed as an all ability trail in line with relevant criteria – see Fig. 20.

Entry charges - While many of the sites within the study area are free to access, access charges apply at the main walking hubs. This includes the National Trust properties at Castle Ward and Mount Stewart and the Council owned and managed facility at Delamont Country Park.

The admission charges to Castle Ward and Mount Stewart are perceived by some as a barrier to access, however, the Trust has stated that these are set at a rate that encourages visitors to take out annual memberships. There is an opportunity for the National Trust to attract more users into the property by creating a new entry category for those wishing to access property grounds or water from the grounds. This may encourage people to park in the car parks provided. Murlough Nature Reserve operates a £5 per car entry fee for non-members. It is recommended that this is considered for Castle Ward and Mount Stewart.

Delamont Country Park also charges for entry and offers an annual permit for £25 per year. This was not identified as a barrier to access.

Quality Walks - WalkNI provides a database of all 'Quality Walks' within the study area, however if a site has not been assessed under the Quality Walk scheme, it will not be available to view on the website www.walkNI.com. A comprehensive list of all walking opportunities is required to communicate to users all possibilities within the study area⁴⁹.

Parkrun - is a UK wide scheme to encourage increased activity levels and participation.

Over the past 3 years, 'Parkwalk' has been developed by ORNI. In England, National Trust properties waive admission fees for those participating in Parkrun to encourage participation.

There are opportunities for both Parkrun and Parkwalk to be developed within the study area at sites such as Castle Ward Demesne, Delamont and Mount Stewart. These could be developed either by the local community or site managers. However, community involvement is essential as events are largely run by volunteers. Consideration could also be given to a waiver of admission charges for participants taking part in these events.

Further information can be obtained from –

<http://www.parkrun.org.uk> OR

<http://www.walkinginyourcommunity.com/news/42504/walk-parkrun-northern-ireland/>

7.1.1.1 Community Trails

A range of relevant studies have been completed over the last 4 years that relate to the development of community trails within the study area, in addition a review of community trails within Newtownards and Comber DEA's was completed as part of this study.

Relevant opportunities from the following reports are set out below by settlement.

- Downpatrick Community Trail Plan (2017)
- Rowallane Community Trail Plan (2017)
- Slieve Croob Community Trail Plan (2017)
- Ards Community Trail Plan (2014)
- Kilclief and Strangford Coastal Walk Trail (2016)

It should be noted that these trails have been identified through consultation as 'opportunities'. The recommendation for these trails is that further investigation takes place to assess if they are feasible and have the potential to be developed as sustainable community trails.

⁴⁹ Outdoor Recreation is reviewing the Quality Walk Scheme and therefore the content of www.walkNI.com in 2018.

Downpatrick, Rowallane and Slieve Croob DEA – Community Trail Plan

Settlement	Opportunities
Ardglass	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Extend the Lecale Way from St Patrick's Well to Phennick Point and along the bay into Ardglass and Sheepland Road to form a circular loop - Proposed greenway along the former railway line as an off-road, multi-use route between Ardglass and Killough - Coast walk from Coney Island to Railway Bridge at Tulycarnan - St Patrick's Loop Trails – Coney Island 'Island Walk' - Footpath extension to connect to Downpatrick Road footpath - Footpath extension from Ardtole Cottage on Strangford Road to Sheepland Road - Perimeter walk of playing fields
Ballyalton, Saul and Raholp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adapt horse riding route around Lough Money - St Patrick's looped trails – Slieve Patrick and Lough Money - Castle Island to Slaney (partially on private land) - Improve the condition and re-open blocked asserted PRow's
Ballyhornan and Chapeltown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Connection from Tullyronan to Killard Drive (and then onto Lecale Way) - Maintenance of network of paths around Ballyhornan Banks walk - Development of trail head at Ballyhornan Beach - Develop access to Killard Point from Ballyhornan beach - Chapeltown looped walk (starting at St Mary's Church) - Linkage between Ringawaddy Estate to Ballyhornan, footpath required - Chapeltown footpath from school to village centre - Chapeltown footpath to Ardtole
Downpatrick	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proposed Greenway along the former railway line from Downpatrick to Hollymount - Development of a multi-use trail system within Hollymount Forest (including water access to the Quoile River for paddlers) - Trail from Ballymote Health & Wellbeing Centre to Downpatrick - Trail from Ballymote Health & Well Being Centre to Sampson's Lane - The Demesne – Investigate access points linking housing development to Sampson's Lane - Circular route from Flying Horse to Sampson's Lane - Footpaths and boardwalks around Mound of Down as featured in the Downpatrick Masterplan (2011) - Improved access from Roughal Park to the Quoile River walk along Jane's Shore - Starting point of Lecale Way located in English Street in Downpatrick - Steam Boat Quay to Castle Island Bird Hide - Quoile walk extend to Delamont Country Park
Kilclief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kilclief and Strangford Coastal Walk Trail⁵⁰ - Kilclief to Strangford Cycleway - Glebe Road to Caravan Park

⁵⁰ A separate piece of work was completed by ORNI to consider the feasibility of this walk trail. Further information is contained below.

Killough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proposed Greenways – From Killough (Station Road) to Ardglass via Coney Island - Lecale Way – Maintenance of boardwalks and pathways at Castle Park
Strangford	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kilclief and Strangford Coastal Walk⁵¹ - Kilclief to Strangford Cycleway - Alleged right of way – School Road from Ballyculter to connect Ballyculter and Strangford avoiding the main A25 Castle Ward Road - St Patrick’s Loop Walk
Ballykinler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Upgrade (where required) and signpost routes used by local community including beach and shoreline and permissive path through the barracks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Including new trail linking Tyrella Road and Ballyrolly Road - Mourne & Strangford Lough Coastal Path - Proposed Greenway from Newcastle to Downpatrick would connect Ballykinler with Dundrum and Downpatrick - Beach Loop – only when the ranges are inactive, seals are not pupping or molting and tide is out
Loughinisland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Investigate alleged PRoW’s connecting village to services/ facilities including main Newcastle Rd, Loughinisland GAC.
Killyleagh & Shrigley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - St. Patrick’s Loop Walk – Investigate alleged public right of way from Downpatrick Road joining Coily Hill Road - Investigate river walk from Shrigley Road into Shrigley Wood across designated amenity land - Dibney River Walk – investigate extension along the land owned by Parish Church connecting to Shore Street in Killyleagh.

Fig. 82: Downpatrick and Slieve Croob DEA - opportunities from Community Trail Plan

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

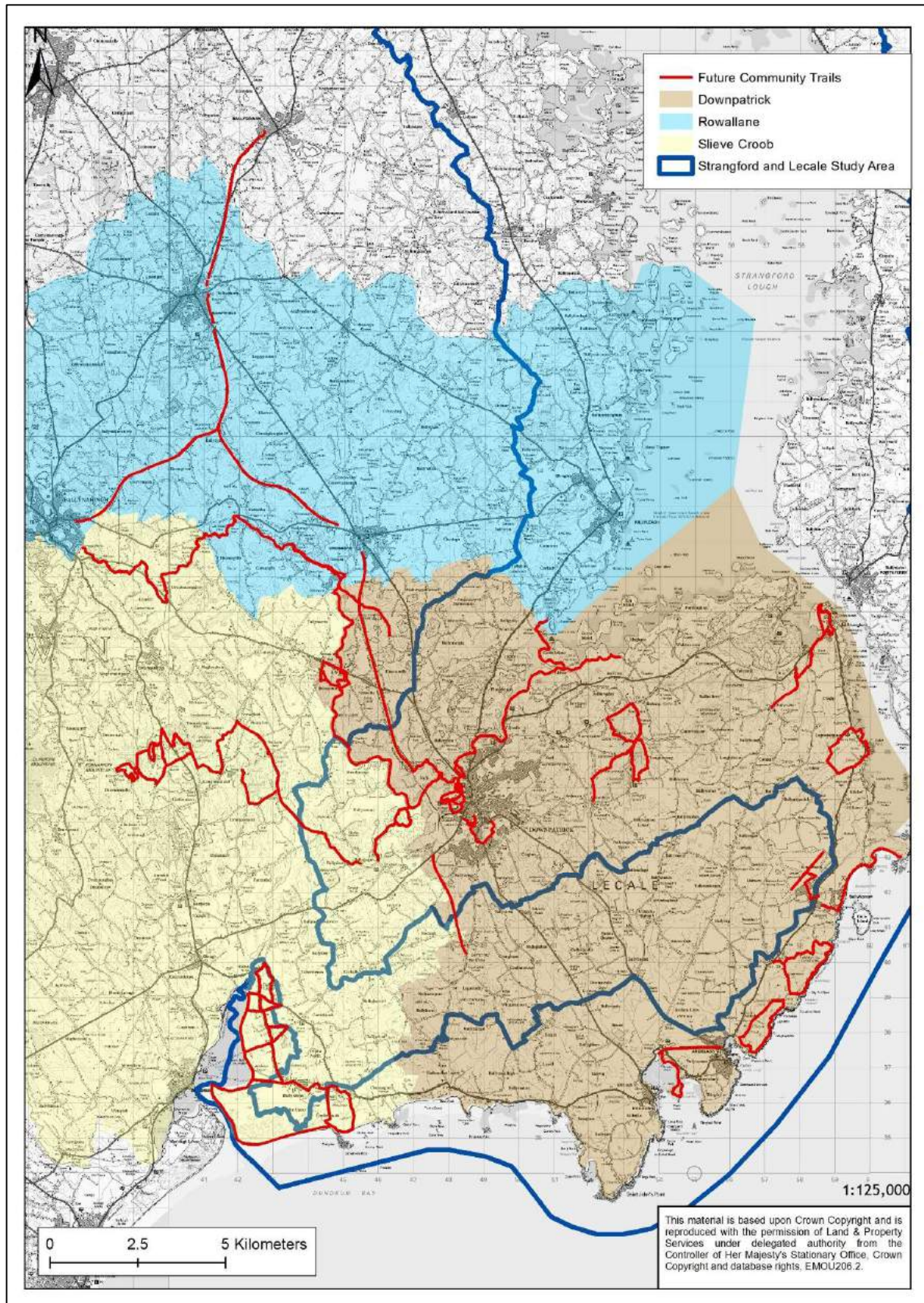


Fig. 83: Map of potential community trails – Downpatrick, Rowallane and Slieve Croob DEA

Newtownards and Comber DEA's – Community Trail Plan

Settlement	Opportunity
Lisbane	Creation an off-road looped walk from the village centre, taking in local woodland and some small fishing loughs, (all assumed to be in private ownership). Sections of this route are currently walked by locals with or without landowner permission.
Comber	Extension of Comber Greenway to Strangford Lough – (see Greenways 7.1.1.4) Link Island Hill to the Floodgates walk in Newtownards to create a linear coastal walk as discussed in Newtownards section below.
Killinchy	No opportunities identified.
Newtownards	<p>Extension of the Floodgates walk along the flood embankment to link with Island Hill, a Council recreation site on the coastline outside Comber. Whilst this walk would be desirable, its development potential is unknown due to the land along the Loughshore being privately owned.</p> <p>Whitespots Country Park⁵² – it is recommended that a Masterplan is completed for the Park to consider current provision and make recommendations for the improvement of facilities including trails within the park, links to other walk trails, toilets, parking, visitor information and management of users.</p> <p>Developing a community trail network in the Country Park as it currently stands is not recommended due to management issues regarding different user groups, including scramblers.</p>

Fig. 84: Newtownards & Comber DEA's - opportunities from Community Trail Plan

⁵² Although not within the study area, Whitespots Country Park was identified through consultation as an opportunity so is included here for completeness.

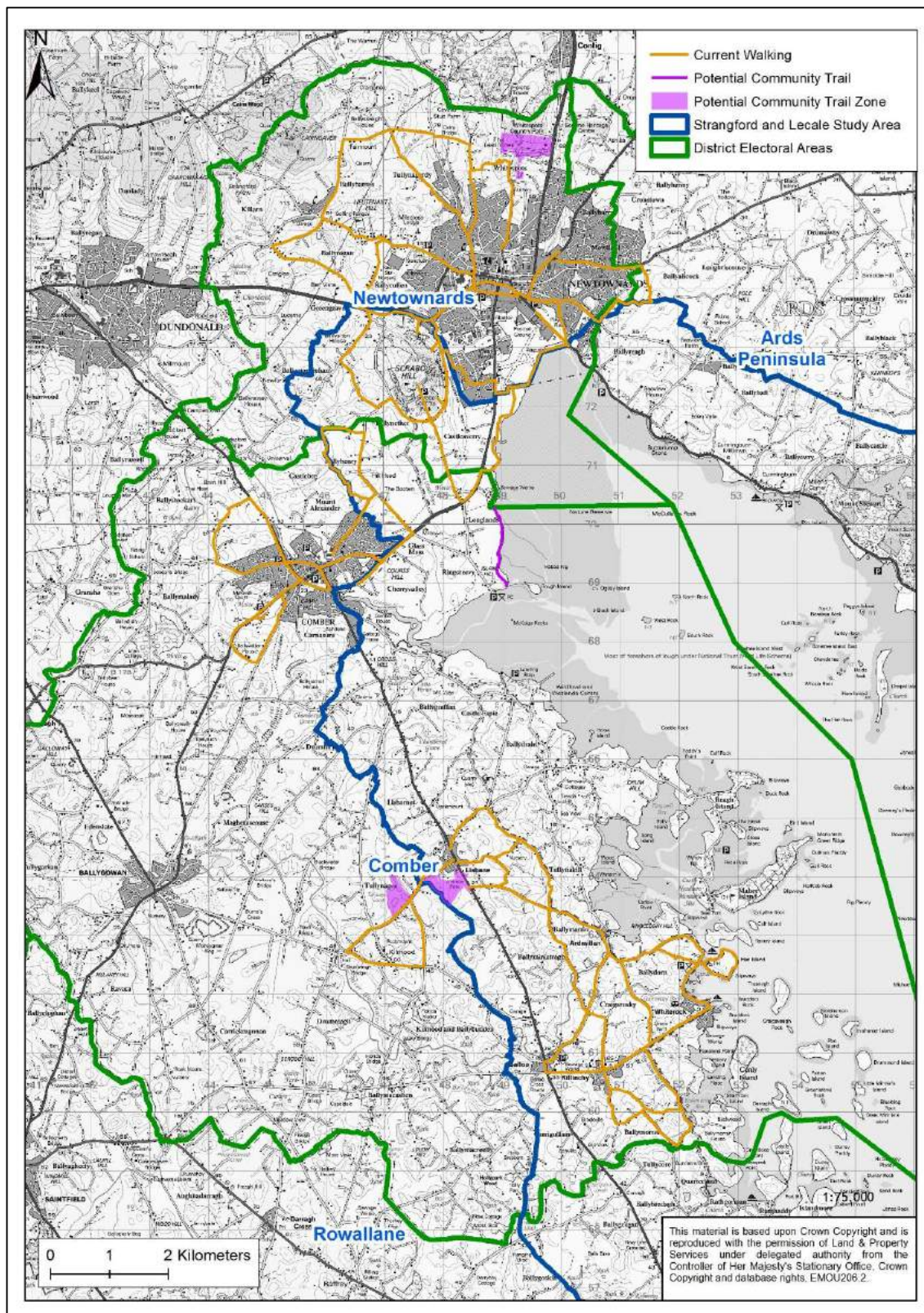


Fig. 85: Potential community trails – Newtownards and Comber DEA's

Ards Community Trail Plan (2015)

Settlement	Opportunity/ recommendation
Carrowdore	Blanes Lane
Greyabbey	Skillins Point Wood Islandview Plantation
Kircubbin	Monaghan Bank
Portavogie	The Quays Trail

A review of above proposed trails will take place in 2018.⁵³

Kilclief and Strangford Coastal Walk Trail (2016)

The report recommended that priority should be given to developing a foot/cycle path on the land side of the A2 Shore Road. This option has the potential to create of an off-road coastal path with excellent views from the designated Motte. However, agreement with private landowners and road crossings will be crucial.

7.1.1.2 Mourn and Strangford Lough Coastal walking path technical and feasibility study (2015)

It is recommended that a Green Book Economic Appraisal is completed to consider as a minimum 2 options –

- Development of the entire route in its entirety
- Development through a phased approach - The route was divided into sections and these were highlighted as being 'priority', 'most achievable', 'most difficult' and those being suitable for 'community-based walking'.

General development recommendations include -

1. Extension of the coastal path:

It is recommended that the coastal path is extended:

- a. North to connect into the North Down Coastal Path
- b. South to Newry to connect with the Greenway
- c. Around the inner loop of Strangford Lough

These extensions will require further work to identify the actual potential route.

2. Revision of the current official start/finish points.

It is recommended that the start/finish point for the 80-mile route is extended to:

- a. Burr Point, Ballyhalbert

3. Creation of connections between the Mourne Coastal Driving Route and the Coastal Path.

It is recommended that the MCDR and the proposed coastal walking route are considered synonymous with each other with visitors being able to access the coastal path from the driving route. This could be achieved through branded signage, the creation of new sites or adaptation of existing sites as official access points/nodes.

4. Promotion of the path as suitable to be walked in both directions.

It is recommended that the walking path is promoted as being suitable to be walked in both directions. Walking in both directions provides a very different experience for the walkers in terms of

⁵³ PHLP has appointed ORNI to complete a review of these trails in 2018.

what they see e.g. walking from Newcastle to Tyrella, walkers do not experience the breath-taking view of the Mournes while walking south to north along the same stretch, walkers do not experience the view of St John's Point and Lighthouse.

5. Promote the path as suitable for walking only.

It is recommended that the path is developed and promoted for walking only, but that reference is made in any promotional literature to sections that can be cycled.

The audits identified that it would not be possible to sustainably develop a coastal path accommodating both walkers and off-road cyclists. A multi-use walk and cycle path has to be built with specific characteristics which the coastal zone cannot accommodate, i.e. maximum gradient of 8%, 20m lines of sight, minimum of 1m wide, sealed and stable surface⁵⁴. However, there is a demand for cycling on certain sections, e.g. Greencastle – Cranfield where there is a ready-made market of users, the majority being families from the caravan sites.

6. Immediate commencement of pre-development phase environmental assessments.

It is recommended that work is started as soon as possible on:

- a. A Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) for the full route
- b. A coastal erosion study for the full route
- c. Planning applications for eligible structures e.g. bridges.
- d. Formal consultation with NED to seek consent for route

Without the above studies and permissions, the project is not likely to proceed.

Recommended development approach

It is recommended that a phased approach is taken with walking 'hubs' developed as a priority followed by the development of linear coastal path stretches in areas of high beauty or interest and then stitched together to create one continuous, coastal path.

Three phases are proposed:

1. Phase 1 – Develop walking hubs (see Fig. 86) as priority, including
 - a. Key linear, coastal path sections linked to hubs
 - b. Looped walks feeding off the coastal path around hubs
 - c. Connections between coastal path and Mourne Coastal Driving Route
 - d. Maintain/reinstate/enhance existing walks
 - e. Develop experiences/attractions/viewpoints
 - f. Encourage business development

⁵⁴ Definition of category 3 multi-use trail taken from 'Principles and Standards for Trail Development in NI'; p.43

Hub	Visitor walking hub opportunity	Business development opportunities & themes
Strangford & Portaferry	The development and promotion of this joint visitor walking hub has the potential to become a key tourism demand generator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lead theme - food - Secondary theme - nature - Development of a Castle Trail - Arts and craft
Ardglass & Killough	With the development of experiences and promotion of the area, Ardglass could represent a reasonable opportunity to develop as a walking hub.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maritime heritage with links to food theme - Limited business development opportunities including guided harbour tours and boat trips
Dundrum	If developed and promoted as a walking hub, there are significant tourism benefits for Dundrum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lead theme – food - Secondary theme – nature

Fig. 86: Mourne & Strangford Lough costal walking path - hubs, opportunities and themes

2. Phase 2 – Develop linear stretches in areas of beauty, high interest and/or secondary ‘hubs’
 - a. Annalong
 - b. Ardglass - Killough
 - c. Greencastle – Cranfield
3. Phase 3 – Stitch the above together to create one long-distance coastal path.

Fig. 87 sets out the proposed phased development approach for the Mourne & Strangford Lough Coastal Walking Path. It should be noted that strategic value is assessed in terms of the tourism value and economic return.

Phase	Hub	Sec	Name	Length (kms)	Strategic value	Difficulty to develop	Site development opportunities? ⁵⁵	Community/ tourism
1	Strategic link section	6	Bloody Bridge – Newcastle	5.1	High	High – Mountain-related topography and access constraints		Both
	Dundrum	7	Newcastle – Dundrum	10.7	High	Low – Uses high % of existing paths		Both
	Portaferry/ Strangford	15	Kilclief – Strangford	5.3	High	High – Access & topography constraints	Site 27. Cloughey Rocks	Both
	PHASE 1 TOTAL			21.1kms				
2	Greencastle/Cranfield	1	Greencastle – Cranfield	2.8	Medium	Low – majority existing PRoW and beach	Site 1. Pier Road	Both
	Annalong	4	Ballymartin – Annalong	5.4	Medium	Low – majority on beach	Site 11. Annalong Harbour Site 12. Springwell Port	Both
	Annalong	5	Annalong – Bloody Bridge	8.2	Medium	High – topography constraint		Both
	Dundrum	8	Dundrum – Ballykinler	8.5	Medium	Medium – high cost due to length of new build required		Both
	Killough / Ardglass	12	Killough – Ardglass	5.1	Medium	Medium – involves bridge crossing	Site 21. Quay Lane	Both
	Killough Ardglass	13	Ardglass – Ballyhornan	8.3	Medium	Low – majority uses Lecale Way	Site 22. Ardglass Marina Site 23. Phennick Point Site 24. Ardtale Church	Both

	Portaferry/ Strangford	16	Portaferry – Ballyquintin	8.5	Low	Medium – Access negotiation will be difficult	Site 28. Portaferry village Site 29. Ballyquintin NNR	Both
	PHASE 2 TOTAL		46.8kms					
3	Link section	2	Cranfield – Kilkeel	8.3	Low	Low – Majority on beach	Site 2. Slate Mill Road Site 3. Nicholson’s Point Site 5. Kilkeel Marine Park	Both
	Link section	3	Kilkeel – Ballymartin	4.5	Low	Medium – due to access physical constraints at Harbour	Site 6. Nautilus Centre Site 7. Moor Road Site 8. Wrack Road	Community
	Link section	9	Ballykinler – Tyrella Beach	5.6	Low	Low – Majority on beach		Community
	Link section	10	Tyrella Beach – Ringavaddy	5.6	Low	Medium – Topography and access constraints	Site 19. Ringavaddy	Community
	Link section	11	Ringavaddy – Killough	8	Low	Medium – Topography and access constraints	Site 20. St John’s Point	Community
	Link section	14	Ballyhornan – Kilclief	6.4	Low	Low – High percentage on private land	Site 26. Ballyhornan Beach Site 26. Kilclief Beach	Community
	Link section	17	Ballyquintin – Kearney	9.6	Low	High – Topography and access constraints	Site 31. Kearney Beach Site 32. Kearney village	Both

	Link section	18	Kearney – Cloughey	7.1	Low	Site 33. Cloughey Beach	Community
	Link section	19	Cloughey – Portavogie	3.5	Low		Community
	Link section	20	Portavogie – Burr Point	4.8	Low		Community
	PHASE 3 TOTAL			63.4 kms			
	GRAND TOTAL			131 kms			

Fig. 87: Mourne & Strangford Lough Coastal Path - phased development approach

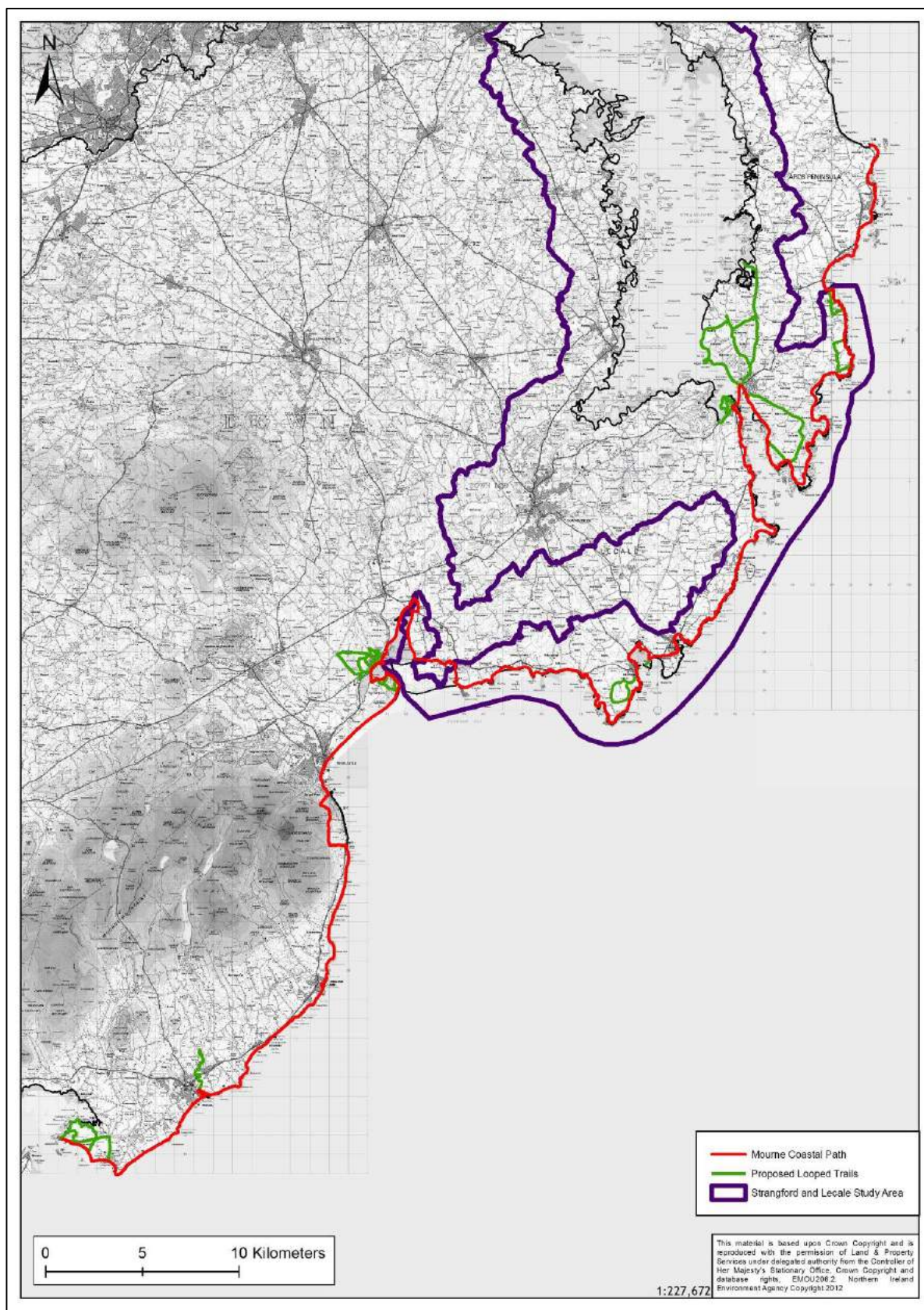


Fig. 88: Map of proposed Mourne Coastal Path

7.1.1.3 Ulster Way

As shown in Fig. 21, in relation to the study area, the Ulster Way currently includes –

- A 'Quality' section on the North Down Coast ending at Groomsport
- A 'Link' section along the eastern coastline of the Ards Peninsula to Cloughey which then leads inland to reach the eastern shore of Strangford Lough at Marlfield, before continuing south to Portaferry.
- Ferry crossing (Portaferry to Strangford)
- A 'Quality' section from Strangford via the Black Causeway Road to Kilclief, then following the coast using on and off-road sections to reach Dundrum, (part of the Lecale Way).

Following the review completed in section 6.2.1.7, recommendations in relation to improvement of the Ulster Way relate to the following areas –

Improvement of the link section Groomsport to Portaferry through-

- Liaison with ANDBC regarding design proposals for the Greenway between Kinnegar and Donaghadee
- Completion of a Feasibility Study for the section between Donaghadee and Burr Point (this is the only section that has not had a study of this type completed).
- The development of a coastal walking path between Burr Point and Ballyquinton as a priority. It is of note that the Mourne & Strangford Lough Coastal Walking Path identifies that the sections between Ballyquinton and Burr Point are of low strategic value, see Fig. 87, in relation to the overall coastal path. However, in terms of improving the Ulster Way this section is strategically important.
- Close liaison with the National Trust Coastal Officer regarding the potential route particularly the inclusion of Orlock Point, Kearney and Ballyquinton.

Improvement of the quality section from Strangford to Dundrum through –

- This is based on the recommendations of the Mourne & Strangford Lough Coastal Walking Path report. Improvements include taking more of the route off road to include more of the coastline. For example utilising the MOD land at Ballykinlar, securing access to private land around St Johns Point, inclusion of Killard NNR and Tyrella beach.

The enhancement of the Ulster Way would greatly improve the walking offer and visitor experience within the area.

Whilst the enhancement of the Ulster Way is put forward as a recommendation, it is not identified as a high priority action within this report. Development opportunities are shown in Fig. 89.

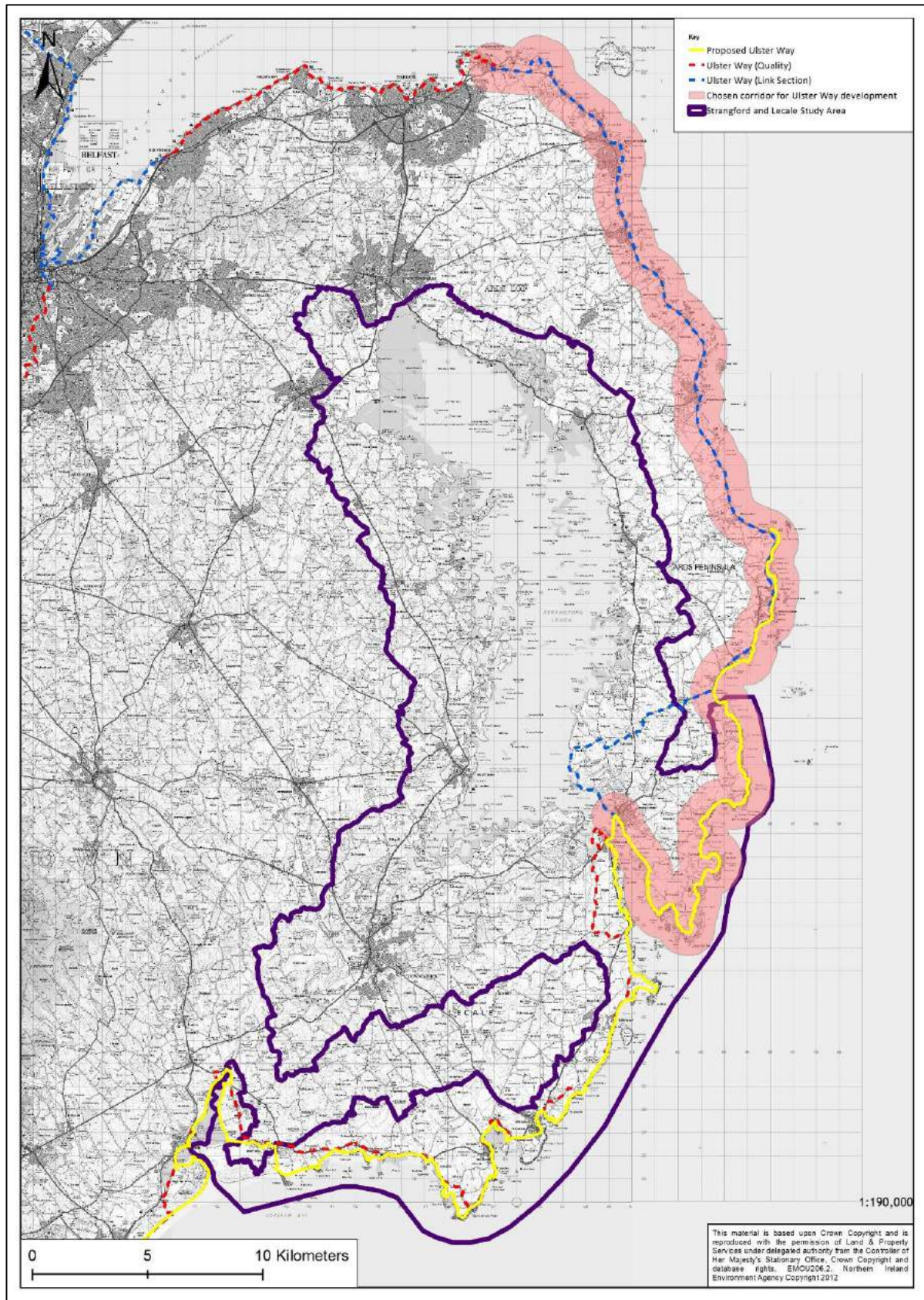


Fig. 89: Map of Ulster Way development opportunities

7.1.1.4 Greenways

Both Councils within the study area are taking an active lead in the development of Greenways. This approach should be fully supported in terms of the 6 potential routes being taken forward.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council –

- Downpatrick to Comber
- Downpatrick to Newcastle
- Downpatrick to Ardglass

Ards and North Down Borough Council –

- Comber to Newtownards
- Kinnegar to Donaghadee
- Newtownards to Helen's Bay

7.1.1.5 Green Lanes

To identify green lanes, SLLP staff proposed 4 zones within the study area for consideration. Green lanes were mapped according to the criteria below and are highlighted in Fig. 91 to Fig. 93.

- The lane is not a dead end
- The lane does not pass *through* farm yards or private property, lanes that pass by private property have been included.
- They are suitable for use by pedestrians

Green lane routes could provide a range of walking opportunities and would generally be suitable for local people.

It is recommended that these routes should be investigated to form part of the Community Trail Plan for each DEA and as such be developed through a similar approach including seeking landowner permission where the lane crosses private land and the design and installation of sensitive signage and waymarking (only where appropriate), using local names including townlands etc.

7.1.1.6 Quiet Lanes

To identify quiet lanes, SLLP staff proposed 4 zones within the study area for consideration. Quiet lanes were mapped according to the criteria below and are highlighted in Fig. 91 to Fig. 93.

- The lane receives relatively light vehicular usage defined as -
 - not being an arterial route
 - not radiating from or linking settlements
 - not being part of a promoted driving route or leading to a visitor attraction
- They are suitable for use by pedestrians and cyclists

Quiet lane routes could provide opportunities for walking and cycling and would generally be suitable for local people.

Quiet lanes should be investigated to form part of the Community Trail Plan for each DEA, only where the quiet lane has grass growing up the middle. Where the surface of the quiet lane is fully tarmacked, they route would be classified as on road, and community trails should be 70% off road or greater.

The opportunity exists to liaise with the Department for Infrastructure regarding the development of Quiet Lanes, that have lower speed limits and provide opportunities for walking and cycling. Please

see Appendix 4 for objectives and frequently asked questions regarding the designation of English Quiet Lanes.



Fig. 90: Map of Ringhaddy green lane and quiet lane network



Fig. 91: Map of Portaferry North green lane and quiet lane network

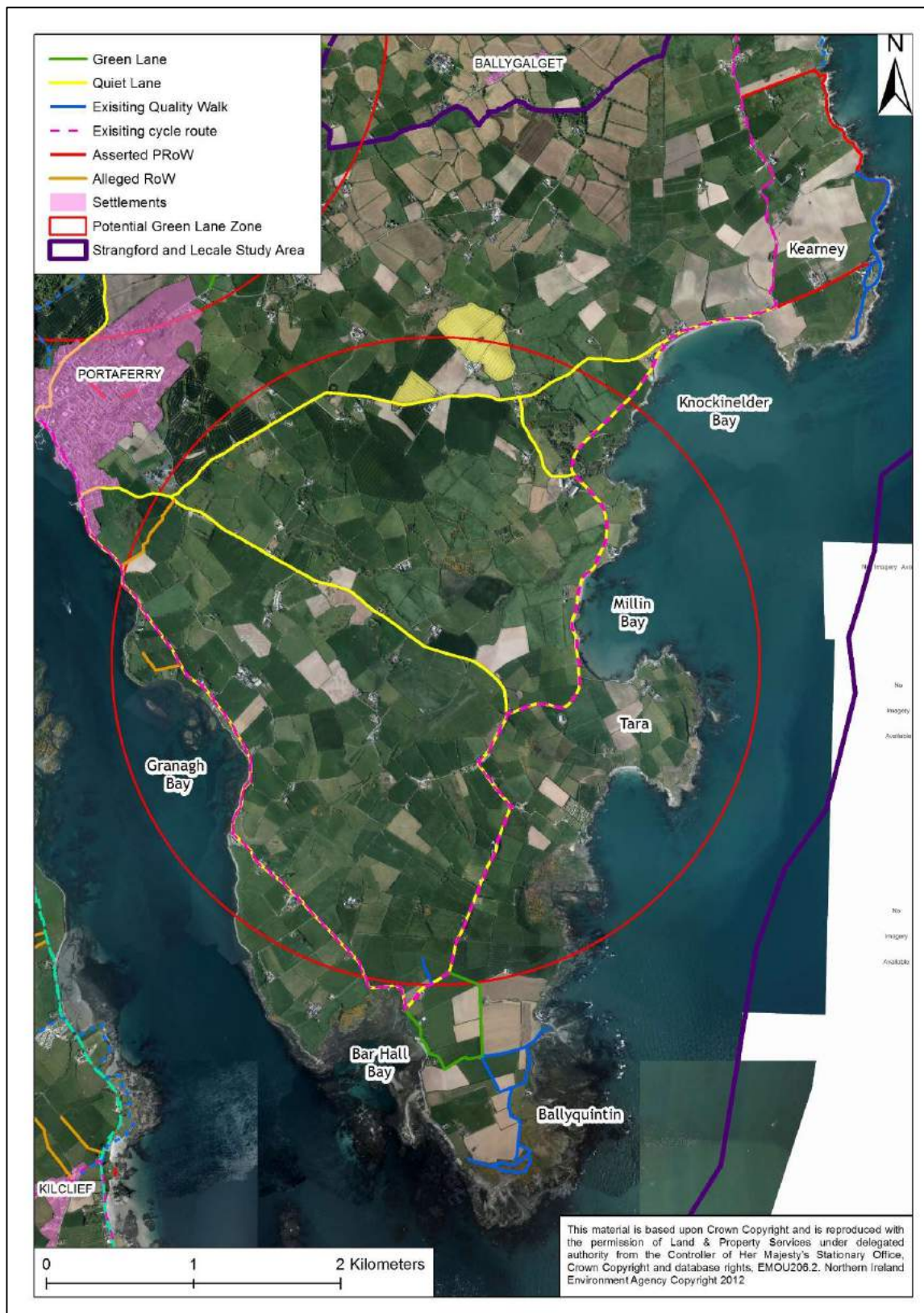


Fig. 92: Map of Portaferry South green lane and quiet lane network

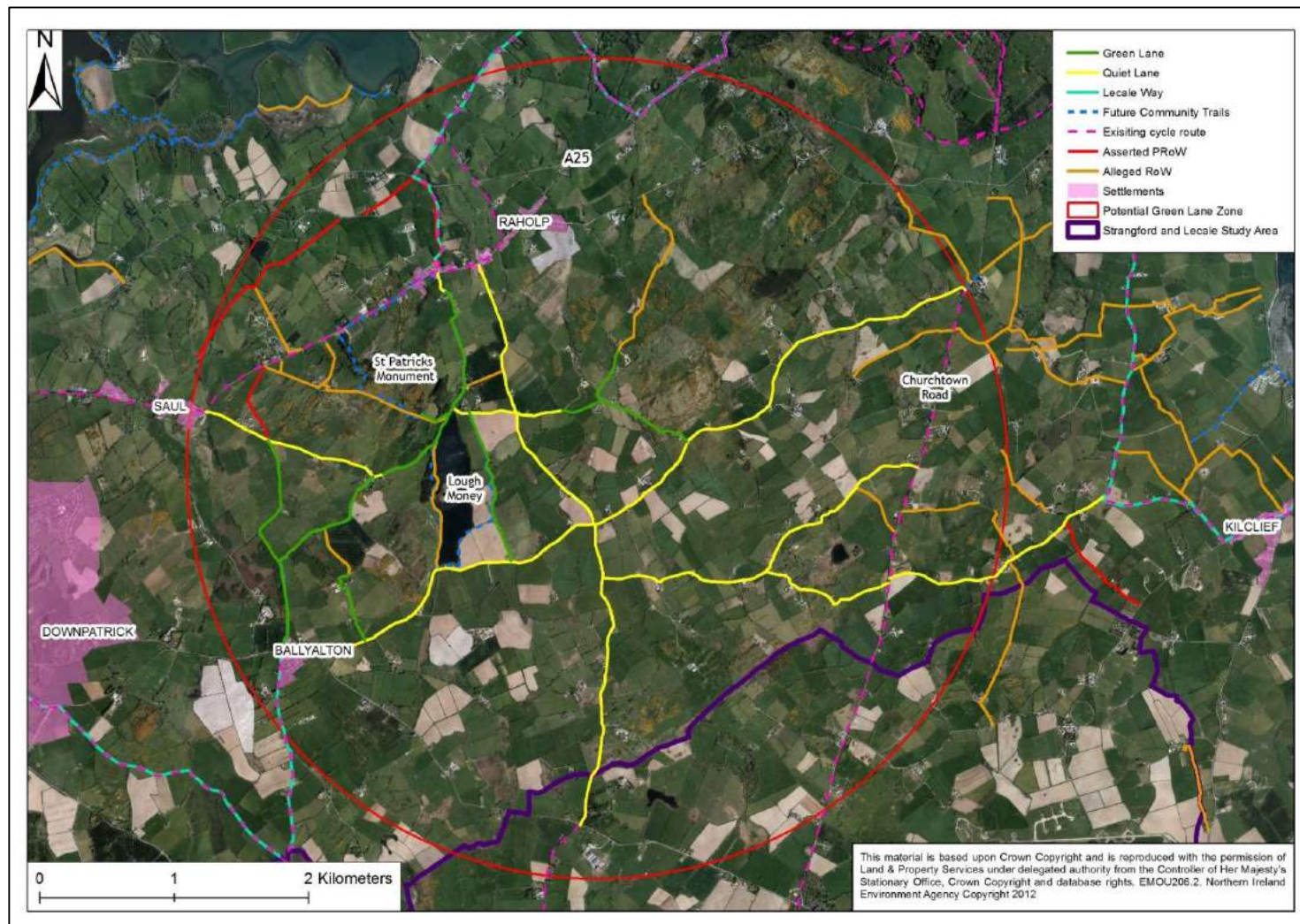


Fig. 93: Map of Kilclief West green lane and quiet lane network

7.1.2 Cycling

7.1.2.1 Road cycling

Road cycling is extremely popular within the study area. This has led to conflict between motorists and cyclists, particularly with regular club runs when large groups of cyclists are often on busy roads.

For this reason, it is recommended that no additional promotion of road cycling takes place within the study area. e.g. signing of routes on the ground or promotion of routes (without road signage) online.

In addition, it is recommended that the non NCN routes currently being promoted through platforms such as www.cycleni.com are reviewed. These may now be out of date in terms of the information provided and in terms of the suitability of the routes for cycling.

7.1.2.2 Off-road cycling

There is an opportunity to improve off road cycling provision within the study area, particularly for family cycling.

It is recommended that the development of off road family cycling is considered at –

- Delamont Country Park
- Hollymount Forest
- Mount Stewart

Trails should be designed and constructed to meet the specification of a Category 1 – Yellow Grade off road cycling trail⁵⁶, although consideration should be given to the development of multi-use trails where possible. Category 1 trail means that trails are suitable for – any cyclist using any type of bicycle regardless of their ability or experience. This includes family/ leisure cyclists of all abilities including bikes with child seats, tag alongs, trainers and training wheels. Key attributes of a Category 1 trail are contained in Appendix 4.

7.1.3 Horse riding

When new off-road trails are developed consideration should be given to the inclusion of horse riding *only where there is a clear demand*. This may include trails within sites, or linear trails such as Public Rights of Way or Permissive Paths.

The inclusion of horse riding on trails with other users, does increase development costs and leads to increased levels of management, to ensure user conflict is kept to a minimum. This relates to not only the trails but also visitor facilities such as car parking. While this should not be used as a reason to not improve horse riding provision, a clear demand must be identified to justify the additional management and cost.

7.1.4 Orienteering

It is recommended that –

- Further discussion takes place with the N. Ireland Orienteering Association (NIOA) to confirm if there are sites that could be enhanced. e.g. permanent course at Tyrella.
- Course mapping takes place for the permanent course at Delamont Country Park.

⁵⁶ Principles and standards for trail development in N. Ireland, ORNI, 2012.

7.2 Water based recreation

Consultation for this study, combined with findings of previous relevant studies and feasibility reports has informed the following opportunities and recommendations.

7.2.1 Cruising on the Lough

Throughout consultation there has been a consensus that there is an opportunity to attract more cruisers to the Lough. In addition, both Portaferry and Strangford Marina's have plans to increase the number of berths particularly for visitor moorings, highlighting that there is a demand.

While there are challenges relating to navigation and tides, there is no doubt that firstly physical infrastructure and secondly access to landing places could be improved throughout the Lough to attract more cruisers.

Potential development of physical infrastructure for the cruising market outlined in this report includes –

- Killyleagh Quay
- Kircubbin Quay
- Extension of public pontoons in Portaferry Marina
- Extension of public pontoons in Strangford Marina

Substantial levels of investment would be required to implement this programme of infrastructure works. Lower investment options would include the development of a visitor mooring scheme within the Lough. Case studies below provide some useful information on this type of scheme from within in the UK and Ireland.

7.2.1.1 Case Study – Visitor Mooring Scheme

The Irish Cruising Club East and North Coasts of Ireland Sailing Notes 12th Edition⁵⁷, references opportunities for shoreside infrastructure, however a visitor mooring scheme would also provide a lower cost intervention to help attract visiting yachts.

A similar model was launched by Waterways Ireland on Lough Erne in 2016. 18 locations across Upper and Lower Lough Erne were installed with yellow mooring buoys that are permanently attached by chain to an anchor point on the lake bed, to which a boat may tie up as an alternative to mooring at a jetty or deploying an anchor.

The locations were chosen to provide safe, sheltered moorings in quiet locations that that will interest boaters with no negative impact or disturbance to bird, fish or mammal species or their habitat. These locations are not intended to give the boater egress to the land, but to provide a safe mooring opportunity away from other waterway users and offering a more intimate connection to nature, which some boaters are seeking. Waterways Ireland paid particular attention to the provision of safe navigation and a safe mooring in a range of water depths and wind directions and the avoidance of overhead electric wires (for craft under sail).

A similar system of visitor moorings is also evident throughout anchorages and mooring areas in western Scotland and the Hebrides. They are provided by a combination of private, public and voluntary sector organisations often for a small charge. An in-depth listing of these opportunities is provided in the annual publication of 'Welcome Anchorages'. The image below is an excerpt from the publication. Carrick Castle is a remote site located on the west shore of Loch Goil on the Cowal peninsula in Argyll and Bute, Scotland.


Two visitor moorings (ideated by blue v symbol) are managed by Carrick Castle Boat Club, a not-for-profit organisation.

⁵⁷ Revised and reprinted with amendments in 2018

WELCOME ANCHORAGES

CLYDE - COWAL

CARRICK CASTLE



To Lochgoilhead

2 x 15 tons

Castle

Footpath to Ardentinny

Yachts and other boats up to 15 tonnes visiting Carrick Castle can use the 2 blue visitors' mooring buoys with yellow pick-up buoys with stops, one cable north of the castle, which are serviced annually.

The visitor's mooring charge is £10 per day/night that can be paid for by using PayPal at www.pay-mooring.co.uk. There is a free Wi-Fi available at the moorings or if you have no computer on board pay within 14 days of use from home, or use the CCBC box by the Carrick Castle notice board behind the castle.

There is lots of information on the Carrick Castle Boat Club website, including directions for and photographs of eight local walks, and a lot more besides. You can access this information by Wi-Fi from your boat.

Carrick Castle Boat Club
Contact for visiting yachts:
Jim Graham, Moorings Officer
Tel: 01301 703709
Email: moorings@carrick-castle-boat-club.co.uk
Website: www.carrick-castle-boat-club.co.uk




Fig. 94: Excerpt from Welcome Anchorages



Fig. 95: Blue visitor moorings at Carrick Castle

7.2.1.2 Recommendation

Given the lack of research to identify if there is current or latent demand, it is recommended that market analysis is completed to identify the potential of Strangford Lough as a cruising destination. It may be more beneficial to conduct this NI wide as Strangford Lough may be only one of several destinations that a cruiser may interact with as part of a trip. This should consider not only the demand, but the type of infrastructure that cruisers require. For example, a berth in a marina/ pontoon or quay i.e. with access to land or somewhere to simply moor for the night i.e. without access to the shore and associated facilities.

In addition to this study it is recommended that –

- A visitor mooring scheme is introduced for Strangford Lough. This should be suitably researched and licensed and consider current visitor mooring schemes at Sailing Clubs.
- In addition, an attempt to improve access to current landing places is recommended. This would involve negotiation with key sailing and yacht Clubs around the Lough, some of which have permit schemes in place.

7.2.2 Canoe Trails

The study area covers Strangford Lough Canoe Trail in its entirety and parts of both the East Coast and South East Coast Canoe Trails. During the site visits, all the canoe trail access points were visited. It was noted that many of the Strangford Lough Canoe Trail panels are in a poor state of repair, missing or ineligible. Only panels at Castle Ward, Delamont and Salt Island are useable. The East and South East Coast Canoe Trails do not have panels at the official access points.



Fig. 96: Canoe Trail panel at Kircubbin

In addition, consultation with DAERA and Allen and Mellon Environmental Ecological Consultants suggested that the message communicated to users through the guide and panels, does not reflect the sensitivities associated with paddling on the Lough. E.g. landing on some islands may disturb species.

7.2.2.1 Recommendation

The Strangford Lough Canoe Trail was established over 10 years ago and the East and South East Coast Canoe Trails were established over 5 years ago. Therefore, a review of the trails is recommended. This should consider-

- Access/ egress points and if these are still the most suitable points to promote
- Environmental messages for users and the need for these messages to be reviewed/ updated annually (as required) to reflect the transient nature of species.

In addition, the information panels on the Strangford Lough Canoe Trail were installed before online information was so readily available, the approach taken now is only to install panels where essential. Observation and consultation throughout the course of this study highlighted that there is a proliferation of signs around the Lough. Therefore, it is recommended that all canoe trail panels are removed by the responsible organisation.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ When the Canoe Trail panels were installed, management agreements were signed with all relevant landowners.

7.2.3 Water taxi

A water taxi, also known as a sightseeing boat, is a watercraft used to provide public or private transport on water and is usually confined to a boat operating on demand rather than on a schedule.

Many consultees stated that there is a strong demand for a service of this type for visitors to the Lough and a private sector operator expressed a keen interest in taking this forward.

In addition, The Marine and Inland Waters Recreational Tourism Programme for Armagh and Down, although almost 5 years out of date, recommended '*The encouragement of 'Seafari' type wildlife/ adventure trips operating out of Portaferry and Strangford.*'⁵⁹

The main limitations to this at present are the lack of accessible access points around the Lough where visitors could get on and off the boat. i.e. sites that are not severely restricted by tides. However, implementation of the proposed site-based recommendations along with consultation to agree use of certain sites, could lead to a range of accessible points with facilities and places of interest for visitors.

This could include –

- Portaferry
- Strangford
- Castle Ward
- Whiterock – through agreement with Down Cruising Club and/ or Strangford Lough Yacht Club. Both clubs were open to the idea of working through agreement to enable managed access for a water taxi.
- Killyleagh
- Ardglass

7.2.3.1 Recommendation

It is recommended that the development of a water taxi on the Lough is proactively taken forward.

The recommendations contained within this report make the prospect of a water taxi more feasible, due to greater accessibility at more stages of the tide. It is hoped that with this in place, the private sector will avail of this development opportunity.

7.2.4 Quays

Many traditional quays are constructed in the vernacular fashion - vertical slabs of shale without grout. This construction method is negated if the top surface is airtight. Consultation has identified several places where quays are deteriorating and in need of urgent expert repair to ensure their preservation. In addition, many of these quays are Scheduled Monuments.

As many are in private ownership they are not necessarily publicly accessible.

7.2.4.1 Recommendation

It is recommended that a survey is undertaken regarding the location and condition of historic quays in addition to costing the works required to stabilise these. This should relate only to those quays

⁵⁹ A strategy and action plan for marine water sports and beach development in the Armagh and Down Tourism Region 2008-2013, Armagh and Down Regional Tourism Partnership, Programme Summary, April 2008, pp. 67

where public access is in place or likely to be put in place in the short term i.e. within the next 5 years.

7.2.5 Site based water recreation development opportunities

During the study, each site was assessed for development opportunities. The table below provides a list of preliminary recommendations for the development of site-based water-recreation to the Lough. These recommendations are subject to Stage 1 HRA Screening; therefore, the assessment has been completed by ORNI staff working closely with Blackstaff Ecology to ensure the necessary considerations are taken into account to preserve the area's conservation features and biosecurity.

Location	Type of access	Development proposal
Portaferry	Pontoon Marina Slipway @ marina General improvements	Install seasonal pontoon at Cook St. Mar – Sept. Consider installation of floating breakwater to shelter marina. Extend to make more accessible when tide out. Improve information for users at a central location within Portaferry Regeneration Hub Provision of storage for skiffs close to the shore – location/ site to be identified
Other initiatives proposed in Portaferry	<p>Portaferry Regeneration Ltd with Council and Sailing Club have plans to extend the pontoon – double the size i.e. another 50 berths.</p> <p>Ards & North Down Borough Council has recently appointed a harbour master for its 5 harbours and is due to carry out some project works at Cook St in 2018. The works will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resurfacing of the boat yard and clearing of abandoned vessels - Erection of bollards and chain to demarcate the area and keep the slipway clear <p>Picnic area refreshed with new seats, picnic tables and BBQ. The introduction of a licence for boat owners to use the area is due to begin in April 2018 and will allow Council to effectively exercise control and ensure it is a usable facility for all. Charges will apply.</p> <p>Portaferry Sailing Club has plans to purchase a tall ship and moor this permanently alongside the harbour wall (south side of ferry slip). This could provide a range of access opportunities including training, trips and have-a-go sessions.</p>	
Cunningburn	2 slipways	Repair ground at upper end of slipway to ensure it is level with the concrete of the slipway
Ringneill Quay	Quay	Approach landowner to discuss public access to Ringneill quay for non-motorised craft (through potential Council management arrangement).
plus, Nendrum Monastic site	Shore access	Approach landowner at Nendrum to discuss securing potential for public shore access (egress only) from western shore and across field to site – potential for Permissive Path Agreement with Council. If permission obtained, consider installation of wooden jetty to enable water taxi to land passengers.

Rathcunningham Quay	- Quay	Approach landowner to discuss securing public access to quay for non-motorised craft (through potential Council management arrangement).
Down Cruising Club	Slipway	Approach Club to discuss securing public access on the slipway for non-motorised craft at slipway (through potential Council management arrangement). Discuss with Club potential for lightship 'Petrel' to become an official stop off point for potential water taxi (to be operated by private sector operator).
Whiterock car park	None	Make hole in existing wall and create shore access
Strangford Lough Yacht Club	2 pontoons 2 slipways	Discuss with Club potential for SLYC to become an official stop off point for potential water taxi (to be operated by private sector operator).
Braddock Reach (Whiterock)	Stone slipway/ shore access	Approach landowner(s) to discuss securing public access to slipway for non-motorised craft (through potential Council management arrangement).
Ringhaddy	Slipway Quay	Approach landowner to discuss securing public access to – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quay for non-motorised craft (through potential Council management arrangement). • Green field between house numbers 53 and 49 for parking.
Taggart Island (egress point)	Shore access	Creation of a formal 'wild camping' area. National Trust leading on this with plans to fence off an area for camping so cattle/ visitors do not mix.
Killyleagh Town	Quay	Install temporary pontoon with rolling ramp, dredge quay and channel (by up to 2m) to create a facility accessible at all tide times. This could accommodate motorised craft including the proposed water taxi. <i>(Pending Cruising Study to identify demand).</i>
Killyleagh Yacht Club & Outdoor Education Centre	Slipway	Approach Club to discuss securing public access to the slipway and car park (through potential Council management arrangement).
Salt Island (egress point)	Shore access	Bothy reopened Easter 2018.
Delamont Country Park	Shore access Temporary Pontoon (currently not in place)	Joined up holistic approach to site development required – OEC and Council working together to create enhanced access. Install temporary pontoon (in place 2016 and 2017 for Coastal Rowing events). AIM – to obtain licence for DAERA, Crown Estate and NT for up to 5 years to enable pontoon to be installed each year for up to 6 months – April to September for non-motorised craft plus licensed water taxi.

Quoile Pondage	Shore Access (Jane's Shore) Inch Abbey (egress only)	Sensitively resurface parking area adjacent to Quoile River. Improve access to Abbey for paddlers through installation of a boardwalk through the rushes to the shore. This would also cater for walkers at the Abbey.
Castle Ward Bay	Audley's Quay	Survey and repair to enable use by motorised craft including potential water taxi.
Strangford	Quay Public slip	Installation of a disabled hoist (movable). Extend and increase angle – this may interfere with boats accessing the quay. Further investigation required.
<p>SCAD Ltd (owner of pontoon) has the following aspirations for the pontoon –</p> <p>The overall vision is that SCAD Ltd would take over control of the whole bay from DFI. This would then enable the installation of permanent floating anchorages ('permanent holding') in a grid formation and therefore significantly increase capacity for permanent anchorage.</p> <p>At a smaller scale, dredging the inner harbour would be welcomed. SCAD Ltd already has a lease for this area. This would enable capacity for floating moorings to be increased.</p>		
Tyrella	Shore Access	Complete a Masterplan for the site. Consider the upgrade of the car park and toilet facilities to include changing facilities and outdoor shower for water sports users.

Fig. 97: Summary of site-based opportunities

7.3 Air-based recreation

As highlighted through consultation, potential for future development for air-based recreation lies in opportunities to expand the offering of sightseeing tours to new locations that clients wished to see from the sky, rather than development of additional facilities. Opportunities should be taken forwards by private sector organisations when market demand allows for this.

Consultation also revealed that in the past, a member of the flying club was actively interested in natural heritage and biodiversity and would relay environmental responsibility information to the club, especially in terms of the effects of aircraft on overwintering birds on the mud flats near the airfield. This contact is no longer a member of the flying club and consequently this important channel for liaison and education is now missing.

7.3.1 Recommendation

It is recommended that liaison and education take place with the flying club and its members, to ensure that the environmental sustainability message is effectively communicated.

7.4 Specific site-based product development

Opportunities exist in the area to improve both the existing outdoor recreation infrastructure and supporting visitor services and facilities. As highlighted in the previous sections, the activities which have the greatest potential for future development are walking, water-based recreation including cruising and coastal rowing and family cycling. These activities have the potential to impact on the greatest number of people including locals, day visitors and tourists.

In addition, these activities are focused on the natural assets of the area i.e. Strangford Lough and the Lecale Coast, with a desire among participants to be close to or on the water.

Across the study area, outdoor recreation provision is characterised by activity-based hubs defined as multi use sites which offer a variety of both outdoor activities and support visitor services (café toilets, changing facilities, parking etc.) in one place. Many of these facilities are Council owned and managed facilities and others belong to the National Trust. In addition, key towns offer a range of tourism facilities including provision of outdoor recreation opportunities.

Most of these key sites and towns are based on or close to the water and therefore this 'water' experience should be the key focus in terms of prioritising site and product development.

The following are the key sites within the study area -

- Portaferry
- Mount Stewart
- Scrabo Country Park
- Killyleagh town and at Outdoor Education Centre (now closed)
- Delamont Country Park
- Downpatrick
- Castle Ward Demesne
- Strangford
- Ardglass
- Tyrella
- Dundrum

7.4.1 Masterplanning

7.4.1.1 Delamont Country Park

Delamont Country Park to the north of Killyleagh is a public site⁶⁰ which borders Strangford Lough. The site has ample car parking and visitor facilities including café, caravan and camping and a large play area. The site is also well used for both land and water-based recreation in terms of coastal rowing, paddling and proposed sailing (from the Outdoor Education Centre). Therefore, it is one of the main outdoor recreation sites within the study area.

Numerous organisations have plans in place to create a permanent access facility to the Lough. This includes Seaboard, Coastal Rowers, Delamont Outdoor Education Centre and Council with plans for

⁶⁰ Council owns the majority of the Park with the Education Authority owning an area around Delamont House and an area by the shore.

a slipway and a permanent pontoon and a desire for a storage facility. In addition, there is potential for any facility to cater for a private sector operated water taxi.

The current walk trail system is extensive; however, it could be improved e.g. to include an all ability trail and trails with reduced gradients and or more even surfaces particularly suitable for the family market.

Off-road cycling is permitted within the Park, however, the trails have not been designed to accommodate off-road cycling. As one of the key user groups within the Park is families, there is an opportunity to design and develop family cycling trails within the Park.

It is therefore recommended that a Recreation Masterplan is completed for the Park to include as a minimum –

- An assessment of current visitor provision within the Park including trails, water-based access, facilities including toilets, parking, play provision, train and café etc.
- Fully costed trail design for a range of multi-use trails
- Design proposals for water-based access and storage provision (close to the shore)
- Consideration of the current orienteering course
- Current and planned use of the site by Delamont Outdoor Education Centre
- A visual Masterplan i.e. maps highlighting trails and visitor and vehicle flow etc.

Extensive consultation with current and potential users, relevant statutory organisations etc.

- Consideration of external links to the Park including connections to Gibbs Island, Mullagh Quay and Quoile Pondage

For further detail see water-based recommendations – Fig. 97.

7.4.1.2 Scrabo Country Park

A trail review and visitor information plan were completed by ORNI in April 2018 on behalf of the Natural Environment Division (NED) of DAERA who manages the Park.

Recommendations included the upgrading of existing trails (with some newly designed and constructed sections), putting some trails beyond use and site-specific recommendations with regards to visitor flow, information and signage.

It is recommended that the Trail Review and Information Plan are implemented to enhance the current visitor experience.

7.4.1.3 Tyrella Beach

Tyrella is a popular site used all year round for a range of activities including wind and kitesurfing, walking, swimming and horse riding. It is popular among families as a seaside destination particularly during the summer months.

To improve the visitor experience for all users, it is recommended that a Masterplan is completed for the site to include as a minimum –

- An assessment of current visitor provision including trails, water-based access, facilities including toilets, parking, changing etc.
- Fully costed trail design for a range of walk trails
- Consideration of the current orienteering course
- A visual Masterplan i.e. maps highlighting trails and visitor and vehicle flow etc.
- Extensive consultation with current and potential users, relevant statutory organisations etc.

8 MANAGEMENT

From the consultation process, several issues regarding the current and future management of outdoor recreation in Strangford and Lecale AONB were identified including –

- There is an inconsistent approach among Councils across the study area in relation to the development, management and promotion of outdoor recreation.
- There is a need to promote responsible outdoor recreation.
- There is little regulation of the development of water-based recreation.
- Informal nature of access to Strangford Lough for water-based recreation.
- Monitoring and consequently understanding the level of use being made of the sites across the study area is limited with only some sites having counters in place to record user numbers e.g. the National Trust sites.
- Signage and information (on the ground) is inconsistent without a strategic approach (other than the entry point signs)
- Few effective mechanisms exist to encourage collaboration between the many different organisations and interest groups involved in outdoor recreation across the study area. These include landowners and managers, NGB's, clubs, private sector activity providers and service providers.
- A holistic approach to managing access for outdoor recreation in this environmentally sensitive area is required. The mechanisms for a holistic management process include appropriate ethos, management structures and responsibilities, communication, training and management measures.

8.1 Council approach to outdoor recreation

There is an inconsistent approach among Councils across the study area in relation to outdoor recreation.

This is evident in -

- The development, management and promotion of outdoor recreation
- The implementation of access legislation in relation to Public Rights of Way, Permissive Paths and the creation of Public Paths.
- The different staff structures, roles and remits of personnel in related positions, e.g. PROW Officers and Countryside Officers.

Consultation also identified a demand for improved public information regarding rights of way.

It is therefore recommended that -

The implementation of access and related legislation receives higher priority within Councils and that a more streamlined approach is taken to ensure Councils and Officers within the study area apply the same approach. Sufficient resources should be identified by Councils to do this.

In terms of managing access routes it is recommended that –

- A costed management plan is created to cover all PROW's, PPA's and Public Paths (including inspections and maintenance). This may include paid staff and volunteers.
- A third party is appointed to implement this Plan.

Current PROW's are not promoted as walking routes on walkni.com unless they are part of a quality walk. i.e. not promoted as standalone walks. However, moving forward, ORNI is considering the

inclusion of PROW's, PPA's etc. Before this would happen the quality of the routes would need to be guaranteed year on year. The use of the third party to implement a Management Plan would address this issue.

The establishment of a Geopark may provide additional opportunities for strategic management across Councils.

8.2 Promoting responsible outdoor recreation and wildlife monitoring opportunities

Consultation identified that the key reason for selecting the study area as a venue for outdoor recreation was enjoyment of the scenic landscape and wildlife and particularly the water assets of the area i.e. coastline and Lough.

The majority of those participating in outdoor recreation within the AONB recognise that it is a sensitive environment and wish to protect it as such. However, in many cases, particularly in the case of water recreation, users admit to not understanding how their participation has the potential to have a detrimental impact (albeit unintentionally) on the environment.

The main areas of concern are as follows –

- Disturbance to wildlife including wildfowl and seals; this can prevent feeding and cause desertion of nests with eggs. Disturbance comes from a variety of sources including dogs being exercised off leads, water sports activities and irresponsible wildlife watching.
- Biosecurity and the introduction of invasive species into the local landscape is a key concern for DAERA. Potential sources of invasive species include yachts/ craft that move into Strangford Lough with water from other water bodies held within the vessel. Flushing the water from the yachts into the Lough permits the invasive species to enter the ecosystem and can establish within the Lough and its waterways. Other potential sources of invasive species cross-contamination include any other recreational activities or users that come into contact with water, e.g. anglers, canoeists, walkers and swimmers.

It is therefore important that steps are undertaken to inform those participating in recreation of best practice steps for responsible use e.g. Invasive Species Ireland 'Check, Clean, Dry' campaign. It is not always appropriate to communicate best practice guidelines, through a proliferation of on site signage. Recommended schemes and awards that are targeted at recreational behaviors are discussed in Sections 8.2.1-8.2.4.4, and appropriate communication methods with recreational users are discussed in Section 9.

In addition, throughout the consultation process it became apparent that there is an untapped resource of information among recreational users in the study area. Many of these users are local people with a keen interest and knowledgeable understanding of the wildlife within the area. In addition, their regular use of the study area means that they are often aware of species specific information e.g. nesting sites, changes in patterns or numbers etc.

The consultation event held at Mount Stewart⁶¹ identified a desire among recreational users, to record this information and share with relevant organisations. DAERA recognised the importance of this information.

Several relevant, well-resourced and robust schemes and awards are already in place, a summary of which is available below –

⁶¹ A consultation event took place on April 26th at Mount Stewart. Over 35 people attended, a list is contained in the Appendix.

8.2.1 The Green Blue – Making the environment second nature

The Green Blue is an innovative environmental initiative developed by British Marine and the Royal Yachting Association.

The initiative provides practical advice and information to help recreational boaters, water sports participants and marine businesses to think and act in an environmentally conscious way.

The overall aim of the initiative is to work towards promoting a sustainable boating community which will help to save money, avoid red tape and safeguard the waters and habitats for the future.

Its four objectives are:

- To raise environmental awareness amongst industry and users;
- To reduce harmful discharges;
- To reduce environmental disturbance; and
- To encourage sustainable choices.

The Green Blue also supports clubs, training centres and businesses by helping them understand and comply with the increasing amount of environmental legislation affecting their operations. The Green Blue offers site audits to help identify areas for environmental improvement, in particular, around wildlife and habitat awareness and biosecurity to prevent the spread of invasive animal and plant species.

The Green Blue website (supported by a selection of free, downloadable posters and leaflets) contains excellent pragmatic guidance of a series of topics for boat users, such as:

- Antifoul
- Invasive species
- Cleaning and maintenance
- Oil and fuel
- Resource Efficiency
- Sewage and waste
- Wildlife

The Green Blue Campaign Manager⁶², recently delivered a workshop at the RYA Northern Ireland Club Conference held at Strangford Lough Yacht Club. The workshop highlighted that following a recent re-focusing of activities, The Green Blue has selected three regions from around the United Kingdom on which to focus their efforts. Strangford Lough has been selected as one of the three.

It was outlined that the programme was keen to work with the sailing clubs/centres and marinas in helping them to pass on environmental awareness of the Marine Conservation Zone and support them in adopting best practice to minimise their impacts on the environment. The programme hopes to achieve this through providing them with resources to help educate their members/clients and supporting them in making their venues and operations greener.

The resources that can be employed to deliver this include:

- Environmental Club Audit – covering a variety of areas e.g. biosecurity, wildlife awareness, waste management, water use, communicating environmental best practice etc. This is a useful tool to provide a baseline as to how sustainable a club currently is. From this The Green Blue can support the club to identify areas for improvement and in turn support the club to achieve the outcomes. A follow up audit can be performed to demonstrate how positive changes can be made.
- Green Boating Event Charter – this is designed to assist clubs/centres, sailing associations, marinas make any boating event they are running a more environmentally sustainable one.

⁶² Kate Fortnam – Manager – correct May 2018

- Instructor teaching resources – to empower instructors to pass on environmental knowledge and best practice to their student on courses.
- Workshops – delivered by the Green Blue and local experts at clubs/centres to raise awareness of the Marine Conservation Zone and Invasive Non-Native Species. Regarding the latter it will highlight the key issues for boaters and the environment and outline mitigations.

8.2.2 WiSe Scheme

The WiSe (**Wildlife Safe**) is the U.K Standard for commercial marine wildlife watching. It aims to promote responsible wildlife-watching, through training, accreditation and awareness -raising.

The WiSe Scheme comprises three levels of WiSe membership, details of which are set out below.

The core element to WiSe, is a modular training and accreditation course aimed primarily at operators of passenger pleasure craft, wildlife cruise operators, dive and service boats, and yacht skippers. These individuals are most likely to come into contact with marine wildlife, as they are out on the water on a regular basis.

WiSe training consists of instruction in how to best to responsibly watch wildlife, whilst at the same time minimising any potential disturbance. All WiSe accredited operators will have received instruction in how to handle their craft whilst in contact with any of these animals, how they may react to the presence of boats, and how to leave them room to carry on with their lives unimpeded.

All WiSe operators will have received instruction into their local and national laws relating to wildlife. They will also have received instruction on species identification, life history and behaviour of a range of species they may encounter in their local waters. All WiSe operators will have agreed to abide by our Codes of Conduct for all of the species covered by WiSe, as well as all relevant local or national laws and bylaws.

WiSe Instructors have been specially selected in all areas around the UK for their years of experience in the field, their knowledge of the species likely to be encountered in their locality, and local conservation issues relating to marine wildlife that are of particular relevance.

WiSe offers three levels of membership:

Affiliate WiSe membership - For people interested in minimising their disturbance on marine wildlife whilst on the water. For example, students, marine guides, wildlife rescuers, sailing club members, and other interested members of the general public. Attendance at a standard training course or presentation by a WiSe instructor or nominated speaker is required. There is no requirement for a refresher course, as no accreditation is provided.

Full WiSe membership - This forms the basis for the accredited WiSe Scheme professional standard. WiSe members commit to abide by not only national and local laws on wildlife conservation and disturbance avoidance, but also the WiSe Codes of Conduct, in addition to any local wildlife-watching codes. Accreditation lasts for 3 years, when the operator should apply to attend a refresher course, or alternatively the operator can attend a Master Class and upgrade their membership level. A WiSe training courses typically lasts 6-8 hours.

Master WiSe membership - This is the WiSe Scheme professional standard 'plus', the Gold WiSe standard of membership. Boat operators are required to have been a standard WiSe member for at least three years and have attended a WiSe masterclass (one day workshop). WiSe masters must not only commit to the WiSe codes of conduct and local codes but also provide sightings data to the relevant sightings collection organisation and provide any useful photo-identification images to relevant research groups.

8.2.3 Leave No Trace

Leave No Trace is an outdoor ethics programme designed to promote and inspire responsible outdoor recreation through education, research and partnerships. The programme is delivered throughout the island of Ireland by Leave No Trace Ireland.

At the heart of Leave No Trace are 7 principles for reducing the damage caused by outdoor activities.

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare
2. Be Considerate of Others
3. Respect Farm Animals and Wildlife
4. Travel and Camp on Durable Ground
5. Leave What You Find
6. Dispose of Waste Properly
7. Minimise the Effects of Fire

The Leave No Trace Ireland programme recognises that as increasing numbers of people seek the beauty and exhilaration of outdoor travel and recreation by the coast, the collective mark on the coastal environment and its natural processes increases. As such, Leave No Trace Ireland has recently developed a 'Coast' edition of the Leave No Trace Ireland Skills and Ethics series to compliment the original mainstay edition.

The Coast edition explains how you can best enjoy the coast and its wildlife, without causing harm. The original Leave No Trace Ireland Skills and Ethics programme is applicable for many situations and contains additional information. The practices in the booklet are appropriate for all coastal locations in Ireland. By following the code, and showing it to other people, you can help ensure that this wonderful part of Irish heritage survives for all of us to appreciate in years to come.

Consultation with Leave No Trace Ireland has identified they are currently working in partnership with Donegal Local Development CLG to develop a pilot programme which will develop resources to create awareness and educate recreational users on responsible use of their environment. The programme (subject to LEADER funding) will be targeted at local communities, walking groups, cycling groups, water sport groups, and adventure race organisers.

The programme which will be bespoke to Donegal will provide 10 targeted workshops (including site visits), development of supporting training resource, an awareness event and short best practice videos. This model could be readily adapted to Strangford Lough and the appropriate training undertaken or funding sought to ensure successful delivery.

8.2.4 Local Environmental Quality Standards

8.2.4.1 Green Flag

The Green Flag Award is the benchmark national standard for parks and green spaces in the UK. It was first launched in 1996 to recognise and reward the best green spaces in the country. It is also seen as a way of encouraging others to achieve high environmental standards, setting a benchmark of excellence in recreational green areas.

Winning a Green Flag Award can generate excellent publicity for a site. Both the media and the public are becoming increasingly aware that a site flying a Green Flag is a high quality green space, which can only be a boost to its popularity.

Awards are given on an annual basis and winners must apply each year to renew their Green Flag status. All green spaces are different and diversity is welcomed, with each site being judged on its own merits and suitability to the community it serves. There are eight key criteria that sites are judged against including environmental management, conservation and heritage, community involvement and management of the site. Local District Councils and community groups are welcome to apply to the scheme.

8.2.4.2 Blue Flag

A world-renowned eco-label, the Blue Flag programme is operated under the Foundation for Environmental Education and is headquartered in Copenhagen, Denmark. In order to qualify for this prestigious award, a series of stringent environmental, educational, safety-related and access-related criteria must be met and maintained. There are currently 4454 Blue flags flying in 45 countries around the world providing visitors and local visitors alike that sustainability is a top priority on a global scale.

In Northern Ireland there are currently nine Blue Flag beaches and two Blue Flag marinas. The Blue Flag applies only during the current bathing season, from the start of June until mid-September, but individual Beach Operators may decide to fly their flags during a shorter season. Blue Flags must be renewed annually, and they can only be awarded to beaches which have been shown to have excellent water quality consistently throughout the previous four bathing seasons. The water quality on all of our Blue Flag beaches is measured by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs between May and September.

Criterion that sites are assessed against, fall under the headings; environmental education and information, water quality, environmental management and safety and services.

8.2.4.3 Green Coast

The Green Coast Award, is aimed particularly (but not solely) at rural beaches which do not qualify for other awards due to the lack of intensive management and development of facilities around the beach area.

Because the award doesn't require toilets, lots of signage or other infrastructure, this award is perfect for smaller beaches, ones with a special or fragile natural character or those which the local community does not wish to see developed to great extent.

To be eligible for the Green Coast Award the beach Management Group must work with the local community to develop a management plan and provide evidence that they have addressed all the award objectives. These objectives include; Water quality, Beach management, Litter and waste, Safety, Information and education and Beach guardianship.

Beaches suitable for the Green Coast Award will be carefully managed by the owner in partnership with the local community and in close consultation with conservation organisations such as the National Trust or Ulster Wildlife. If facilities are present on or near the beach, they should minimise visual impact and any litter found on the beach should be cleansed sensitively.

8.2.4.4 Seaside Awards

The Seaside Award is a mark of quality management and clean water for beaches across the UK.

The Seaside Award works towards sustainable development of beaches through strict criteria dealing with Water Quality, Environmental Education and Information, Environmental Management, and Safety and Other Services. In order to ensure the high standards are maintained, Seaside Awards must be renewed annually. The applications are evaluated by a National Jury made up of experts in public health, tourism and other relevant fields.

Because the awards are based in part on water quality data, they are only applicable during the bathing season when bathing water is being tested. The water quality on 'identified bathing waters'

(basically popular beaches) in Northern Ireland is measured by the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs between May and September

8.2.5 Case Study - CEDaR

Established at the Ulster Museum in January 1995, the Centre for Environmental Data and Recording (CEDaR), is a partnership between Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), National Museums NI and the local biological recording community.

CEDaR is the Local Records Centre (LRC) for Northern Ireland and supports biological recording through working in partnerships with numerous individuals and organisations. The organisation collects, stores, manages and releases information on the wildlife of Northern Ireland and its coastal waters. It also manages several recording initiatives, such as species surveys, websites and training courses.

Records can be added online by both registered and non-registered users. All records must have the following information –

- Species name
- Grid reference
- Site name
- Recorder first name
- Recorder last name
- Recorder email address
- Date of record

There are also functions that allow registered users to view data they have uploaded.

The following extracts taken from the CEDaR website - <http://www2.habitas.org.uk/records/>.

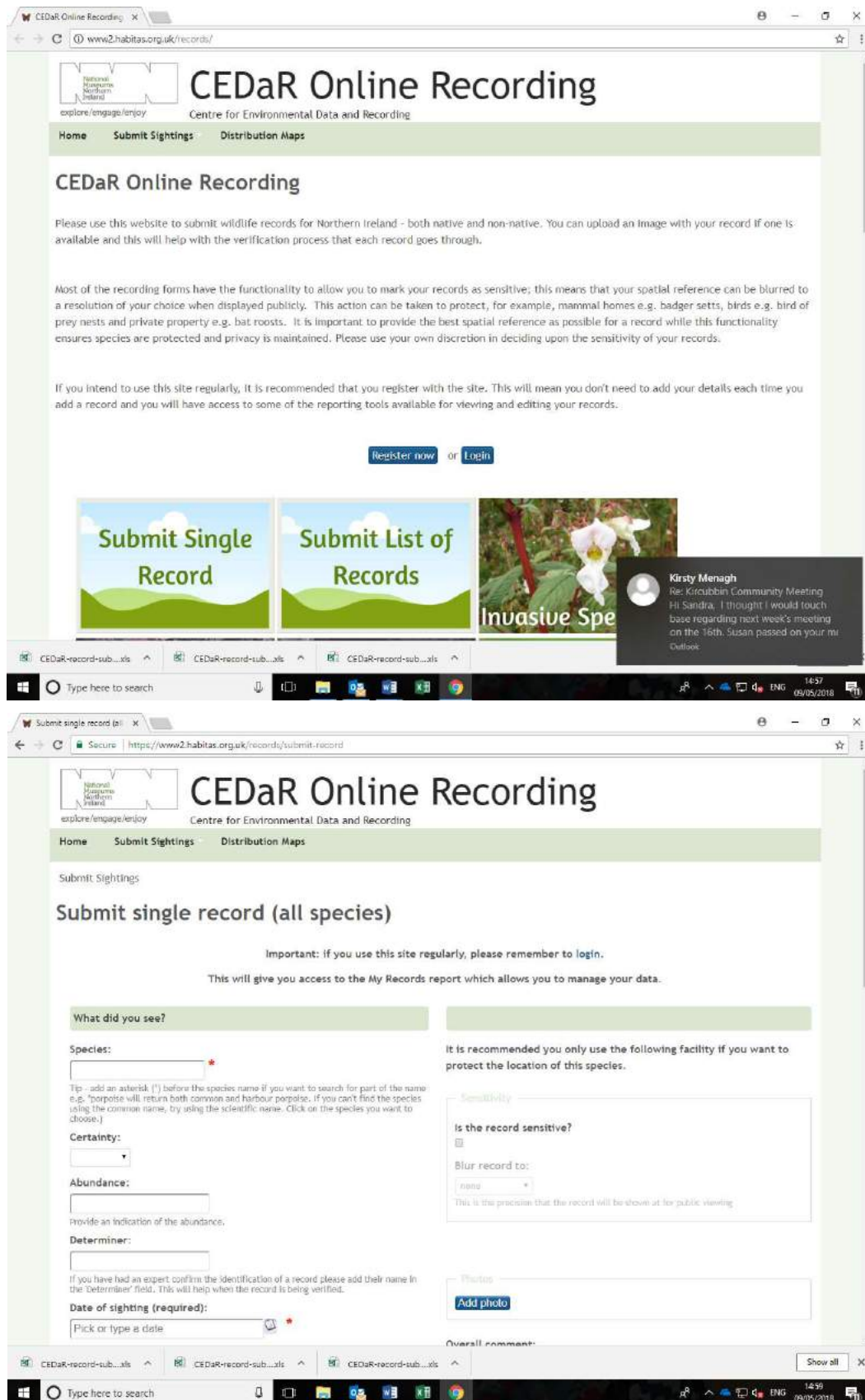


Fig. 98: CEDaR – online recording of species

8.2.6 Recommendation

Consultation has identified that many of those engaging in water recreation on Strangford Lough do so via a club, group or are a member of the appropriate National Governing Body. In addition, there are commercial operators and outdoor educators. Therefore, there are well developed channels in place through which to champion responsible water recreation.

Research also identified that there are a range of well established awards that are already in place within the study area that set standards and goals for the management of outdoor green and coastal space.

Rather than creating additional and specific programmes and awards for Strangford Lough and Lecale AONB, it would be more cost effective to channel appropriate existing schemes to the appropriate target groups as outlined below.

It would be important to identify a key organisation to deliver such initiatives whilst also having champions within the key target groups. It is recommended that these schemes are run together with at least 2 sessions per annum.

In last 5 years SLLP has coordinated 2 sessions of Wise and Leave No trace and is working with RYA to promote the Green Blue initiative, with Sport NI. These were well attended. The aim is that this information is then be passed onto members/ participants.

Scheme	Target Groups
The Green Blue - Strangford Lough	Sailing Clubs Marina Berth Holders RYA Members
WiSe	Boat Tour Operators Dive Operators
Leave No Trace Programme for Outdoor Recreation Groups	Coastal Rowers Irish Kite Surfing Association CANI – Canoeist / Kayakers / Stand Up Paddleboarders Relevant Community organisations Walking and cycling clubs Flying Clubs
Green Flag	Land owners Management organisations
Blue Flag	Land owners Management organisations Marina owners
Green Coast	Land owners Management organisations
Seaside Awards	Land owners Management organisations
CEDaR	Water based clubs Relevant Community organisations Walking and cycling clubs

Fig. 99: Proposed schemes and target groups

8.3 Informal nature of access to the water

The public have a right of navigation and fishing to all water within UK and no-one can stop this other than a regulatory body e.g. DAERA, Crown Estate. However, there is no public right of access over the foreshore. Despite this over 80 access points to Strangford Lough and the Lecale coast were identified throughout the course of this study. This is partly because users need a range of sites dependent on tide, winds and the ability of users. Few of these access points are 'formal' i.e. with agreed access arrangements in place. The majority are 'informal', where access is tolerated and largely not prevented (unless issues arise). The highest concentration of access points is on the west coast and therefore this is where most demand exists, and most issues arise. Concerns typically include wildlife disturbance, car parking, user conflict, etc.

It is not recommended that retrospective permission is sought for access at sites where it currently takes place and is tolerated with no apparent issues. The exception is where there are issues. In

these cases, it is recommended that landowners are identified, and approaches made regarding the sustainable management of access at these locations. This may involve Councils entering into management or other agreements with the landowners. Where new infrastructure or sites are developed, formal access arrangements should be put in place.

8.4 Environmental management

8.4.1 Managing the impact of moorings

There is a robust approach in place to issuing a license for new infrastructure. However, consultation identified that the installation of moorings falls outside of this.

In relation to Strangford Lough AONB -

- Some moorings (depending on location), should have a Marine License from DAERA.
- Most moorings within the Lough are privately owned. This includes moorings owned by individuals and moorings owned by members of Yacht/ Sailing Clubs around the Lough.
- Environmentally Friendly Moorings⁶³ (EFM's) should be used for all future upgrade of moorings and installation of new moorings.

With no designated harbour authority for the Lough, it is difficult to regulate moorings and the issue of permission has never been enforced by either The Crown Estate or DAERA (although DAERA has powers to enforce this within the Marine Conservation Zone where no dropping of anchors is permitted).

With up to 2,000 boats thought to be moored throughout the Lough, therefore, the potential impact could be notable.

Case Study - The West Highland Anchorages and Moorings Association (WHAM)

The West Highland Anchorages and Moorings Association was founded in 1985 as a direct result of the growing realisation that there were rapidly increasing pressures on the marine environment which, if not understood and if necessary contested, would result in serious and lasting deterioration in the facilities, environment, right of free anchorage and freedom of navigation.

The purpose and objectives of WHAM are -

1. To maintain safe and unobstructed access to the anchorages and mooring areas of western Scotland and the Hebrides.
2. To help to ensure protection of the marine environment.
3. To promote and encourage responsible and considerate use of our seas and to further the aims of recreational sailors in and around western Scotland, working with The Crown Estate, The Scottish Government, Scottish Natural Heritage, Royal Yachting Association Scotland and other organisations.
4. To respond on behalf of members to such matters as planning applications or consultations on marine energy and all other developments affecting the use of the seas.
5. To help promote thoughtful and considerate use of our waters by marine based organisations and individuals.

WHAM now consists of some 60-member organisations in western Scotland and the Hebrides including most of the Moorings Associations, boatyards, clubs and other organisations, including

⁶³ EFM's are mooring systems designed to have less impact on the seabed by minimising interaction with the seabed, preventing abrasion and therefore the potential to damage sensitive habitats.

Royal Highland YC, Clyde Cruising Club, Ocean Youth Trust, Argyll Charter Boats, Oban Port Users and others. In the intervening years, WHAM has established excellent working relationships with the Crown Estate, The Scottish Government, Local Authorities, fish and shellfish farmers, local fishermen, and is recognised as a knowledgeable and helpful organisation whose aims coincide with those of most marine users and whose views are taken account of (even if not always acted upon).

It is worth commenting that there has been no reduction in pressures over the intervening 25 years. Indeed, more pressures have arisen with the advent of wind and tidal power, attempts to restrict navigation in channels, changes in licences, and a significant and continuing pressure on mooring space generally. Fortunately, the requirements of leisure and recreational boating are now taken seriously by government and other administrative bodies, and WHAM is a key part of the consultation system that has developed over the past few years.

Fig. 100: Case Study – the West Highland Anchorages and Moorings Association (WHAM)

8.4.1.1 Recommendation

It is recommended that learnings from the WHAM approach are considered by relevant organisations in relation to the Lough. If nothing is done, then the activity could ultimately lead to impact on the designated features and even result in restrictions. By taking a positive management approach this can be prevented from happening.

8.4.2 Recreation activity, wildlife disturbance and habitat damage management

A report⁶⁴ was commissioned in 2014 by Sport Northern Ireland in partnership with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, The National Trust, SLLP and the Department of Environment Marine Division, that investigated the impact of recreational disturbance on over wintering birds on Strangford Lough. The report highlighted that alongside its wildlife interest, Strangford is important for a wide range of recreational users undertaking a variety of activities. Kite surfing is a relatively recent sport on Strangford Lough and there have been anecdotal reports that it has caused major disturbance to birds on the lough. This resulted in a voluntary exclusion zone for kite surfing being established at the northern end of the lough. Whilst kite surfing was central to the project, it was recognised it should not be looked at in isolation and therefore other sources of disturbance from recreational activity were also considered.

The report concluded that dog walking caused the greatest amount of disturbance to birds, in all cases the dog(s) were off-lead and accompanied by at least one person. People walking without dogs rarely caused disturbance. Kite surfing was the second greatest cause of disturbance, accounting for 20% of the disturbance events. The report recommended providing information on appropriate conduct in the vicinity of feeding and roosting birds such as avoiding sailing within 400 metres of bird roosts on any offshore islands.

In 2017, Marine Evidence based Sensitivity Assessment (MarESA)⁶⁵ was produced through Strangford Lough Landscape Management Partnership that highlighted the sensitivities of marine and terrestrial environments. Each habitat type designated within the SAC was assessed based on its resistance and resilience to identified pressures, one of which was tourism and recreation. Associated pressures identified as having high potential effects in terms of sensitivity and vulnerability include introduction or spread of invasive non-indigenous species, disturbance/removal of target /non-target species and penetration and/or disturbance of the substrate below the surface of the seabed (including abrasion). The assessment goes on to state that recreational craft and

⁶⁴ 'The impact of recreational sports and activities on over-wintering birds in the North End of Strangford Lough' (2015), Allen and Mellon Environmental

⁶⁵ Strangford Lough MarESA Assessment Tables (2017), Strangford Lough Landscape Partnership

equipment used at other sites and brought to the Lough can introduce or spread invasive flora and fauna, and that voluntary codes have been introduced and awareness raising has been undertaken. It also states that there is some potential for trampling of *Zostera* by horse riders and that education has been initiated. It was identified that bait digging for Lugworm and Ragworm by anglers within mudflat/sandflat areas, such as Island Hill and also the occasional anchoring of yachts above low tide line.

Consultation has identified a strong desire from those participating in water recreation to be provided with a map that portrays sensitive areas on which their activity may impact for example location of seal haul outs. Whilst a good idea in practice, the presentation of such information in a meaningful way to recreational users with limited knowledge of ecology is challenging. The challenges include:

- Volume of environmental designations and key features
- Seasonality – area will differ is sensitivity during winter, summer and breeding seasons
- Mobility – sensitive species can relocate e.g. seal haul outs may alter
- Tide – some areas are more / less sensitive at different states of tide e.g. high water tern roosts are more sensitive at high water

Research indicates that once sensitive areas are identified there remains to be a challenge in establishing appropriate buffer zone or set-back distances. A report from Natural England⁶⁶ states ‘...it is difficult and probably often inappropriate to set such distances as responses to disturbance vary between species (Blumstein *et al.* 2005) and between individuals of the same species (Beale & Monaghan 2004a). Particular circumstances, such as habitat, flock size, cold weather or variations in food availability will also influence birds.’

The report further urges caution in the use of set-back distances and stress that distances applied at one location may not necessarily be applicable at other locations. However, as an indication of the kind of distances and the variation at which species respond, the report summarises a selection of distance examples from the scientific literature below:

- 180m as the safe distance for approach for pedestrians and boats for tern colonies, based on work in Florida (Rodgers & Smith 1995).
- 118m as a recommendation for zoning around Black Skimmer colonies in New Jersey (118m representing the distance within which 95% of flushing events occurred) (Burger *et al.* 2010).
- 70m as a recommended distance to protect roosting cormorants, gulls and oystercatchers from disturbance from kayaks and motorboats off Vancouver Island (Chatwin 2010).
- 200m as the necessary zoning required to protect common tern colonies from disturbance (people on foot) at colonies in Virginia and New Carolina (Erwin 1989).
- 100m as the necessary zoning required to protect least (very similar to little) and royal tern colonies from disturbance (people on foot) at colonies in Virginia and New Carolina (Erwin 1989).
- 100m as the necessary distance to protect nesting common terns from disturbance effects of personal watercraft in New Jersey (Burger 1998).
- 200m as the approximate distance at which curlews roosting on saltmarsh in Holland could be approached before taking flight (Smit & Visser 1993).
- 25-550m as the distance at which different wader species and brent geese were recorded taking flight when approached by someone walking across mudflats at two different sites in Holland (Smit & Visser 1993).

⁶⁶ *Identifying best practice in management of activities on Marine Protected Areas, Natural England 2012*

- 260m (range 32-675m) the mean approach distance for black guillemots (foraging on the sea in Canada) in relation to boats (Ronconi & St. Clair 2002).
- 5-178m (median 52m) as the distance at which brent geese responded to a potential disturbance event on the Solent. Data from 20 locations (Liley, Stillman, & Fearnley 2010).
- 10-200m (median 46m) as the distance at which oystercatchers responded to a potential disturbance event on the Solent. Data from 20 locations (Liley *et al.* 2010).
- 75-150 (median 44.5m) as the distance at which redshanks responded to a potential disturbance event on the Solent. Data from 20 locations (Liley *et al.* 2010).
- 25-200m (median 75m) as the distance at which curlews responded to a potential disturbance event on the Solent. Data from 20 locations (Liley *et al.* 2010).

Applying a 'broad brush' approach is not appropriate as this could unintentionally result in the majority of Strangford Lough being identified as highly sensitive.

8.4.2.1 Recommendation

Based on these studies, the following actions are recommended –

- Investigate the potential to develop of a high / medium / low sensitivity criterion (or equivalent) based on a combination of factors to identify areas which may be impacted by water recreation
- Reflect the criteria on a user-friendly layman focused interactive map-based website. This should be developed to complement training programmes identified in Section 8.2.

8.5 Visitor monitoring

Having the evidence base that highlights the use made of the areas outdoor recreation sites is vital moving forward. Any new outdoor recreation developments should automatically include the positioning of counters to help justify and prioritise any current and future expenditure on site.

8.6 Signage and information

Aside from the Strangford and Lecale AONB welcome signage, signage and information on the ground is inconsistent and would benefit, in terms of communication of message, from a strategic approach. This is addressed in more detail in Section 9.

8.7 Conclusion

There are several tasks or roles required to address the management issues identified in this report. This is crucial in order that a holistic approach is implemented regarding the management of sustainable outdoor recreation within the study area.

The following diagram sets out the roles identified in relation to sustainable management –



Fig. 101: Sustainable management issues

Some of these roles are currently being undertaken by one or more organisation. However, what is important is that a holistic and coordinated approach is taken and that one organisation or person has the responsibility for this coordination of sustainable management for outdoor recreation within the study area.

9 COMMUNICATION

This section of the report considers current communication of outdoor recreation information including online communication, signage and codes of conduct.

This is followed by two case studies from within the UK at the Norfolk Broads and Scottish Canals.

9.1 Current position

Communication is one of the most crucial elements relating to outdoor recreation within the study area. This takes place at many levels including consumer facing communications i.e. with participants or potential participants and with stakeholders or partners.

Within the study area there are a range of organisations all communicating a range of messages in a range of formats. This includes –

- Councils (x2)
- Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership (SLLP)
- National Trust
- Outdoor Recreation NI (through online platforms such as WalkNI.com, CycleNI.com and CanoeNI.com)

- Clubs e.g. sailing or walking club online platforms
- Private sector operators e.g. Portaferry Marina, Clearsky Adventure Centre

While this list is not exhaustive, it gives an indication of the range of organisations and therefore the breadth of information that is available.

9.2 Overview of communication

SLLP is one of the key organisations providing communication in relation to outdoor recreation within the study area.

The current SLLP website has three key audiences:

- o Members of the public – locals and visitors
- o User groups, including canoe clubs, coastal rowers, sailing clubs
- o Corporate including other organisations involved in Strangford Lough as well as others interested in the constitution, projects of SLLP

The basic principle for effective communication is that a message is targeted appropriately for each audience. Currently, the messages are intermingled across audiences at SLLP. For example, a local resident who enjoys walking the dog may receive an email communicating a new funding scheme. It may be more appropriate for this person to find out about where they can and can't let their dog off the lead or the location of a new walk trail.

The primary public/visitor message communicated by SLLP focuses on sustainability and responsible usage (for example 'Share the Shore' or litter). There is little focus on other aspects such as encouraging recreation or access.

There is no question that sustainability is of the utmost importance, however, in terms of communication this is usually not the lead message. A clear communication remit and following on from this, priorities should be developed so that SLLP can effectively communicate with target audiences.

9.3 Platforms

The following table summarises and reviews the primary communication platforms employed by SLLP.

Platform	Review & Assessment
SLLP Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosts information for all three audiences that is currently intermingled. • Further consumer information is currently being written for recreation activities. It is important that access is key in this section. Proposed copy has been drafted for some activities, for example, kitesurfing and windsurfing. The copy does not provide details on access for these activities but refers to the SportNI report⁶⁷. • The content on the homepage is heavily heritage based, access and recreation does not feature strongly.
Social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Facebook page has over 1200 likes. • This mainly consists of sharing the content of environmental or heritage messages from other organisations. There is little content relating to access and outdoor recreation.

⁶⁷ Sport NI Report reference

Email database	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Database of 1,300 email addresses that include local people, user groups such as coastal rowers, community organisations. • Emails are sent frequently but on an adhoc basis. There is no regular, planned communication such as a monthly e-newsletter. • The content of the current emails is often issue based. Recent examples include communication on household sewage and a small grants opportunity. • The communication is not segmented according to the 3 audiences.
Print	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some printed literature from some previous projects (e.g. Turn O the Tide) was produced and this primarily focused on archaeology and heritage. • Recent print piece was the 'Share the Shore' postcard and poster which was distributed at local vets and schools.
Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Outdoor Recreation Forum meets two to three times per year. It is organised by SLLP. It is open to anyone with an interest in the development and management of outdoor recreation on and around the Lough and the Lecale area. There has been good attendance from both water and land-based interests – canoeing, coastal rowing, sailing, diving and walking, cycling and orienteering. • Currently the Forum is a way to communicate developments in the AONB, provide an opportunity for delegates to comment on the AONB management plan, provide an opportunity to feed into development opportunities and to share good news and update on events.

Fig. 102: Communication platforms used by SLLP

9.4 Signage within the AONB

The signage provision in the AONB has evolved over many years and been developed by numerous organisations. As such, signage is not consistent across the area. In addition, old signage exists such as the canoe access points signs that are in poor repair and no longer fit for purpose. It should be noted however, that this is typical of any large destination and was also the case in the best practice case studies.

Signage	Review
Threshold signage	There is adequate brown signage on the key roads to inform visitors they are entering the Strangford and Lecale AONB.
Site identification signage	<p>There a variety of sign types which include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trail identification • Attraction/destination such as Exploris <p>These are fit for purpose</p>



Canoe trail brown and Ulster Way/Lecale way signs

Visitor information signage

There is a variety of sign types which include:

- Out and About signs: SLLP signage with interpretation, sustainability and basic tourism information located at key places of interest and sites of outdoor recreation. Several of these are currently being replaced and refreshed.
- Share the Shore signs are being erected at key sites beside the Out and About signs.
- Canoe trail signage: located at all access points on the Strangford Lough Canoe Trail. These are in a state of poor repair and communicate to a niche user group.
- NED/DAERA site signage is located at the NED sites such as Killard Nature Reserve and primarily communicate environmental messages.
- Ulster Way signage and a variety of walking signage.
- Other visitor information signs exists throughout the area such as National Trust signage, NED ASSI regulation signage etc.



Example of 'Out & About' panel

Fig. 103: Signage within the AONB

Many information and interpretation panels were installed within the AONB before online information was so readily available. The best practice approach taken now is only to install panels

where essential and that online information is a much more cost-effective solution. Observation and consultation throughout the course of this study highlighted that there is a proliferation of signs within the AONB often detracting from the environment/ character of the area. Therefore, it is recommended that any dated, damaged or unnecessary panels are removed by the responsible organisation.^[1] In addition, it is recommended that new panels or signs are only installed where deemed to be essential or part of a strategic Communication Plan.

9.5 Code of Conduct

There is not a specific code of conduct for the study area. Within the SLLP website it refers to NED RAMSAR Convention and NED advice on raising household awareness to improve water quality. In addition, advice on how to look after the area is included on the Out & About signage as well as keeping dogs on a lead in the 'Share the Shore' message and proposed signage.

9.6 Best practice in communication

Two examples of best practice have been selected in the UK: Norfolk Broads and Scottish Canals. These were chosen for numerous reasons including the large waterways that they manage, their planned approach to communication and base of established outdoor recreation users.

9.6.1 Norfolk Broads

The Norfolk and Suffolk Broads is Britain's largest protected wetland and third largest inland waterway, with the status of a national park. It is home to some of the rarest plants and animals in the UK. The Broads Authority (BA) has responsibility for conservation, planning, recreation and waterways.

9.6.1.1 Audience

There are four audiences that the Broads Authority (BA) communicate to (see below). A planned approach to what messages to communicate to each of these audiences is in place.

- Public / visitors - The primary message to this audience centres around basic access to the waterways and land, tourism information on boat hire and other recreation provision, accommodation and what else to do in the area.
- User groups (e.g. paddlers, boaters) - Through stakeholder groups and direct engagement, BA meets with these groups to discuss issues and how best to resolve these, for example a sustainable environmental issue. Also, it is used to communicate new information such as safety, regulation and new developments.
- Licence Holders - Boats on the Broads must have a licence. The licensees get a newsletter each year which outlines development work and changes to regulations and safety.
- Corporate - Those with an interest in Scottish Canals as an organisation will seek information such as constitution of the board, projects, policies and strategies.

9.6.1.2 Message

The primary messages centre on:

- General access to the waterway and land and tourism information
- Regulation, codes of practice and safety information
- Corporate information

^[1] When the Canoe Trail panels were installed, management agreements were signed with all relevant landowners.

Whilst the environmental message and sustainable use of the waterways and land are important, it does not form a key element of the message. If issues around sustainability arise, this is generally addressed on a case-by-case basis through the stakeholder groups or directly with user groups such as canoe clubs.

9.6.1.3 Platforms

There are several platforms that BA uses to communicate information to a wide audience such as the website, as well as several platforms that are audience-specific such as stakeholder groups. The following table considers each platform.

Platform	
Website	<p>The website is cited as the key communication tool. There are two websites which are linked:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broads Tourism website provides visitors with information on where to stay, activity providers, where to eat, recreation etc. • The BA website contains information for affiliate users of the Broads that includes corporate information, project development and volunteering. In the 'visiting' section, it pulls the pages from its sister website run by Broads Tourism (of which BA is a partner). This is created with the same look and feel as the BA website
Social media	As with the website, there are two social media pages, one for the visitor and one for the affiliate user.
Visitor Centre	The Broads Authority has three visitor centres which are essentially tourism information centres staffed by BA staff
Newspaper	The 'Broadcaster' is a printed newspaper aimed at visitors. It is widely distributed throughout the Broads and surrounding areas in visitor centres, activity providers, accommodation providers
Go Safely Leaflet/Video	The leaflet and video give all the safety and navigation information required particularly for those new to boating and hiring for the first time. It is planned to move to an e-learning approach
Stakeholder Groups	There are several stakeholder groups that have been set up to communicate and consult with user groups. These are made up of clubs, organisations, commercial businesses and council. It is the primary mechanisms to influence behaviour change in the Broads
Rangers	There are 9 rangers who patrol the Broads. As well as enforcing speed limits and making sure that boats navigate properly, rangers play a vital role in educating people about important navigation and land-based issues, safety and tidal conditions
Monthly E-newsletter	BA issues a monthly e-newsletter providing information for affiliates on product development, issues in the Broads and news written by the Chief Executive
Newsletter	An annual printed newsletter, 'Broad Sheet', is sent to licence holders with information on product development, issues in the Broads and news

Fig. 104: Broads Authority communication platforms

A key learning is that there is a clear differentiation of platforms and messages for each audience and this is also reflected in the design (see below for corporate and consumer communication).



Fig. 105: Broads Authority - Broadsheet and Broadcaster

The following table summarises the messages and platforms and how these are selected based on the audience.

	General public/ visitors	User groups	Licence holders	Corporate
Key Messages	Tourism information Basic safety	BA Projects & Developments Issues / Problems Regulation & Safety	BA Projects & Developments Regulation & Safety	Constitution of the board, projects, policies and strategies
General Platforms	Visitor Centres, Website, Social media			
Specialist platforms	Newspaper Go Safely leaflet	Stakeholder groups Rangers Monthly e- newsletter	Printed Newsletter Monthly e- newsletter Rangers	Corporate website

Fig. 106: Broads Authority summary of messages and communication platforms

9.6.1.4 Signage

Signage is also an important communication platform for the three audiences. The Broads navigation is a busy waterway and as such has a lot of navigation and mooring related signage. Aside from this, there is a wide variety of legacy interpretation panels and safety signage. BA is currently reviewing its signage strategy as it would like to move to a more integrated approach where interpretation, safety and other information is hosted on one panel or in a more integrated fashion. An example below from Holyrood Park shows improved signage integration where event information is housed with safety information and Pannett Park (Whitby) where trail information, interpretation is housed with safety information.



Fig. 107: Integrated signage at Holyrood Park and Pannett Park

BA are clear that, aside from navigational signage, signs only make up one part of the communication to their audience. If there is a proliferation of signage this tends to be counter-productive. BA have found that engagement and education are often a better route to compliance particularly with seasonal topics or one-off issues.

9.6.1.5 Code of Conduct

Where appropriate, BA adopts national schemes as their code of conduct but there is no one overarching code for the Broads.

Rules of the River	These rules are based on the International Rules for Preventing Collisions at Sea but with certain amendments which reflect special conditions of Broads navigation.
Hire Boats	BA, in partnership with other organisations, are currently developing a code of conduct for hire boats. This is because there was no appropriate code of conduct in existence

Fig. 108: Broads Authority code of conduct

In addition, there are several other codes and schemes that the BA signpost users to, such as the Green Blue.

9.6.2 Scottish Canals

Scottish Canals (SC) is responsible for managing the inland waterways of Scotland. It cares for 137 miles of waterway network in total, including five canals, 17 reservoirs and the navigation rights to four lochs, including Loch Ness.

Broadly speaking, the communication approach taken by SC is very comparable to that of the Broads Authority, with similar audience, messaging and platforms.

9.6.2.1 Communication

There are several key differences to highlight:

Website	SC have only one website: www.scottishcanals.co.uk . However, the message and communication to the consumer and corporate audience is clearly segmented. The consumer message is the lead. A portal for the corporate information is hosted at www.scottishcanals.co.uk/corporate
Social media	There is only one Facebook page which is consumer facing
Roadshows	As a promotional platform, SC host roadshows outside of Scotland to encourage people to visit
Skipper Guides	A guide for each canal acts as a complete reference guide with navigational information, as well as ideas for where to stop for food and services for boats
Messaging	Seasonal or topical campaigns are delivered periodically generally relating to safety and are rolled out primarily on digital platforms. The tone is light hearted. Two examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canal Careful in Winter • Stay SAFE (Stay Away From the Edge) this summer Sustainable usage, whilst recognised as extremely important, is not a lead message of the communication plan. Environmental messages relating to litter, wildlife in distress,

checking for egress/access points are briefly covered within the codes of conduct (see below) and have occasional posts on Facebook,

Fig. 109: Communication differences - Scottish Canals

The image consists of two parts. The top part is a blue poster for the 'Scottish Canals Roadshow'. It features the title 'Scottish Canals Roadshow' in white. Below the title, it says 'Join the Scottish Canals' team for an evening exploring the many incredible sights and experiences that await you on the Crinan and Caledonian canals.' A table lists the venues, dates, and times for the roadshow. The bottom of the poster includes the Scottish Canals logo, a Facebook icon, and the website 'Visit scottishcanals.co.uk for more information'.

Venue	Date	Time
Down Cruising Club, Strangford Lough	19th March 2018	7:30pm
Royal Ulster Yacht Club, Bangor	20th March 2018	8:30pm
Carrickfergus Sailing Club, Carrickfergus	21st March 2018	7:30pm
East Antrim Boat Club, Larne	22nd March 2018	7:30pm

The bottom part of the image shows a white sign with the text 'ICE ON TOWPATH' in purple. Below the text is a purple snowflake icon. To the left of the sign, there is a white dog's head. The text 'Be #CanalCareful this winter' is overlaid on the image, along with the subtitle 'Stay safe near Scotland's canals this winter.'

Fig. 110: Roadshow and campaign examples - Scottish Canals

9.6.2.2 Signage

There is no signage strategy in place but this is under review. The key principals that they adhere to currently are:

- Focus on seven destinations which are tourism led
- Less is more – where there is historic signage that is a poor state of repair, this is often removed and not replaced
- Partnership approach – work with other organisations who have interest in Scottish Canals to develop integrated signage
- Use encouragement and light-hearted tone to encourage users to comply with rules and regulations. Education and digital often preferred over signage.

9.6.2.3 Code of Conduct

As with BA, there is no one overarching code of conduct for the Scottish Canals. There are several codes of conducts that have been developed specifically for Scottish Canals in partnership with other organisations or stakeholders.

Overview	
Boats, Bikes, Boots and Beyond	<p>A guide to using Scotland's canals responsibly for water users, cyclists and walkers.</p> <p>The guide was developed by a stakeholder group that included Ramblers Scotland, Scottish Federation for Coarse Angling, RYA Scotland and other interest groups. It centres around three easy to remember pointers – 'share the space', 'drop your pace' and 'it's a special place'. The guide lets users know what to expect from other groups on and around the canal as well as reminding them to take care, stay safe and share the space considerably.</p>
Towpath Code of Conduct	<p>The towpath code of conduct was developed by several partners including Sustrans and Living Streets and focuses on 3 key messages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being considerate towards each other • Taking responsibility for their own actions • Caring for the environment
10 steps to a safe, fun paddle trip!	Online advice to paddlers was developed by Scottish Canals and the Scottish Canoe Association
SAFE	Whilst SAFE (Stay Away From the Edge) was a campaign for Scottish Canals campaign, it is also widely used code for the Canal River Trust as part of their school's education programme.

Fig. 111: Scottish Canals – code of conduct



Fig. 112: Codes of conduct, Scottish Canals

SC partners with other organisations to take the lead on other areas. For example, Keep Scotland Beautiful deals with the issue of littering.

9.6.2.4 Key Learnings

The following table summarises the key learnings that have been gained from the review of best practice case studies.

Theme	Learning
Appropriate and planned communication	It is critical to put in place a clear communication plan ensuring best fit of messages and platforms for each audience
Website is key	Website is cited as a key communication tool. It is critical that the corporate information and visitor information are clearly segmented within the website
Proliferation of signage	Signage makes up only one part of the communication. A proliferation of signage can be counter-productive with engagement and education often proving to be a better route to compliance. More integrated signs are preferred although there are few examples of best practice
Code of conduct originates from various schemes and codes	Code of conduct originates from various schemes and codes and often is developed in partnership with a range of organisations or by a stakeholder group. There is no one overarching code of conduct for the waterway.

Fig. 113: Key learnings from best practice

9.7 Communication Recommendations

Based on marketing best practice and review of best practice demonstrated at Scottish Canals and Broads Authority, it is recommended that there is a more planned and focused approach to communication relating to the Strangford Lough & Lecale AONB.

It is critical to communicate the right message on the most appropriate communication platform for targeted audiences. A Communication Plan should be developed that is the sole remit for one organisation, and with outdoor recreation featuring as one key element. Additional resources would be required for this to occur as communication is not currently the role of one organisation.

The following table recommends the key messages and platforms for outdoor recreation.

Objective	Audience	Message	Platforms
Encourage access to countryside and water through integrated messaging	Public/visitor	Information on where to access the countryside and water independently and how to access with others e.g. guided walks, clubs etc. Alongside messaging around natural and built heritage.	Website Social Media E-newsletter (consumer)
	User groups e.g. paddlers or coastal rowers	Encourage groups and clubs to participate in initiatives e.g. Get Wet and increase membership/host open events	Forum Direct communication to clubs and groups
Ensure that this is done in a responsible and sustainable manner	Public/visitor	3 to 4 key 'bite-sized' messages, reinforced and delivered in different formats e.g. image, video etc.	Website Social Media E-newsletter (consumer)
	User groups e.g. paddlers or coastal rowers	Interpret complex regulations, rules and codes of conduct; present these appropriately to cascade to users	Forum Direct communication to clubs and groups

Fig. 114: Recommended outline communication plan

The outline Communication Plan is based on the following principles:

- Focus should be appropriately apportioned to the audiences:
 - Greatest focus should be given to the public/visitor. This represents the largest audience and the audience who most need encouragement and information to access the countryside and water.
 - User groups already access the countryside and Lough. They are a small but important audience and particularly require information on sustainability.
 - The corporate audience is a much smaller audience who require access to information such as the constitution of the board, projects, policies and strategies.
- A greater focus on the lead message of encouraging access and recreation. This should be supplemented with the sustainable and responsible use message.
- Platforms that are primarily consumer platforms, and should be populated with consumer-focused messages.
- Commit to primarily a digital communication strategy. Whilst there are many other effective communication platforms, there is limited capacity to roll these out effectively given the limited resources that are currently dedicated to audience communication. It is critical to embrace the digital platform as the most effective given the resource available.
- Tackle specific sustainability issues through user group engagement employing signage sparingly for this purpose.

As part of the overall Communication Plan, it is important for other objectives to be considered. It should be noted that whilst these objectives are no less important than sustainable access to the

countryside and Lough, other comparative organisations such as Broads Authority and Scottish Canals focus their consumer communications on access.

The key recommendations for action are highlighted in the following table.

Recommendations	Description	Priority
Develop a Communication Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a concise document outlining the key audiences, messages and platforms based on the 'Outline Communication Plan': <ul style="list-style-type: none"> simple, short document should guide all communication going forward 	High
Develop a website/ enhance existing website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Home page to focus on access to Lough and countryside and recreation; supplemented with sustainable and responsible usage message Populate fully with information on destinations, activities, trails and visitor events Corporate information such as reports and policies should be easy to access within the website but contained within a corporate section and not given focus on home page 	High
Embrace digital platforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focused Facebook page <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consumer focused Focus on access and recreation; Supplement with sustainable usage message delivered in a light consumer-friendly way and reinforced seasonally Develop e-newsletter <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted Create a regular e-newsletter to consumers focused on access and recreation (monthly or quarterly) Create a quarterly e-newsletter to corporate/user groups as appropriate with key messages on access, sustainable and responsible usage, projects, codes of conduct etc. 	High
Develop signage guidelines for Visitor Information Signage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Within the Communication Plan, develop broad signage guidelines for the area for Visitor Information Signage. This should include the following principles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signage should primarily be focused on key destinations and hubs Signage should focus on the public/visitor not a specific user group Remove old signage and only replace only where there is a clear need 	Medium

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Signage should be integrated as far as possible – leading on access, but also incorporating sustainable usage, interpretation and safety/code of conduct ○ Work with other organisations to streamline signage but recognise that there will continue to be legacy signage or other organisation's signs in the area ● Remove canoe trail signage when it is no longer fit for purpose ● Enhance Out and About signage as and when these signs need replaced 	
Utilise partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work with partners to encourage them to take a greater lead on their key message. ● Encourage partners to share the key messages including access and sustainable usage on their platforms, particularly social media 	Low
Engage more effectively with user groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Build on the existing stakeholder groups/forums, utilising these as a key communication platform for messages on sustainable usage as well as encouraging them to encourage more participants to take part ● Address and resolve specific sustainability issues at these forums or through direct communication with the user groups (e.g. Face to face meeting, email etc.) ● Agree appropriate code of conduct and safety messages for Strangford Lough with the user groups ● Distil and present the key messages to the user groups in a way that allows them to effectively cascade the key messages to their members or teams e.g. Members of coastal rowing teams, Canoe Association of Northern Ireland members 	High

Fig. 115: Communication recommendations

Given that SLLP is a small team with limited time and financial resources, and communication is only one small aspect of their work, it is very important that the expectations on what can be achieved are realistic. A more extensive Communication Plan with more events, community engagement and other initiatives would be recommended if resource was not a barrier.

It is important to stress that communication is key with regards the promotion of the study area as a location for sustainable outdoor recreation. It can be stated that appropriate and targeted communication is more important than the development of recreation. Local communities and visitors to the region will only be able to access sites and trails if appropriate communication platforms are employed, engaged and targeted. Sustainable recreation within the study area can also only be achieved if the appropriate communication channels are put in place. The correct messages need to reach to appropriate user groups/ clubs/ individuals, and this needs to be repeated annually and seasonally if required. The repetition of the key messages that need to be conveyed is required to ensure that the largest percentage of users are captured within the

communication of the message, and to ensure that gaps are filled with regards to turnover within clubs (e.g. retiring staff/ officers etc.) and the instances of one off or new recreational users.

There are ample opportunities for the correct communication channels to be employed, but it is recommended that a comprehensive Communication Plan be carried out for the study area that effectively details the essential steps and resources required.

Finally, it is recommended that a dedicated Communications Officer develops this plan and its objectives. A post should be created and hosted by the appropriate organisation, for example, SLLP. If the resources for a dedicated post are not available, a third-party organisation should be used to develop and deliver the Communication Plan. For example, delivery could be through ORNI, who have expertise in both outdoor recreation and communication and who manage existing platforms that could be utilised.

In conclusion, improved communication to user groups and the public/visitors will help address the outdoor recreation objectives of encouraging access to the countryside and water resource and ensuring that this is carried out in a responsible and sustainable manner.

PART 4// HRA SCREENING AND ACTION PLAN

10 HRA SCREENING

This section completed by Blackstaff Ecology contains an 'Information to inform an HRA report'.

This Stage 1 HRA (Screening) considers both the recommendations for access infrastructure but also the holistic access management system.

To do this, Blackstaff Ecology has undertaken the following four-step process:

1. Determine whether the project or plan is directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site
2. Describe the project or plan and the description and characterisation of other projects or plans that in combination have the potential for having significant effects on the Natura 2000 site
3. Identify the potential effects on the Natura 2000 site - this involves the characterisation of the site as a whole or of the areas where impacts are most likely to fall. Impact identification will consider cumulative impacts from other projects or plans, and reference will also be made to the cumulative assessment steps outlined in the EU guidance entitled '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.'
4. Assessing the significance of any effects on the Natura 2000 site.

The HRA Screening report will detail the findings of the above four steps and provide recommendations for mitigations as required.

11 ACTION PLAN

This section sets out an action plan (2018-2028) based on a review on the recommendations contained in this report.

A Development of walking			
Code	Title	Action	Priority level
A1	Access legislation	Councils adopt a consistent and proactive approach to the implementation of access legislation.	H
		Councils allocate sufficient resources to this.	H
A2	Long Distance Trails	Commission a Feasibility Study on the development of a walk along the shore of Strangford Lough.	H
		Implement the findings of the Mourne and Strangford Lough Coastal Path review (see 7.1.1.2).	M
		Ulster Way –	M
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve link section Groomsport to Portaferry - Improve quality section Strangford to Dundrum 	M
A3	Medium Distance Trails	Support for Councils in developing medium distance walks trails	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quoile to Delamont - Newtownards to Island Hill to Comber 	H H
A4	Greenways	Support for Councils in the development of Greenways	H
		Ards and North Down Borough Council	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Comber to Newtownards - Kinnegar to Donaghadee - Newtownards to Helens Bay 	
		Newry, Mourne and Down District Council	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Downpatrick to Comber - Downpatrick to Ardglass 	

		- Downpatrick to Newcastle	
A5	National Trust Coastal Officer	Develop relationship with National Trust Coastal Officer to ensure effective use of resources	H
A6	All ability walk trails	Where a new walk trail developed consideration should be given to the potential to be designed and constructed to meet all ability trail criteria (where appropriate to the environment).	H
A7	Community Trail Plans	Implementation of Community Trail Plans Fig. 82 & Fig. 84 – incorporating PRow's, Permissive Paths etc. and Green Lanes and Quiet Lanes.	H
A8	Management Plans	Fully costed Management Plans put in place for all Community Trails – including consideration of insurance/ insurance provision where trails utilise private land. Third party contract to deliver Management Plan – including inspections and maintenance.	H H
B Development of cycling			
Code	Title	Action	Priority
B1	Road cycling	Review of non NCN routes promoted through platforms such as www.cycleni.com	L
		Liaise with the Department of Infrastructure liaising regarding the development of Quiet Lanes that have lower speed limits and greater opportunities for walking and cycling	M
B2	Off-road cycling	Consideration of family off road cycling provision at	
		- Delamont Country Park (as part of a Masterplan – see 7.4.1.1)	H
		- Mount Stewart (as part of the Trusts development plan)	M
		- Hollymount, Downpatrick (as part of the Community Trail Plan)	M
C Development of horse riding			
Code	Title	Action	Priority

C1	Off road horse riding trails	Consider inclusion for horse riding where new trails are developed only where there is a high demand that can justify the increased expenditure in terms of development and management costs.	L
D	Development of orienteering		
Code	Title	Action	Priority
D1	Orienteering trails	Further discussion with the Northern Ireland orienteering Association (NIAO) to confirm if there are additional sites that could be enhanced e.g. permanent course at Tyrella	L
		Course mapping at Delamont Country Park (not be done if any trail development etc. is to take place as this will mean the map will not be up to date).	L
E	Development of water-based recreation		
Code	Title	Action	Priority
E1	Cruising	Market analysis to identify the potential of Northern Ireland and specifically Strangford Lough as a cruising destination.	M
		Introduction of a Visitor Mooring Scheme for Strangford Lough	H
		Improvement of access to current landing places through negotiation with key sailing and yacht clubs	H
E2	Canoe Trails	Review of trails	M
		Removal of canoe trail panels on Strangford Lough canoe Trail	M
E3	Water taxi	Development of a Strangford Lough water taxi - private sector led	H
E4	Quays	Survey of historic quays where public access is in place (or likely to be put in place)	L
E5	Site based water-based development	See Fig. 97 and 'An audit of access to Strangford Lough, ORNI, 2018'	Various

F Development of air-based recreation			
Code	Title	Action	Priority
F1	Liaison and Education	Liaison and education with flying club and members regarding environmental sustainability (as part of the Communication Plan)	H
G Holistic site-based development			
Code	Title	Action	Priority
G1	Delamont Country Park	<p>Development of a Recreation Masterplan to include -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An assessment of current visitor provision within the Park including trails, water-based access, facilities including toilets, parking, play provision, train and café etc. - Fully costed trail design for a range of multi-use trails - Design proposals for water-based access and storage provision (close to the shore) - Consideration of the current orienteering course - Current and planned use of the site by Delamont Outdoor Education Centre - A visual Masterplan i.e. maps highlighting trails and visitor and vehicle flow etc. - Extensive consultation with current and potential users, relevant statutory organisations etc. - Consideration of external links to the Park including connections to Gibbs Island, Mullagh Quay and Quoile Pondage 	H
G2	Scrabo Country Park	Implementation of the Trail Review and Information Plan	M
G3	Tyrella Beach	<p>Development of a Masterplan to include –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An assessment of current visitor provision including trails, water-based access, facilities including toilets, parking, changing etc. - Fully costed trail design for a range of walk trails 	M

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consideration of the current orienteering course - A visual Masterplan i.e. maps highlighting trails and visitor and vehicle flow etc. - Extensive consultation with current and potential users, relevant statutory organisations etc. 	
H Management			
Code	Title	Action	Priority
H1	Council approach to outdoor recreation	<p>Councils approach to access legislation receives higher priority and a more streamlined approach is taken to ensure Councils and Officers within the study area apply the same approach.</p> <p>Sufficient resources identified by Councils to do this.</p> <p>Development of costed Management Plans to cover PRow's, PPA's and Public Paths (including inspections and maintenance).</p> <p>Contract with third party to implement Management Plans.</p>	H
H2	Promoting responsible outdoor recreation	<p>Use of existing channels and best practice standards to engage Clubs, governing bodies, community organisations for land water and air-based recreation (as appropriate).</p> <p>Schemes to include –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Green Blue – Strangford Lough - WiSe - Leave No Trace - Green Flag - Blue Flag - Green Coast - Seaside Award - Wildlife Recording CEDaR 	H
H3	Informal nature of access to the Lough and	Existing informal access points with access issues – seek landowner permission to secure access	L

	Lecale Coast for water-based recreation	New access points – formal access agreements to be put in place.	M
H4	Environmental management - managing the impact of moorings	Learnings from The West Highland Anchorages and Moorings Association (WHAM) are considered. See Fig. 100.	H
H5	Recreation activity, wildlife disturbance and habitat damage management	Investigate the potential to develop of a high / medium / low sensitivity criterion (or equivalent) based on a combination of factors to identify areas which may be impacted by water recreation Reflect the criteria on a user-friendly layman focused interactive map-based website. This should be developed to complement training programmes identified in Action H2	H
H6	Visitor monitoring	Any new outdoor recreation developments should automatically include the positioning of visitor counters.	Ongoing
H7	Signage and information	Development of a strategic approach – see Section I.	High
I	Communication – *** HIGHEST PRIORITY OF ALL ACTIONS***		
Code	Title	Action	Priority
I1		Development of a Communication Plan for Strangford Lough and Lecale AONB. Employment of a Communications Officer for Strangford Lough and Lecale AONB – who can develop the plan.	H

Fig. 116: Action Plan

APPENDIX 1 – CONSULTEES⁶⁸

(* attended the presentation of findings at Mount Stewart, 26th April 2018)

Organisation/ Club Name	Contact name
Sailing Clubs	
Comber Cruising Club	Connor Coey
Down Cruising Club	Derek Fairley
East Down Yacht Club	
Killyleagh Yacht Club/ Outdoor Education Centre	Graham Chambers Gordon Galloway
Newtownards Sailing Club	Michael Cox
Quoile Yacht Club	Ross Boyd
Ringhaddy Cruising Club	Dr. Michael Edgar
Strangford Lough Yacht Club	Mr PJ Gault
Strangford Sailing Club	Gerry Reilly
Community groups/ development organisations	
Ards Community Network	Paula Hickey
County Down Rural Community Network	Sandra Henderson
Kircubbin Community Development Association	Brian Baillie
Lisbarnett and Lisbane Community Association	Avril Torrens
Lisbarnett and Lisbane Community Association	Kathryn Callaghan
Lisbarnett and Lisbane Community Association	Margaret Finlay
Strangford Yacht Haven	Peter McElean

Other Clubs	
Ards Walkers	Yvonne Campbell
Belfast CHA Walking Club	Eileen Griffiths
Black Neb Rowing Club	Lynn Andrews
Coastal Rowing Expert	Isabelle Hood *
Comber and District U3A	Bob Bell
Comber Walking Group	Lorna Tinman
Dolphin Sub Aqua Club	
Down Danderers	Pauline McCandless
Easy Ramblers	Eileen Anderson
Killyleagh Rowing Club	Ann Fee *
Killyleagh Skiff Rowing Club	Dougie Marr *
Lecale Ramblers	Sean Hanna
Lisburn Sub Aqua Club	Tony Finley
Narrows Tri Club	Ryan Conlan
North Down & Ards U3A Walking Group	Ken Ogilvie
Portaferry Rowing Club	Maura Bettes
Queens Triathlon Club	

⁶⁸ All consultees were contacted via one or more of the following methods: email, phonecall, one to one meeting or public consultation

Sit on Top Touring Club	
Strangford Coastal Rowing Club	James Elliott
Ulster Flying Club	Rodney Pritchards
Outdoor Activity Providers	
Belfast Activity Centre	
Clearsky Adventure Centre	Andy Porter
DV Diving	Dave Vincent
Life Adventure Centre	
Mobile Team Adventure	John Hubbucks
NI Kitesurfing School	
NI SUP	
Northern Ireland Microlights	Ken Crompton
St Brendan Boat Tours	John Murray
Strangford Yacht Charter	
Tollymore National Outdoor Centre	

NGB's	
British Horse Society	Susan Spratt
British Sub Aqua Club Ireland	Nikki Evans
Cycling Ulster	Gary Lavery
Irish Underwater Council (CFT)	Jean Kelleher
Northern Ireland Orienteering	Susan Lambe
Rowing Ireland, Ulster Branch	
Royal Yachting Association NI	
RYA Strangford Lough	Mr PJ Gault *
Swim Ulster	Ruth McQuillan
The Canoe Association of NI	Ashley/ Rodger
Triathlon Ireland	
Ulster Angling Federation	Rob Marshall

Other contacts/ organisations	
AFBI	Robert Rosell
Allen and Mellon Environmental Ecological Consultants	Dave Allen
ANDBC	CLlr Eddie Thompson*
ANDBC Access Officer	Jenny Ingram
ANDBC Corporate Project Officer	Julia Kane*
ANDBC Facilities Manager	Peter Caldwell
ANDBC Principal Planning and Technical Officer	Leona Maginn
ANDBC Rural Development Officer	Marguerite Osborne
ANDBC Tourism Development Officer	Judith Hammond
ANDBC Tourism Manager	Rosemary Richardson*
ANDBC Tourism Manager	Sharon Mahaffey*
Angling NI	Gary Houston
Ardglass Marina	Fred Curran
Conservation Enthusiast	Philip Nye
Crown Estates	Fraser McConnell
Cuan Marine Services	Jeremy Rogers
DAERA - Countryside Access and Grants Officer	Niall McAleenan
DAERA - Marine Conservation and Data Reporting	Stephanie Bennett*
DAERA - Marine Conservation and Data Reporting	Colin Armstrong*
DAERA - Marine Monitoring and assessments Team	Tim Mackie
DAERA - Marine Monitoring and assessments Team	Hugh Edwards
DAERA - NIEA - Quoile Countryside Officer	Rory Mellon
Delamont Outdoor Centre	Keiran Loder
Dibney River Trust	Stephen Kennedy
Disability Sport NI	Aubrey Bingham
DoI Transport NI – Development Control	Rowan Laughlin
Killyleagh Outdoor Centre	Keiran Loder/ Trevor Quinn
Kite surfer and wind surfer	Michael Forster
Kite Surfing and Stand up Paddle boarding business	Warren Polly
Leave No Trace	Maura Lyons
Maritime and Coastguard Agency	Captain David Carlisle/ Bill Bennett/ Katharine Martin
National Trust	Andrew Upton
National Trust Castle Ward	Jaquie Baird
National Trust Castle Ward	Sarah Sharpe* Adrian Bell*
National Trust Mount Stewart	Andrew Upton*
NIEA Northeast Catchment officer	Steven McDowell
NMDDC	CLlr Cadogan Enright*
NMDDC - Access Officer	Heather Wilson
NMDDC - Delamont Country Park	Simon Boyle
NMDDC - Downpatrick DEA Co-ordinator	Katrina Hynds
NMDDC - Facilities Manager	Gail Kane
NMDDC - Rowallane DEA Co-ordinator	Ellen Brennan
NMDDC - Tourism Officer	Michelle Boyle

Portaferry Marina Ltd	James Murray
Portaferry Recreation Hub Manager	Bernard Roddy
QUB Marine Station	Jaimie Dick
QUB Marine Station	Simon Exley
Seaboard	Ken Philpott*
SLLP	Caroline Nolan
SLLP	Judith Caldwell*
SLLP	David Sandford*
SLLP	Susan McClay
Sport NI	Mike McClure*
Spouncer Ecology	Celia Spouncer,
The Green Blue	Kate Fornham*
Wild Eireland	David Thompson
Walk guide	Duane Fitzsimmons *

Fig. 117: List of consultees

APPENDIX 2 – PUBLICLY OWNED LAND WITHIN THE STUDY AREA

Organisation	Site	Area (Ha)	Sites	Total Area (Ha)
Ards and North Down Borough Council	Ballycran Play area	0.18	61	46.20
	Ballydrain Play area	0.04		
	Ballyphilip Playing Fields	2.73		
	Cattogs	5.38		
	Cleland Avenue Open Space	0.07		
	Cloughey Road Play area	0.60		
	Comber Pavilion	1.10		
	Cook Street Pier	0.05		
	Cook Street Slip	0.60		
	Cunningburn Public Conveniences	0.90		
	Exploris	4.45		
	Foreshore	0.47		
	Greyabbey Col Car park	0.05		
	Greyabbey Old Cemetery	0.20		
	Greyabbey Pavilion	1.18		
	Greyabbey Public Conveniences	0.01		
	Greyabbey Village Hall	0.96		
	Greyabbey War Memorial	0.04		
	High Street Playing Fields	0.46		
	Islandhill	1.08		
	Islandhill Public Conveniences	0.02		

Islandview Playarea	0.25		
Killinchy Community Centre	0.27		
Killinchy Village Hall	1.51		
Kircubbin Cemetery	2.24		
Kircubbin Community Centre	0.23		
Kircubbin Pavilion	0.96		
Kircubbin Public Conveniences	0.07		
Kircubbin Re-cycling Centre	0.23		
Land at Anne Street	0.03		
Land at Ballyhaft	0.91		
Land at Boyd Avenue	0.07		
Land at Church Grove	0.78		
Land at Main Street	0.01		
Land at Parsonage Road	0.07		
Land at Railway Embankment, Scrabo Rd, Newtownards	1.72		
Laurelbank Park	0.14		
Lisbarnet Playarea	0.18		
Market House Car Park	0.06		
Meetinghouse Street Car Park	0.16		
North Street Playarea	0.66		
Old Kircubbin Parks Depot	0.05		
Parkway	1.68		
Parsonage Road	0.08		
Parsonage Road Playarea	0.08		
Portaferry Ballyphilip Pavilion	0.75		

	Portaferry Market House	0.04		
	Portaferry Pavilion	0.37		
	Portaferry Public Conveniences	0.01		
	Portaferry Re-cycling Centre & Pavilion	2.15		
	Portaferry TIC	0.04		
	Rubane Playarea	0.07		
	Shore Road Car Park	0.16		
	Steel Dickson Playarea	0.15		
	The Commons	6.26		
	The Green	0.16		
	The Green Car Park	0.16		
	Tullynakill Graveyard	0.15		
	Upper Crescent Open Space	1.72		
	Whiterock Public Conveniences	0.70		
	Windmill Stump	0.29		
Newry , Mounre and Down Council	Ardglass Playing Fields	2.41	51	147.17
	Ardmore Avenue Playground Downpatrick	0.11		
	Ballyhornan Picnic and Rough grass area	1.00		
	Ballyhornan Toilets	0.02		
	Bridge Com Centre & Riverside Rec Area Killyleagh	3.42		
	Bridge Street Playground Downpatrick	0.14		
	Castle Recreation Area Killyleagh	0.15		
	Cuan Beach Recreation Area Killyleagh	0.11		
	Delamont Country Park	80.81		
	Dunleath and Townpark Downpatrick	10.21		

English Street recreation Area Downpatrick	0.06		
Flying Horse Recreation Area	0.80		
Former Workhouse Graveyard	0.33		
Gallows Hill Downpatrick	0.99		
Greenfield Steps Ardglass	0.03		
Grove Gardens Rec Area Killyleagh	0.15		
Hans sloane Square killyleagh	0.20		
Kerry wind verge Killyleagh	0.04		
Kilclief Castle Picnic Area	0.11		
Killough Carpark and Toilets	0.14		
Killough Harbour	0.70		
Killough Playing Fields	2.23		
Killough Road Community centre and grounds	0.53		
Knocknashinns Pgrd and Rec Area Dpk	0.66		
Marian Park Downpatrick	0.08		
Meadowlands Recreation Area	1.78		
Model Farm Rec Area Downpatrick	0.68		
Phennick Marina Ardglass	0.14		
Pound Lane Amenity Area Downpatrick	0.05		
Quay Street Rec Area Ardglass	0.49		
Quoile Picnic Site and Toilets	1.71		
Roughal Park Downpatrick	0.95		
ScordIn Picnic Area	0.09		
Seaview Playground Ardglass	0.95		
Shrigley Playground	0.22		

	St Dympnas Playground Dpk	0.05		
	St Patricks Grave Downpatrick	0.19		
	Strangford Playing fields	1.67		
	Struell Cemetery Downpatrick	3.04		
	The Arts Centre & 3 Scotch Street Downpatrick	0.05		
	The Clock and Recreation Area Shrigley	0.79		
	The Green Strangford	0.17		
	The Grove, St Pats Centre, Market Street Carpark	2.59		
	The Rope Walk Killough	0.41		
	The Shore Recreation Area Killough	0.68		
	The Square Killough	0.06		
	The Square Strangford	0.06		
	Toilets Killyleagh	0.03		
	Tullyhill Recreation Area Kilclief	0.20		
	Tyrella Beach	24.71		
	Upper Scotch Street Downpatrick	0.01		
Crown Estate - leased to National Trust		826.00	9	826.00
Crown Estate - leased to Council		495.92	6	495.92
Crown Estate - leased to Other	Minesto UK Limited	7.50	4	100.35
	Marine Current Turbines Limited	51.42		
	SeaGeneration Limited	0.78		
	Sea Generation Ltd	40.64		

National Trust	Castle Ward	352.64	6	5754.82
	Strangford Lough	5000.41		
	Killynether	16.99		
	Kearney	23.73		
	Dundrum Coastal Path	10.63		
	Mount Stewart	350.45		
Woodland Trust	Corrog Wood	5.44	3	10.20
	Pond Wood & Compass Hill	1.16		
	Nut Wood	3.60		
Forest Service NI	Hollymount	110.95	3	110.95
NI Water	Lough Cowey	31.00	2	56.00
	Lough Money	25.00		
Crown Estate	Strangford Lough	1866.00	1	1866.00
		Total	146	9413.63

Fig. 118: Publicly owned land within the study area

APPENDIX 3 - PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY

Location	Type of Right of Way	Database Reference	Right of Way Distance (m)
Newry Mourne and Down DC			
Drumroe Road And Blackcauseway Road, Ballyculter	PROW	ID65, Down, 23/04/2013	2397.136894
Castle Lane, Ardglass	FOOTPATH	ID67, Down, 23/04/2013	118.362718
Raholp To Loughmoney	BRIDLE PATH	ID68, Down, 23/04/2013	1183.997721
The Shore To Raholp	PROW	ID69, Down, 25/04/2013	982.914733
Ballysugagh To Saul Chapel	PROW	ID70, Down, 25/04/2013	612.720856
Ballyalton To Ballysugagh	PROW	ID71, Down, 25/04/2013	1715.958046
Lough Money To Ballystokes	PROW	ID72, Down, 25/04/2013	1740.843949
Killough To St. John'S Point	PROW	ID73, Down, 25/04/2013	2994.631695
Ballyhornan To St. Patrick'S Well, Sheepland	PROW	ID74, Down, 25/04/2013	3957.302216
Bishopscourt Road To Glebe Road	PROW	ID75, Down, 25/04/2013	873.768691
Castle Flannen, Kilclief	PROW	ID76, Down, 25/04/2013	57.573498
Carrownacaw Road To Ballyculter Road, Raholp	PROW	ID77, Down, 25/04/2013	735.027256
The Braodmeadows, Killyleagh	PROW	ID86, Down, 25/04/2013	623.982007
Net Walk & Shore Loney, Killyleagh	PROW	ID87, Down, 25/04/2013	869.391418
Belfast Road To Jane'S Shore, Downpatrick	Public Path	ID88, Down, 25/04/2013	924.696156
Park Lane/Saul Lane, Harry'S Loney	PROW	ID89, Down, 26/04/2013	653.392192
Sampson'S Lane, Downpatrick	PROW	ID90, Down, 26/04/2013	420.558766
Downpatrick Road To Castle Street, Strangford	Public Path	ID91, Down, 26/04/2013	1551.922845
English Street To Market Street Carpark	PROW	ID23, Down, 17/04/2013	92.946326
Shrigley Road To Castlevew, Killyleagh	PROW	ID24, Down, 17/04/2013	272.356579
		Total	22779.48456
Ards and North Down BC			

High St, Ballyphilip Road, Portaferry	FOOTPATH	ID92, Ards, 29/04/2013	127.083001
High St, Ballyphiip Road, Portaferry	FOOTPATH	ID93, Ards, 29/04/2013	159.021516
Ballydrain Rd To Shore Beside Castle Espie Pier	BRIDLE PATH	ID95, Ards, 29/04/2013	453.30852
Lisbane Road To Ardmillan Road, Comber	FOOTPATH	ID97, Ards, 29/04/2013	1101.837683
Ballyblack Church To Cunningburn Road	BRIDLE PATH	ID99, Ards, 29/04/2013	761.299878
Carrowdore Rd To Mountstewart Rd At Ballygrangee	FOOTPATH	ID102, Ards, 29/04/2013	1853.688522
155 Portaferry Road, Newtownards	FOOTPATH	ID106, Ards, 29/04/2013	39.298875
Tubber Road To Inishargy Road, Kircubbin	FOOTPATH	ID107, Ards, 29/04/2013	1741.634786
From Kearney Road To Newcastle Road, Portaferry	FOOTPATH	ID109, Ards, 29/04/2013	2993.778964
		Total	9230.951745

Fig. 119: Public rights of way

APPENDIX 4 – CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT RURAL ENGLAND’S GUIDE TO QUIET LANES

Objectives

Walk, cycle and ride in safety

- Quiet Lanes are designated minor rural roads intended to pay special attention to the needs of walkers, cyclists, horse riders and the mobility impaired. They are designed to enable users to enjoy country lanes in greater safety and encourage car drivers to respect more vulnerable road users.

Widen transport choice

- Quiet Lanes are a key way of widening transport choice in the countryside by encouraging local journeys to be made on foot or bicycle, and for recreation. While cars are not banned and use of these roads is shared, lower speed limits and discrete road signs can encourage drivers to slow down and help to promote a more tranquil rural environment.

Quiet Lanes as a network

- Quiet Lanes work best when they are part of a network of designated lanes which can link local residents to, for example, the local shop or school, and connect lanes around a village centre or to a nearby village.

Quality of life

- Quiet Lanes are about appreciating the beauty and tranquillity of country lanes rather than travelling along them from A to B as quickly as possible in a car. By helping to protect the character and tranquillity of the countryside from traffic, reducing the intimidating effects of traffic on rural roads, building community links and encouraging healthy, recreational activities, Quiet Lanes play a valuable role in improving people’s quality of life.

Frequently asked questions

What are Quiet Lanes?

Quiet Lanes are minor rural roads, typically C or unclassified routes, which have been designated by local highway authorities to pay special attention to the needs of walkers, cyclists, horse riders and other vulnerable road users, and to offer protection from speeding traffic. Cars are not banned from Quiet Lanes and the use of Quiet Lanes is shared. Measures such as lower speed limits and discrete road signs aim to encourage drivers to slow down and be considerate to more vulnerable users who can in turn use and enjoy country lanes in greater safety, with less threat from speeding traffic. The concept of Quiet Lanes was first introduced in Jersey (they were known as ‘Green Lanes’) where much of the rural road network is now designated. The Countryside Agency first introduced the idea of Quiet Lanes in England. The Agency has initiated two demonstration schemes in Norfolk and Kent to measure the success of Quiet Lanes.

Why does CPRE promote Quiet Lanes?

The Quiet Lanes initiative forms part of CPRE’s Safer Country Lanes campaign. This seeks to protect country lanes and villages from the adverse effects of speeding traffic by calling for lower speed limits and widespread designation of Quiet Lanes. Speeding traffic blights many villages and has led to numerous collisions and fatalities. Fatal car crashes occur most frequently on rural roads and it is no surprise that speeding traffic has a significant impact on people’s quality of life. CPRE’s Rural Traffic Fear Survey 1999 found that 65% of people felt threatened either all or some of the time by speeding traffic on country lanes. A Quiet Lane may not be the most appropriate solution to motorists persistently driving at excessive speed, but they can be part of a package of measures to improve transport choices. Quiet Lanes can help make country lanes feel safer, pleasant and less intimidating to pedestrians, cyclists, horse riders and all who enjoy them, by aiming to reduce the risk of collisions and reclaim their tranquillity and local character.

Will Quiet Lanes act as a form of traffic calming?

Quiet Lanes are designed to make country lanes safer and more accessible to vulnerable users. To achieve this, CPRE believes Quiet Lanes should have speed limits of 20 mph. Quiet Lanes are not, however, a means of tackling safety problems on a particular stretch of road and should not be seen as a way of banning or significantly calming traffic. Measures can be taken to help deliver the aims of Quiet Lanes but these should be in keeping with the local character of the area. Examples include varying verge maintenance, soft landscaping, removal of road signs, road surface treatments or even planting grass in the middle of the road. Traditional traffic calming measures such as speed cushions, humps and high visibility signs are often more appropriate to urban areas.

What do Quiet Lanes look like and will they clutter the countryside with signs?

Quiet Lanes will vary from area to area but the sign of a successful Quiet Lane is that it looks similar to the existing lane. Quiet Lanes should be designed to protect and enhance the local character and distinctiveness of the countryside. Signs should, therefore, be discrete whilst indicating clearly to road users that they are in a Quiet Lane. Signs should neither detract from, nor clutter, the countryside.

Can any road be designated a Quiet Lane?

Quiet Lanes are only appropriate for minor rural roads, C or unclassified routes (single-carriageway).

Who has priority on a Quiet Lane?

Currently, the legislation does not afford any user group priority on a Quiet Lane and use is shared. CPRE would, however, like to see vulnerable road users have priority right of way. This would be similar to the priority attached to pedestrians stepping onto a zebra crossing. While motorised traffic may use a Quiet Lane, CPRE believes it should respect the presence of walkers, cyclists and horse riders who should have priority. In the meantime, publicity, community involvement and other measures should ensure drivers take even more care when travelling along a Quiet Lane.

Are lower speed limits required?

Under the Transport Act 2000, local authorities can make speed orders. This means they can take measures to reduce the existing speed of motor vehicles and/or cycles. Although lower speed limits are not a compulsory part of a Quiet Lane, the key is to encourage drivers to slow down and to reduce their speeds in order to create a safer environment. Lower speed limits are, therefore, likely to be needed and CPRE encourages 20 mph as part of a broader hierarchy of rural speed limits.

How are Quiet Lanes enforced to ensure that drivers drive slowly and considerately?

Quiet Lanes are essentially self-enforcing. Enforcement largely depends on advertising the Quiet Lanes and maintaining public awareness about their purpose. This requires a continuous programme of promotion in order that all in the community and visitors to the area know the Quiet Lanes exist and what they are seeking to achieve. Frequently those motorists travelling at higher speeds come from the local area and this reinforces the need for local community support for Quiet Lanes as they are developed and implemented.

Where do Quiet Lanes exist in England?

Two pilot Quiet Lanes projects have been developed in Norfolk and Kent with the support of the Countryside Agency. CPRE is aware that local highway authorities in Buckinghamshire, Cheshire, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Lancashire, Oxfordshire, Somerset, Surrey, Wiltshire and Worcestershire have started to develop Quiet Lanes networks. Across the country 31 local authorities are intending to collectively develop over 300 Quiet Lanes with their local communities.

What regulations are in place for Quiet Lanes?

The Transport Act 2000 contains provisions which give local highway authorities the power to designate certain roads, for which they are responsible as Quiet Lanes, and has given the term 'Quiet Lane' legal status. Under the Transport Act 2000, local authorities are also able to make orders about the use of these roads ('use orders') and about speed reduction measures ('speed orders'), subject to regulations made by the Secretary of State for Transport.

APPENDIX 5 – KEY ATTRIBUTES OF A CATEGORY 1 - YELLOW GRADE OFF-ROAD CYCLING TRAIL

These trails can be used by any cyclists using any type of bicycle regardless of their ability or experience. This includes family/ leisure cyclists of all abilities including bikes with child seats, tag alongs, trailers and training wheels. These should therefore be wide enough to safely accommodate these users.

Low gradients are essential to ensure safe use of these trails by all users and to ensure that conflicts between users or safety issues do not effect the sustainability of these trails. In this regard, good lines of sight are essential.

Even and consistent surfaces are also important in ensuring that cyclists with a variety of bicycles and tyres can safely access the trails, in particular, children with bikes with small wheels.

Key attributes of Category 1 – Yellow grade off road cycling trails

- **Trail width** – Minimum 1.5m
- **Trail gradient** – Maximum average gradient not more than 3%. Maximum absolute gradient not more than 5% for not more than 30m.
- **Trail surface** – Sealed surfaces only, surfaces must be even and consistent throughout and can include compacted gravel.
- **Lines of sight** - Minimum 40m
- **Trail features**
 - Flat or level trails with no significant trail features
 - Grade reversals – min length 10m, max depth 500mm
 - Climbing turn, min radius 10m
 - Rolling crown switchbacks, min radius 8m
 - Berms – NONE
 - Rollers – NONE
 - Level changes – NONE
 - Step downs and rollable step downs – NONE
 - Tabletops – NONE
 - Bridges, min width 2.5m – guardrails both sides min height 1100mm
 - Boardwalks, min width 2.5m – maximum height above ground level 300mm guardrails of min height of 1100mm where there are exposed drops of over 300mm. Max gradient of boardwalks 0% with no out-slope of in-slope
 - Pot holes – NONE
 - Any exposed edges higher than 600mm should have a guardrail throughout, min height 1100mm
- **Trail Users** - Cyclists of all types on all kinds of bikes