

Review and Audit of Mid Ulster District Council Landscape Character Assessment Review for Local Development Plan Preparation



Job No. 2018259
Client: Mid Ulster District Council

Revision	Amendment	Drawn	Checked	Date
-	Draft report for client	KB/CMcN	CMcN	14/08/18
A	Draft report for client	KB/CMcN	CMcN	05/09/18
B	Final Report for client	KB/CMcN	CMcN	16/10/18



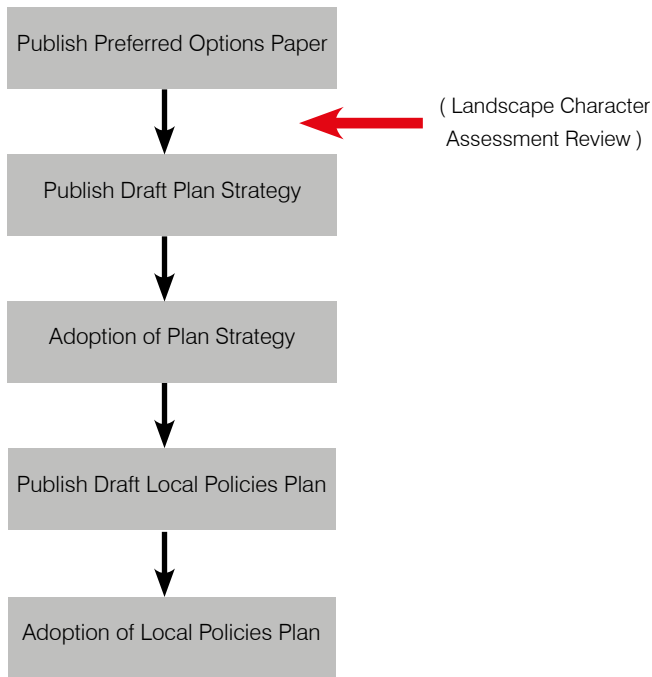
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Introduction

Background

- Mid Ulster District Council (MUDC) is in the process of preparing its Local Development Plan. At this stage, MUDC are preparing the Plan Strategy which will include the introduction of environmental designations. These designations will be informed by Landscape Character Assessments.
- MUDC have reviewed and analysed all 22 LCA's relevant to the District, determining key development changes since the publication of the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment (NILCA) 2000. This review took account of relevant policy and guidance, in particular the NILCA 2000 and the later Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment (NIRCLA) 2016.
- The review concluded that although many parts of the district have seen a substantial phase of development, the overall character and inherent sensitivities of individual LCA's, as defined in NILCA 2000, have not been significantly affected. The review also concluded that NILCA 2000 remains fit for purpose and continues to provide a robust baseline to inform future decisions regarding these landscapes.
- As part of the Local Development Plan system, the MUDC wish to ensure that the findings of their Landscape Character Assessment Review are 'sound' and that it can be utilised to inform the preparation of their Local Development Plan.



Scope of work and statement of requirements

GM Design Associates Ltd were appointed to the contract on 16th July 2018. The contract comprises the provision of a review and audit of the MUDC Landscape Character Assessment Review. The Council required GMDA to undertake the following:

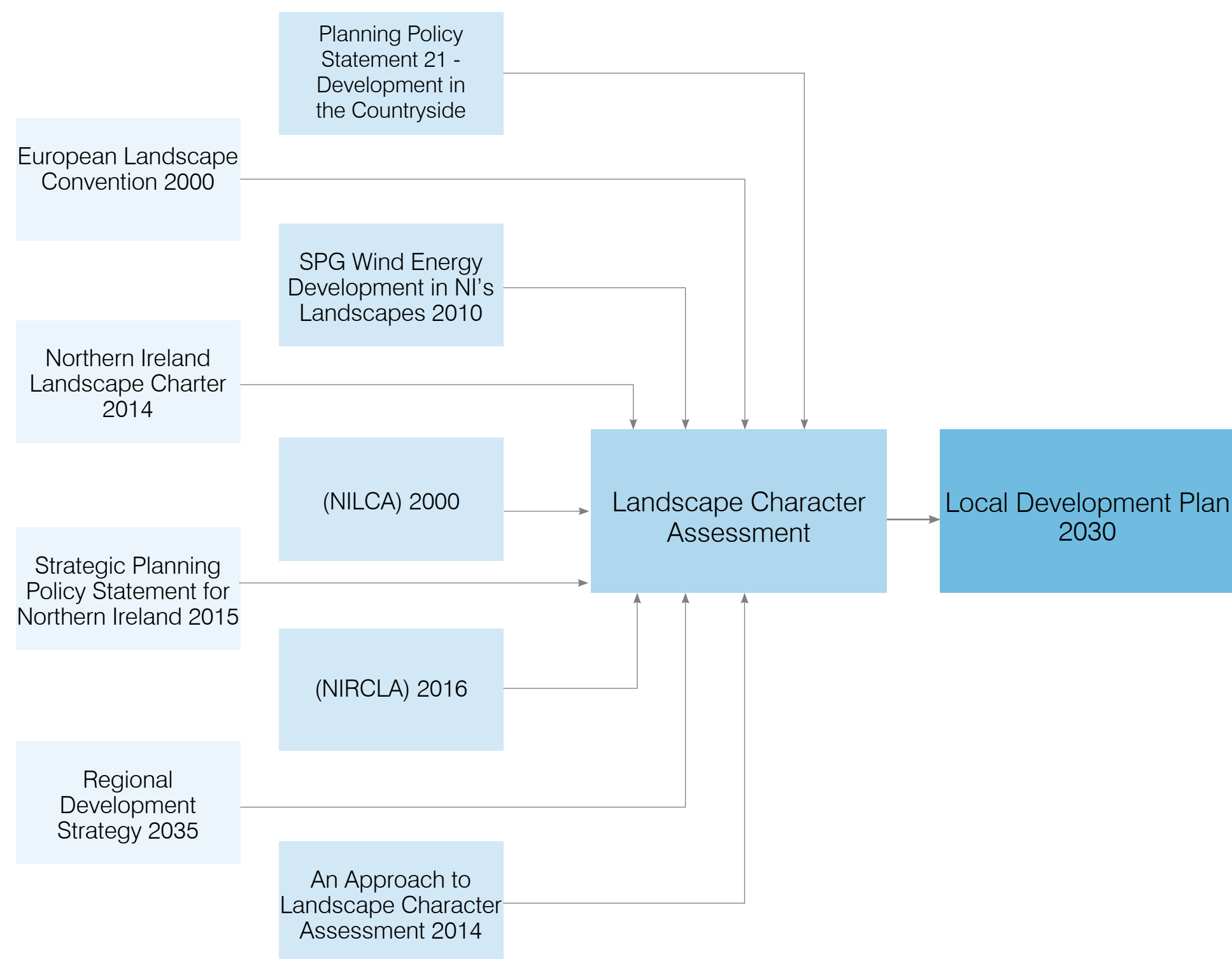
Review and Audit Findings Report

1. A preliminary desk-based review and audit of the Council's Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) Review.
2. Site visit to a random sample of 3 landscape character areas (LCA) within the district for the purpose of validating the findings of the council's review of the particular LCA. The site visit will include an assessment of key landscape and visual characteristics, an identification of key intervening changes since the publication of the NILCA in 2000 and an opinion as to whether or not the overall character and sensitivity of the LCA has been significantly affected in the intervening period.
3. Submission of a findings report from the desk-based review and the site visit, to include but not limited to;
 - comment on the methodology employed by the Council in the Landscape Character Assessment Review;
 - highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the councils LCA review, including identification of information gaps, flaws or inconsistencies, where relevant;
 - suggest improvements to the councils LCA review and/or supplement with additional information, if necessary;
 - subject to the above, the consultant(s) final report will sign off on the methodology and overall findings of the Councils LCA Review.

Methodology

- An introductory meeting, which took place on 26th July 2018 between the Landscape Consultancy Team and members of the MUDC LCA team, provided the basis for commencing the review and audit of the LCA Review.
- Our team commenced by identifying and reviewing the policy context that surrounds and guides Landscape Character Assessments in Northern Ireland. This was completed at an early stage to ensure an informed review and audit of the Council's LCA Review could be completed.
- The next step of the works entailed a preliminary desk-based review and audit of the Council's LCA Review. We identified if MUDC have consulted the correct policies related with Landscape Character Areas, assessed their general approach to the LCA Review and highlighted initial weaknesses.
- On the 7th and 8th August 2018, after the completion of the desk-based review, we completed site visits to a random sample of Landscape Character Areas within the Mid Ulster District. This would allow the team to assess the key characteristics of the landscape, to identify any key intervening changes that have occurred since the publication of NILCA 2000 and to help inform our opinion as to whether or not the overall character and sensitivity of the LCA has been significantly affected over the intervening period. The team gained a first hand visual appreciation of the study areas and obtained photographs to aid the review.
- After the completion of the site visits the team de-briefed and discussed the findings ensuring the information gathered could be utilised to inform the final stages of our review of MUDC's LCA Review.
- The Landscape Consultancy Team presented and discussed the initial findings from the desk-based review and site visits with the MUDC LCA team on the 14th August 2018.
- The final stage of the works required us to review the findings from the desk-based review and site visits. For this task, we assessed whether the Council employed the correct methodology and whether this allowed them to complete the review as thoroughly as possible. We identified the strengths and weaknesses of the LCA Review and suggested potential improvements, to ensure a more sound MUDC LCA Review.

Policy Context



Preliminary desk-based review and audit of the Council's Landscape Character Assessment Review

Policy

- MUDC have acknowledged and reviewed all relevant European and regional policy and guidance in relation to landscape character assessments. Key points from this policy and guidance have been identified and outlined within the opening sections of the LCA review document. The MUDC LCA review recognises the relationship between the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment (NICLA) 2000 and the Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment (NIRCLA) 2015 and understands that the purpose of the NIRCLA 2015 document is not to replace the NICLA 2000 document, but to compliment it.
- The MUDC LCA review has referenced and outlined important guidance contained within the SPPS such as the need to protect landscapes from inappropriate development and the protection of mountain areas and certain views and vistas, however, the review has not made reference to specific aspects such as archaeology, listed buildings, Historic Parks, Gardens and Demesnes, Conservation Areas or Areas of Townscape Character. These features play an integral role in many landscapes and any change to these could significantly affect the character and integrity of the landscape.
- There is no reference to specific planning policy statements, for instance PPS 21 Development in the Countryside. PPS 21 sets out policies for managing development in the countryside with an emphasis on protecting the landscape. It identifies the four interrelated strands of the Countryside Assessment including the Landscape Assessment.
- Have MUDC considered the relevant Conservation Area Design guidance. i.e. Moy Conservation Area Design Guide - within Loughgall Orchard Belt LCA.

Methodology

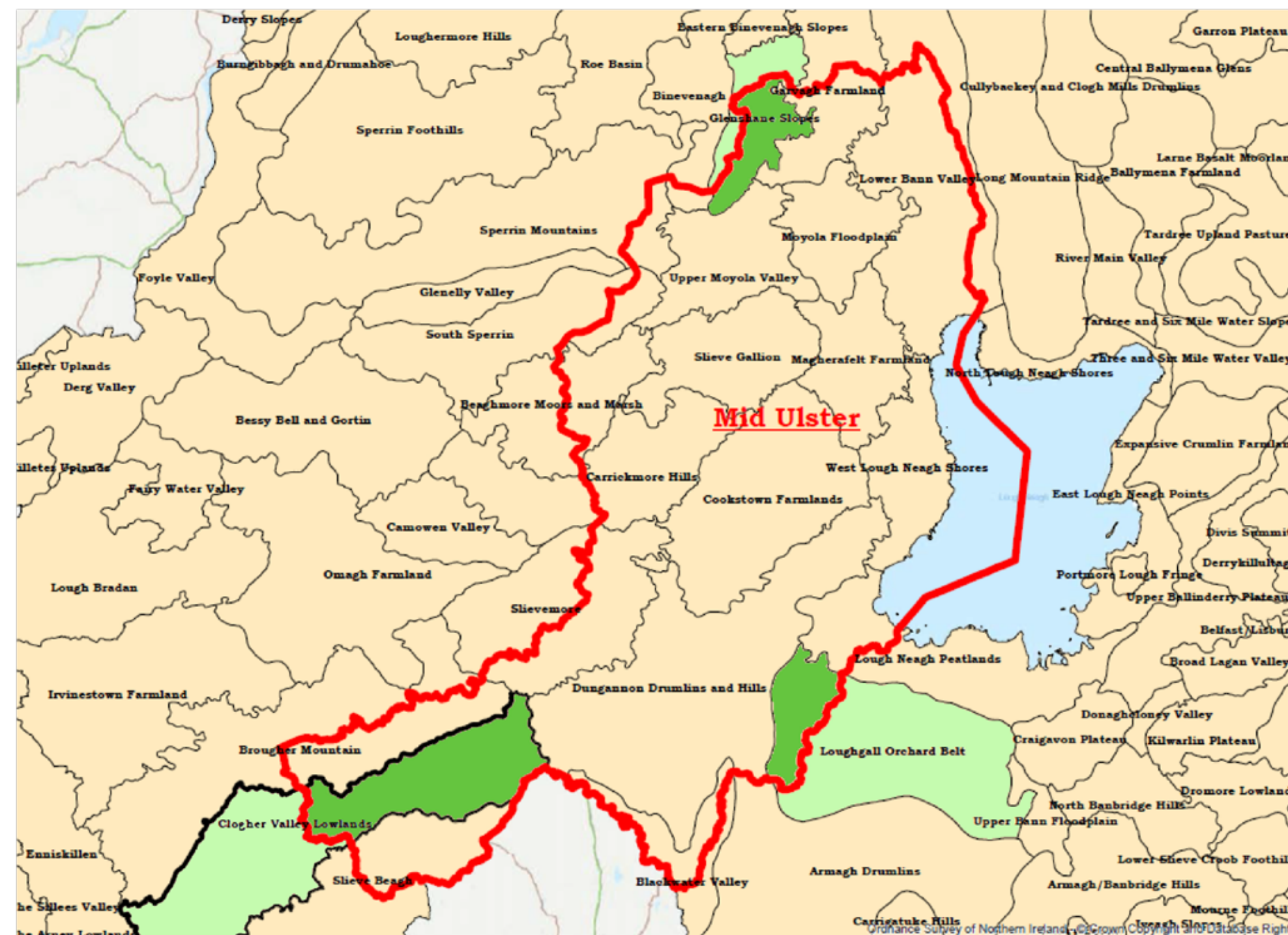
- The MUDC report seeks to highlight key developments within the Mid Ulster district since the publication of NILCA 2000 and suggests whether or not landscape character has been affected as a result, or is likely to be affected if development trends continue over the forthcoming plan period. Where relevant, potential action points or policy implications have been suggested.
- A desk top analysis was initially carried out by MUDC including a review of relevant policy, with particular emphasis on NILCA 2000 and NIRCLA 2016.
- The MUDC review draws upon information on the ecosystem services for Mid Ulster.
- MUDC have outlined the Corine Database and associated document 'Land Cover of the UK' as a source of data in relation to landscape character.
- The MUDC approach was to primarily focus on the impact of one-off housing and wind energy development, but to take into account the impact of other key indicators of landscape change such as the extent of quarrying operations, industrial operations, major roadworks and commercial forestry.
- This information was used to review and analyse the key landscape changes within Mid Ulster since the publication of NILCA 2000. The intervening changes within each LCA were listed and a Landscape Review table was produced to be read in conjunction with the list.
- The review used aerial ortho-photography maps to accompany the review of each LCA along with base maps illustrating single dwelling, wind turbine and wind farm approvals.
- Focused field survey work was carried out in order to help identify and confirm key changes within each LCA.

Initial weaknesses identified

- Although the Corine Database and associated document 'Land Cover of the UK' has been outlined as a source of data to help inform the LCA Review, there seems to be no actual use of this data within each LCA review.
- There is a limited use of visual information (photos) throughout the review. There are only 4 photos used within the review of the LCA's.
- Limited reference to SPG Wind Energy Development in NI's Landscapes document (2010), particularly within table 2. The SPG provides detailed information on the key landscape and visual characteristics and values of each LCA. The SPG also provides guidance on the sensitivity and ideal siting of wind energy development within each LCA.
- Lack of review of LCA information on 'Landscape Condition and Sensitivity to change', Principles for Landscape Management and Principles for accommodating new development' contained within NILCA 2000.

*These weaknesses were reported by the Landscape Consultancy Team to MUDC for consideration on the 14th August 2018.

3 LCA Study Areas



Selection of Study Areas

In order to select the 3 random LCA's for the purpose of site visits and validation of the Council's review, we assigned random numbers to each of the LCA's within the district and used an online random number generator to select three numbers.

On this basis, the 3 study areas randomly selected were:

- LCA 17 - Clogher Valley Lowlands
- LCA 39 - Glenshane Slopes
- LCA 47 - Loughqall Orchard Belt

 Mid Ulster District Boundary

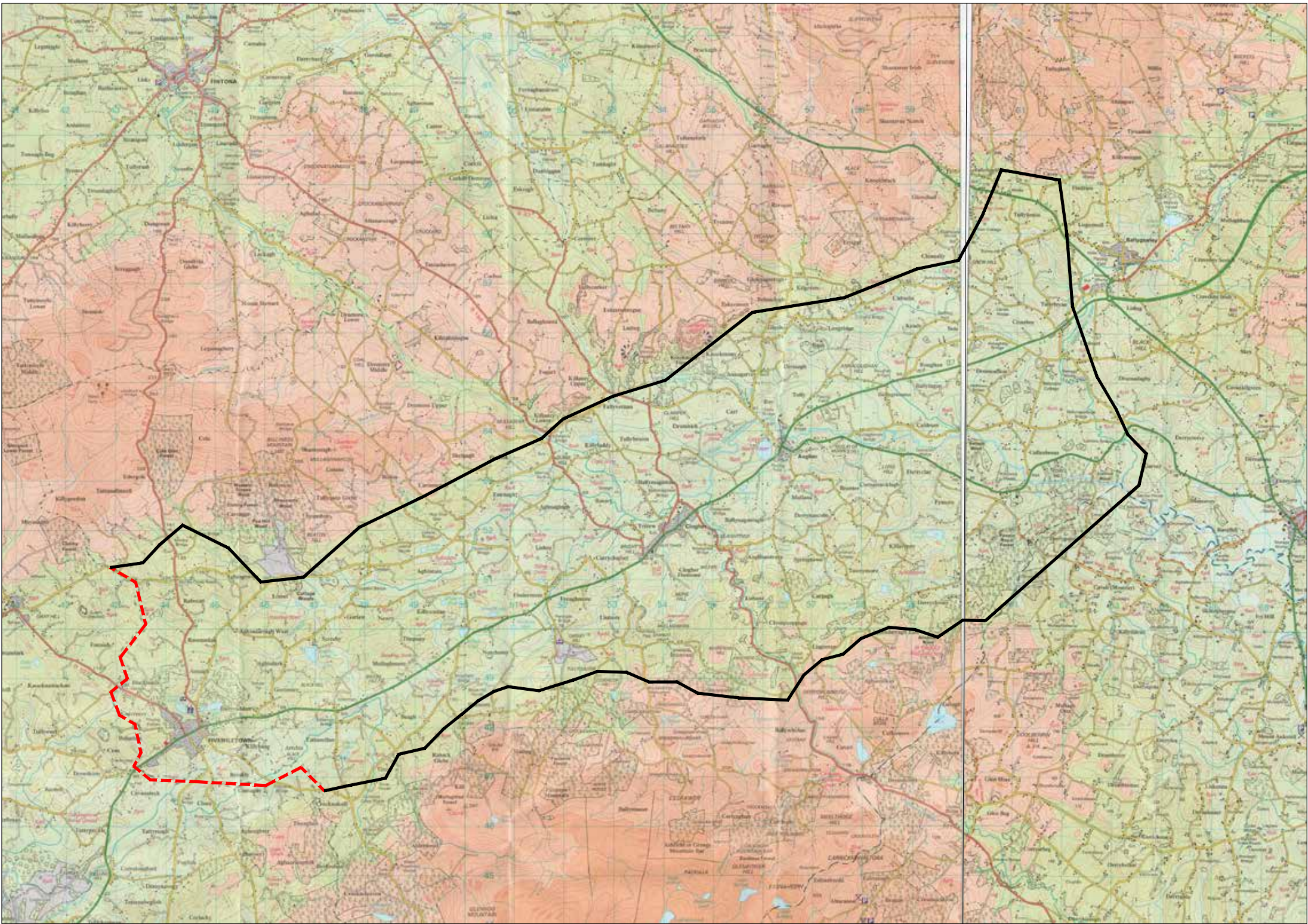
LCA within Mid Ulster boundary

LCA outside Mid Ulster boundary

Map identifying 3 randomly selected LCA study areas (not to scale)

LCA 17 - Clogher Valley Lowlands

Map showing LCA boundary



- Clogher Valley boundary
- - - Mid Ulster boundary

LCA 17 - Clogher Valley Lowlands

NILCA 2000 LCA Guidance

Landscape - Key Characteristics

- Broad lowland corridor with small rounded hills and long ridges.
- Well farmed countryside with distinctive estate landscapes. Extensive grassland production on progressive farms.
- Relatively dense vegetation cover, with hedgerows, woods and tree belts. Large, mature trees on estates, around farms and along roads are a feature.
- Numerous winding rivers and streams, with meadows, mills, bridges and loughs.
- Many traditional buildings and small county houses of character. Older buildings on the slopes and tops of drumlins.

Landscape - Description

The Clogher Valley Lowlands are confined between the sandstone ridges of Brougher Mountain to the north, and Slieve Beagh to the south. It is a broad distinctive corridor of undulating lowland, including a low watershed between the Colebrooke and Tempo river valleys and the Clogher Valley, which contains the Upper Blackwater River. The lowland is covered with boulder clay drumlins of varying sizes and long winding eskers of sand and gravel. There are also occasional solid rock outcrops. Between the drumlins and ridges are areas of flatter land, linked by streams and rivers. Most are pastures but some have pockets of bog and small loughs, such as Lough Eyes and Screeby Lough. There is some peat-cutting but much of the peat from the bogs has been worked in the past and they have been colonised by birch and willow scrub.

Farming is progressive, dominated by medium sized farm businesses, producing silage and hay for cattle rearing and dairy herds. Fields are relatively large and are bounded by hedges which are often overgrown with tall, mature trees. Tree groups occur around farms and at the hilltop raths, which are a particular feature of the Brookeborough and the Tempo river valleys. The lowland has many notable estate landscapes, including the Colebrooke, Clogher and Tempo Manor estates. All are distinctive and attractive landscapes, with a mix of woodland, parkland and historic estate buildings. Housing is associated with farms and with older houses on the top or sides of drumlins and ridges. Most have been modernised but elements of traditional design still remain. Some of the larger dwellings have small parkland settings. The lowland is criss-crossed with minor roads. Fivemiletown, Clogher and Augher are important local centres along the principal A4 route from Belfast to Fermanagh.

Landscape Condition and Sensitivity to Change

The landscape is in good condition, with intact field boundaries and a high degree of unity and enclosure.

The area has a strong sense of place and its rich historic landscape heritage and detailed, intricate landscape pattern is extremely sensitive to change. The lowlands are overlooked in views from the adjacent uplands and landscapes within these views are particularly sensitive. The wider corridor of the many rivers and streams, with their associated meadows, bridges, loughs and mill buildings are also vulnerable to landscape change. In addition, the Clogher Valley is considered to be a fine example of an undisturbed fluvio-glacial landscape and merits protection from mineral extraction.

Principles for Landscape Management

- The distinctive flowery waysides, hedgerows and mature trees which line the roads are important features. Young trees should be retained and protected in order to replace older ones as they die. New tree planting would be appropriate.
- Changes in land use which are in scale with the existing attractive balance of bog, hay and silage meadows, woodland and parkland and which fit within the robust pattern of hedgerows, are most appropriate. Large scale planting, or the enlargement of fields would change the intricate grain of the landscape.

Principles for Accommodating New Development

- Development has been generally well integrated into the existing pattern of small hills, ridges and mature vegetation. The skylines and the characteristically flat open bog areas are best kept open and free of development. Former house sites nestled amongst the hill-slopes and within established vegetation may provide scope for development. Small scale dwellings with white washed facades are characteristic.
- It would be beneficial to control ribbon development, which would detract from the distinctive setting and character of local settlements.
- The settings to historic features, such as raths and estate landscapes, should be protected from development.
- Planting native species around houses, instead of exotic coniferous species, would ensure that new developments fit more comfortably into the landscape.

LCA 17 - Clogher Valley Lowlands - MUDC LCA Review

LCA 17 Clogher Valley (The eastern portion of this LCA falls within Mid Ulster)		
Key landscape characteristics, features and values.	Key Intervening Changes to LCA since 2000	Action point
<p>NILCA 2000 'Distinctive, scenic lowland landscape with a secluded verdant character'</p> <p>'Farmsteads and cottages are interspersed with numerous archaeological sites. The latter are exceptionally prominent, as the raths, cashels and crannogs are often marked by groups of high trees'</p> <p>'In the centre of the valley, the small historic towns of Augher and Clogher are the sites of 17th and 18th Century Demesnes, surrounded by remnants of their designed landscapes'</p> <p>'Low lying area is confined between the ridges of Brougher Mountain to the north and Slieve Beagh to the south'</p> <p>'The landscape is in good condition with intact field boundaries and a high degree of unity and enclosure'.</p> <p>'Development has been generally well integrated into the existing pattern of small hills, ridges and mature vegetation'</p> <p>'The skylines and the characteristically flat open bog areas are best kept open and free of development'.</p> <p>Wind Energy Development Sensitivity Rating: High</p> <p>Key feature: Knockmany Hill Neolithic Passage Tomb Key feature: Strategic Transport Corridor Key feature: Clogher Hillfort</p>	<p>Except for some localised impacts of ribbon development and expansion of existing industry, this area has experienced few intrusive developments. The upgrade of the A4 between Ballygawley and Augher is a noticeable change although this has not been on the same scale as the Dungannon to Ballygawley section.</p>	<p>No key changes identified.</p>

LCA 17 - Clogher Valley Lowlands - Photos



Main Street, Augher



Main Street- new development close to existing houses at Knockview



Springtown Road- looking East (Near ASSI's)



Springtown Road- looking East (Near ASSI's)

LCA 17 - Clogher Valley Lowlands - Photos



Clogher- Main St- Taken from near St.Macartans Cathedral



Fairdross House on Ashfield Road



View from Fairdross Rd-Slatmore Rd area looking north



Fivemiletown- Main Street

LCA 17 - Clogher Valley Lowlands - Photos



Farm on Corick Rd



Wind Farm located outside LCA boundary



Glenhoy Road Agricultural Barns



View from Glenhoy Rd

LCA 17 - Clogher Valley Lowlands

Key landscape and visual characteristics

- A4 River Blackwater Basin- gently sloping valley sides with distinctive coniferous wooded ridgelines
- Well vegetated drumlins
- Large established single dwellings
- Distant/long views from upper slopes of Valley.
- Forestry blocks
- Clogher Valley Scenic Drive & Carleton Walking Trail
- Views/Approaches into Augher/Clogher/Fivemiletown hasn't changes much in 40+ years. Slightly run down feel. V busy towns. Fivemiletown College.
- Residential development on way out of Augher
- New housing developments on way into Fivemiletown
- Pastureland with a more remote feel to the landscape
- Favour Royal Forest
- Historic estate landscapes
- Out of Clogher into very wooded edge roads
- Sizes of sheds related to new bungalows
- Kell Rd heading back into Fivemiletown- Roadbridge Construction - gas pipe laying
- Cannot generally see the ASSI's- due to vegetated screening and drumlins.

Has the overall character and sensitivity of the LCA been significantly affected

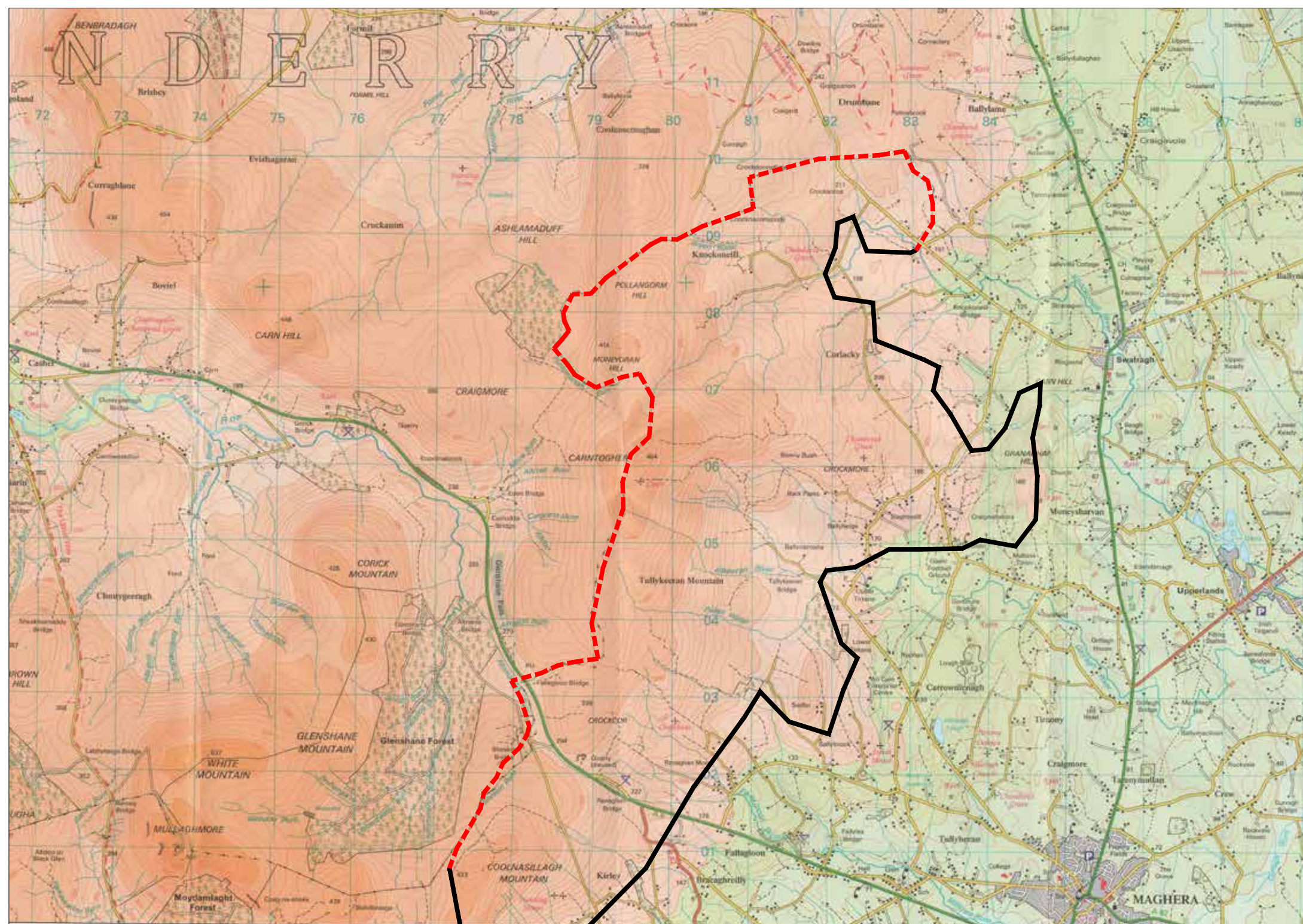
- No, the overall character and sensitivity of the LCA has not been significantly affected, however there are localised pockets of uncharacteristic development.
- It should be considered whether existing policy controls are being implemented effectively regarding new residential developments, extensions to agricultural developments and single turbine applications.


Key intervening changes since publication of NILCA 2000

- No visual signs of quarries or new road infrastructure (apart from A4 upgrade between Ballygawley and Augher)
- Increased turbine developments in this area- especially on Northern side of Valley
- No significant residential development or growth of Augher/Clogher/Fivemiletown
- Increase in large single dwelling development with associated large barns/sheds

LCA 39 - Glenshane Slopes

Map showing LCA boundary



 Glenshane Slopes boundary

■ ■ Mid Ulster boundary

LCA 39 - Glenshane Slopes

NILCA 2000 LCA Guidance

Landscape - Key Characteristics

- broad, rounded ridges with sweeping slopes and rocky outcrops leading to steep, pointed summits
- deep, branching gullies and open, fast-flowing moorland streams
- open moorland wilderness, exposed to the elements, with a gradual transition to scrub and pasture on the lower eastern slopes
- carpet of open moorland pasture and heather with extensive bog and areas of damp grassland on flatter land and lower slopes
- prominent townland boundaries are visible as earthbanks and stone walls and form a striking landscape pattern on some slopes
- winding moorland roads and straight tracks leading across contours
- scattered buildings on lower moorland slopes; occasional isolated farms

Landscape - Description

The Glenshane Slopes are a relatively small upland area on the eastern fringes of the Sperrins. The area is separated from the main block of the Sperrins by the basalt escarpment summits of Carn Hill and Craigmore, but is formed from the same resistant metamorphic rocks as the Sperrins and pre-dates the basalt escarpment by millions of years. The highest summit of Carntogher (464m) towers over the Glenshane Pass, forming a dramatic gateway to the Sperrins from the east. The landform of the uplands is similar to that of the Sperrins to the west, with knife-like ridges and pointed summits which are more sharply defined than that of the upper basalt plateau. There is no escarpment and the summits are surrounded by steep ridges and scree slopes.

The steep, open slopes leading to the summits are carpeted with moorland grasses, closely-cropped by sheep. The lower slopes support a more diverse, patchy mosaic of moorland grasses, heather and rushes and there are rich, verdant pastures at the foot of many ridges. Even minor variations in landform are revealed by the carpet of low vegetation. There are no roads (other than the Glenshane Pass), farmsteads or cottages on the upper slopes; only occasional barns, some of which are partially derelict but continue to be used to provide some shelter for sheep and for storage. The eastern slopes of the uplands have a more diverse landscape pattern, with a transition to the undulating pastures of the drumlin lowlands near Maghera. Here partially broken stone walls, earthbanks and gappy remnant hedgerows subdivide the slopes, marking the former pattern of fields.

This transitional landscape typically has many small-holdings and derelict cottages, but there are no settlement clusters and few roads. The extensive conifer plantation of Glenshane Forest is contained by the valley of the Upper Roe on the south west fringes of the plateau. The slopes are typically subdivided into large fields by wire fences to control sheep grazing. These are barely visible and the ancient townland boundaries leading directly up the slopes of Crockcor, are prominent features in the open landscape at the entrance to the Glenshane Pass.

Landscape Condition and Sensitivity to Change

This open moorland landscape is extremely sensitive to change since even relatively small elements in the landscape, such as electricity pylons or a single building are visible over long distances. Conifer plantations represent one of the most significant pressures for change; there is a risk that they will form extensive, homogeneous blocks which camouflage the subtle variations of colour and landform which are such an important characteristic of this upland landscape.

Plantations may also have straight edges and geometric shapes which form hard, jarring lines against the natural grain of the slopes. The only built development in this area is on the lower fringes of the uplands; any buildings or infrastructure (such as wind farm developments) on the upper slopes would be extremely visually intrusive and would threaten its intrinsic qualities of wild remoteness and isolation. The ridgetops and summits are particularly sensitive, as are the slopes of Crockcor, which have striking historic field patterns.

Principles for Landscape Management

- planting deciduous trees on the fringes of conifer plantations may help to diversify the appearance of extensive monocultures and improve their integration with the surrounding landform

Principles for Accommodating New Development

- new built development is not appropriate in the remote upland landscapes of the Glenshane Slopes - however, the transition to the uplands influences the quality of the upland landscape and the scattered, modern bungalows on the lower slopes may detract from the sense of wilderness
- new development on lower slopes may be integrated by using local stone as the principal building material and by selecting a sheltered site; extensive earth modelling is not appropriate and any new planting should use native species
- the view from the A6 is particularly important and any new development involving infrastructure, mineral extraction or buildings, should be sited and designed so that it is not visible from this major gateway route

LCA 39 - Glenshane Slopes - MUDC LCA Review

LCA 39 Glenshane Slopes (Majority of LCA falls within Mid Ulster Council)		
Key landscape characteristics, features and values.	Key Intervening Changes to LCA since 2000	Action point
<p>NILCA 2000 ‘The Glenshane Slopes are a relatively small upland area on the eastern fringes of the Sperrins’</p> <p>‘The highest summit of Camtoghher (464m) towers over the Glenshane Pass, forming a dramatic gateway to the Sperrins from the east’</p> <p>‘This open moorland landscape is extremely sensitive to change since even relatively small elements in the landscape, such as electricity pylons or a single building are visible over long distances’</p> <p>‘The only built development in this area is on the lower fringes of the uplands; any buildings or infrastructure (such as wind farm developments) on the upper slopes would be extremely visually intrusive and would threaten its intrinsic qualities of wild remoteness and isolation’</p> <p>SPG Dramatic moorland landscape of sweeping slopes and summits’</p> <p>Wind Energy Development Sensitivity Rating: High</p> <p>Key feature: Sperrins AONB Key feature: CARN/Glenshane Pass SAC/ASSI</p>	<p>Brockaboy wind farm (15 No. turbines) straddles the Causeway Coast and Glens and Mid Ulster Council boundaries – 3 No. turbines fall within Mid Ulster. This wind farm is widely viewed on approach from the east and south.</p>	<p>Potential need for greater policy control on all development in elevated natural grassland/peatland/moors and heathland areas to protect scenic quality and natural conservation interests.</p>

LCA 39 - Glenshane Slopes - Photos



View of Glenshane Mountain and Forest



South easterly view from Ranaghan picnic area



View from Lisnamuck Hill of house rising above existing vegetation



Wind turbine on Coolnasillagh Mountain

LCA 39 - Glenshane Slopes - Photos



Easterly view from Coolnasillagh Rd



View over Coolnasillagh Mountain



Modern residential development along Ranaghan Road



Roadside view of modern property from Ranaghan Road

LCA 39 - Glenshane Slopes - Photos



View of 2 single turbines from Tirkane Rd



Single turbine with agricultural building along Tirkane Rd



Short/medium range view of single turbine from Halfgayne Road



Brockaboy Wind Farm from Drumbane Road

LCA 39 - Glenshane Slopes

Key landscape and visual characteristics

- Open moorland wilderness with pastureland and bog areas
- Winding moorland roads
- Coniferous Forest blocks
- Glenshane Pass- dramatic gateway
- Sheep grazing
- Scattered existing and new single residential properties around Slaughtneill/ Swatragh area
- Travelling back towards Maghera along Glenshane- panoramic long distant views
- Post & Wires fences- no hedgerows, self colonising gorse
- Various historic features- e.g. chambered graves with promotion of Hill Walking in the area – e.g. Carntogher Hill Walks

Has the overall character and sensitivity of the LCA been significantly affected

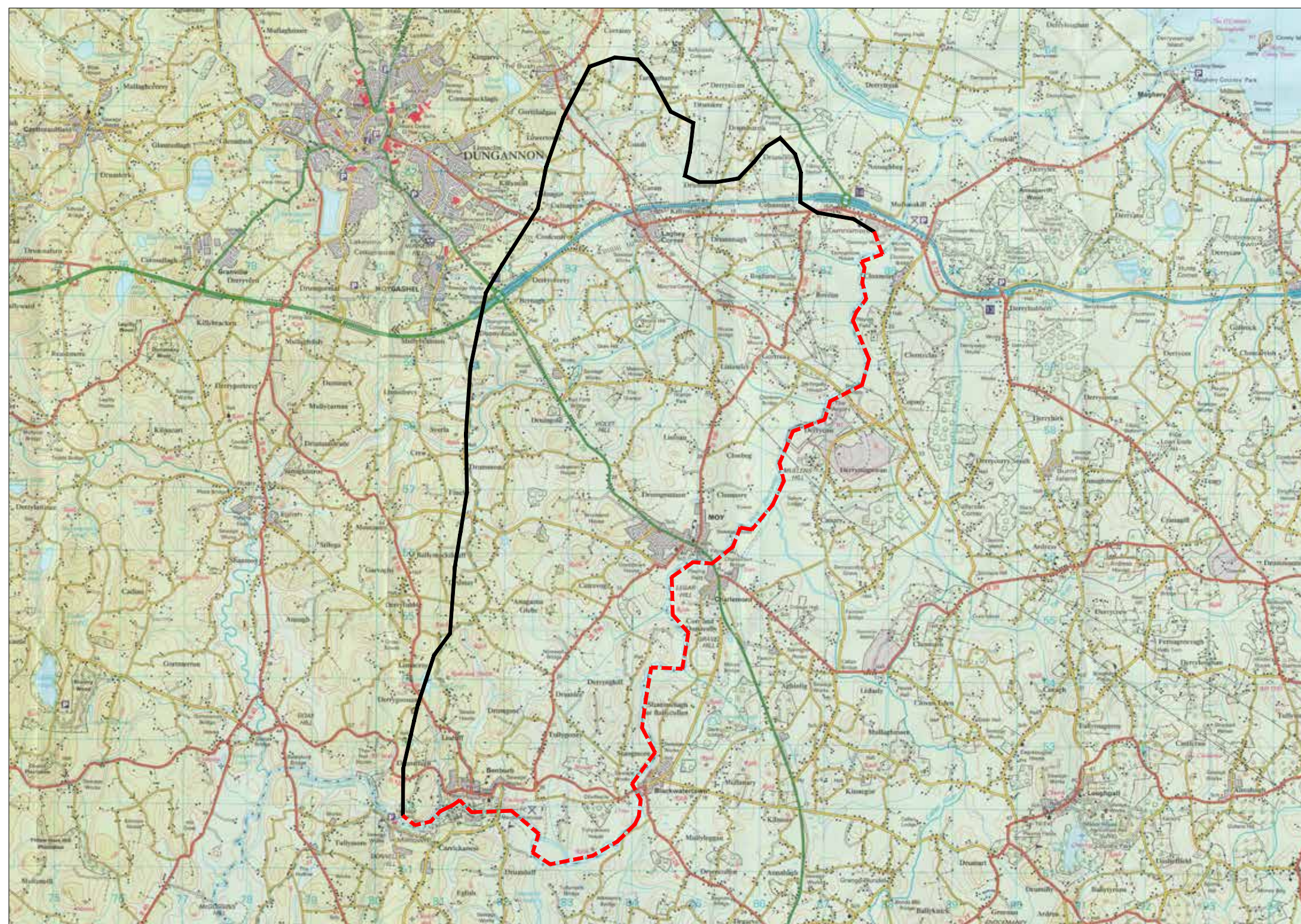
- No, the overall character and sensitivity of the LCA has not been significantly affected, however there is a danger of it becoming moderately affected by uncharacteristic development.
- It should be considered whether existing policy controls are being implemented effectively with respect to:
 - New properties: Siting, Design and Retention of boundary vegetation and new planting regimes- especially for contemporary properties. Sitting of properties related to surround landscape and distant views.
 - Scale and sitting of turbine developments
 - Glenshane: Sitting of Telecoms masts and billboards etc

Key intervening changes since publication of NILCA 2000

- House and turbine breaking distant views
- Peat Bog activity
- New coniferous planting along River Roe
- Scale of Turbines not related to Agric Buildings
- Scale of new homes and earthworks related to them
- Billboards & Telecoms Masts around Glenshane Pass
- Brockaboy Turbine farm

LCA 47 - Loughgall Orchard Belt

Map showing LCA boundary



- Loughgall Orchard Belt boundary
- - - Mid Ulster boundary

LCA 47 - Loughgall Orchard Belt

NILCA 2000 LCA Guidance

Landscape - Key Characteristics

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

Landscape - Description

The Loughgall Orchard Belt extends from Portadown to the M1 motorway, the River Blackwater and Armagh. The area is characterised by low rolling drumlins which fall towards Lough Neagh to the north and to the slopes of the Blackwater valley to the west. It is crossed by numerous small river valleys and streams, tributaries of the Rivers Blackwater and Bann. The underlying geology is a mix of sedimentary and contemporaneous igneous rocks and gives rise to rich brown soils. The upper slopes are a mixture of pasture and arable fields, enclosed by hedgerows and some hedgerow trees. Roadside hedgerows are mostly well maintained and there are a number of short avenues of mature beech and ash trees. Blocks of attractive, well kept orchards are located on the steeper sheltered drumlin slopes of favourable aspect. There are many old knarled trees as well as some newly planted orchards and nurseries.

The very shallow northern slopes near Portadown tend to be poorly drained, with extensive areas of moss. Regenerating alder, birch and willow are found on the moss and previous peat extraction has left a typical pattern of rectangular working sites linked by access tracks. There are numerous wooded designed estate landscapes, parklands, woodland and attractive loughs. Loughgall is the largest estate, and is associated with historic features such as crannogs and raths. Hilltop copses, mature trees and neat clipped hedges are features. There is a dense scattering of farms and dwellings scattered along the sides of lanes and at the end of access tracks, as well as villages such as Loughgall. Many cottages are of traditional simple styles, with a narrow layout and whitewashed exterior.

There are numerous large houses, and churches are a feature of the area. Stone buildings and traditional gate posts are also quite common. Dwellings are connected by hedge lined winding minor roads and roller coasting 'A' roads. The landscape pattern over much of the area to the east is influenced by the linear corridors of the M1, the A4 and by the River Bann. Two lines of pylons cross the landscape. This is a varied landscape, with a mix of scales and landscape patterns. In some areas there are pleasant long views across mixed farmland to farmsteads, churches and woodlots, but elsewhere, views are more contained by narrow tree-lined roads or regenerating scrub.

Landscape Condition and Sensitivity to Change

The landscape condition is relatively good, with a well maintained hedgerow structure. Areas of moss and the margins of the M1 require management for invasive species such as gorse and brambles. Orchards are a feature of the landscape and neglect of some of these has resulted in their dereliction. The majority of the area has a rolling landform and good tree cover and is therefore not particularly sensitive to change. The more open land on the lower slopes and low lying areas is the most sensitive. The landscape on the edge of Portadown is under pressure from new residential, urban and infrastructure developments.

Principles for Landscape Management

- The management and progressive replanting of roadside and avenue trees and hedgerows will conserve the character of rural roads and avoid the necessity for wire fences.
- Thinning and removal of invasive weeds where necessary will encourage the orderly regeneration of moss scrub woodlands.
- The planting of deciduous shelter belts in association with horticulture will enhance the structure of the landscape.
- The conservation and progressive replanting of orchards will help to ensure the persistence of this important local landscape feature.

Principles for Accommodating New Development

- There is scope for extensive woodland structure planting on the fringes of existing housing estates near Portadown. It would be beneficial to associate all new built development with planting to provide a partial screen and to integrate the development within the existing geometric farmland pattern.
- The use of traditional building materials and forms in new housing will improve the character and integration of new built development.

LCA 47 - Loughgall Orchard Belt - MUDC LCA Review

LCA 47 Loughgall Orchard Belt (Western portion falls within MUDC)		
Key landscape characteristics, features and values.	Key Changes to LCA since 2000	Action point
<p>NILCA 2000 ‘This LCA is characterised by low rolling drumlins which fall towards Lough Neagh to the north and to the slopes of the Blackwater valley to the west.’</p> <p>‘The majority of the landform has good tree cover and is therefore not particularly sensitive to change. The more open land on the lower slopes and low lying areas is the most sensitive’.</p> <p>Wind Energy Development Sensitivity Rating: High to Medium</p> <p>Key Feature: Orchard Landscape</p>	<p>There have been few intrusive man made influences in this area in the intervening period.</p>	<p>Potential need for introduction of policy to protect main river corridor from inappropriate development.</p>

LCA 47 - Loughgall Orchard Belt - Photos



St. Andrews Church off Trewmount Rd, Killyman



Trewmount Rd- Industrial etc after Lisantlet Rd



Trewmount Rd- Nr Bridge over River Rhone- Looking East



Trewmount Rd- Nr Bridge over River Rhone- Looking West

LCA 47 - Loughgall Orchard Belt - Photos



The Square- Moy



Moy Demense off Trewmount Rd



View near 71 Benburb Rd



View looking down into Benburb Valley Park- View from Main Street

LCA 47 - Loughgall Orchard Belt - Photos



Near end of Derryoghill Road- looking east over Blackwater River



road that connects Derryoghill Rd and Benburb rd



View on Syerla Rd near junction with Gorestown Rd



View on A29 close to M1 roundabout near Moygashel

LCA 47 - Loughgall Orchard Belt

Key landscape and visual characteristics

- Area within MUDC is non typical of majority of LCA- lack of Orchards/Estate Landscapes
- Sprawling/unsightly industrial developments around Killyman
- Combination of low rolling drumlins and high hedgerows go far to visually screen reduce pockets of unsightly development
- Large single dwellings- common, reasonably well finished. Poor stone boundaries
- Localised/small orchards
- St.Andrews Church- poorly sighted Turbine not respecting Church setting
- Waterpipe laying in area
- Very occasional distant views- more prevalent around Benburb
- Conservation Area at The Diamond in Moy
- More farmland on approach to Benburb
- Benburb Castle/Valley Park
- Protection to historic parts of Benburb village?
- Not much connection with Blackwater River- due to high intervening vegetation- hard to know its there.
- Culrevog Road- more industry and single turbine
- Grange Road- occasional turbine views.

Has the overall character and sensitivity of the LCA been significantly affected

- No, the overall character and sensitivity of the LCA has not been significantly affected, however there are localised pockets of uncharacteristic development.
- It should be considered whether existing policy controls are being implemented effectively regarding new residential developments, extensions to agricultural developments and single turbine applications.

Key intervening changes since publication of NILCA 2000

- New residential development on way into Moy- very poor, complete lack of planting or interest with development.
- A29 back into Moygashel- sprawling/unsightly businesses/industries
- Single wind turbine developments- siting issues
- No real evidence of new road infrastructure or mineral developments in the area, not much forestry evident in the area
- Larger farm developments
- Increase in large single dwelling development

Findings Report

Methodology used by Council

- It is considered that MUDC have employed an appropriate and comprehensive methodology to undertake the LCA Review. The methodology, which has been outlined on page 5 of this document, was employed by MUDC in order to establish if the landscape character of the District's LCA's have been significantly affected by development since the publication of NILCA 2000.
- The desk top review enabled MUDC to identify and outline the relevant European and regional policy and guidance in relation to landscape character assessments. This initial analysis of relevant policy helped inform the Council's approach to the LCA Review.
- MUDC's approach to the review of landscape changes within each LCA was to primarily focus on the impact of one-off housing and wind energy development, it also took into account the impact of other key indicators of landscape change such as the extent of quarrying operations, industrial operations, major roadworks and commercial forestry. This again, was an appropriate approach to take as it enabled MUDC to understand how each LCA has been affected by development since the publication of NILCA 2000, how sensitive each LCA is to particular development and their ability to absorb further development.
- The sources of data used by MUDC to review and analyse the key landscape changes within Mid Ulster since the publication of NILCA 2000 such as the Corine Database and associated document 'Land Cover of the UK' as well as information on the ecosystems services of Mid Ulster are considered appropriate, when utilised alongside other relevant documents such as SPG Wind Energy Development in NI's Landscapes. The use of aerial ortho-photography maps and other base maps illustrating single dwelling, wind turbine and wind farm approvals are useful in accompany the review of each LCA.
- Focused field survey work is seen as a vital component of the Council's methodology, this provided the Council with a first-hand appreciation of each LCA and helped identify and confirm key changes within each of these areas. A combination of desk top and focused field work has enabled MUDC to, where relevant, suggest potential action points or policy implications to help protect the landscape from significant adverse changes.

Strengths and weaknesses of LCA Review

Strengths

- A considered and appropriate methodology has been employed.
- The report has acknowledged and reviewed relevant European and regional policy and guidance in relation to landscape character assessments. Key points from this policy and guidance have been identified and outlined within the opening sections of the document.
- Identification, understanding and appreciation of NILCA 2000 and NIRCLA 2015 guidance.
- Use of base maps illustrating single dwelling, wind turbine and wind farm approvals to accompany the review of each LCA.

Weaknesses

- No reference to specific planning policy statements, for instance PPS 21 Development in the Countryside. PPS 21 sets out policies for managing development in the countryside with an emphasis on protecting the landscape. It identifies the four interrelated strands of the Countryside Assessment including the Landscape Assessment.
- A lack of reference to the Corine Database and associated document 'Land Cover of the UK' within each LCA review despite it being identified as a source of data to inform the review of the LCA's.
- Limited reference to SPG Wind Energy Development in NI's Landscapes document (2010), particularly within table 2. The SPG provides detailed information on the key landscape and visual characteristics and values of each LCA. The SPG also provides guidance on the sensitivity and ideal siting of wind energy development within each LCA.
- Lack of review of LCA information on 'Landscape Condition and Sensitivity to change', Principles for Landscape Management and Principles for accommodating new development' contained within NILCA 2000.
- Conservation Areas, Areas of Townscape Character, Areas of Archaeological Potential, Archaeological Sites/Monuments, Local Landscape Character Areas and Historic Parks, Gardens & Demesnes have not been identified as 'Key Features' of the LCA's. These features play an integral role in many landscapes and any change to these could significantly affect the character and integrity of the landscape.
- Limited use of visual information (photos) throughout the review with only 4 photos used in total throughout the document

Suggested Improvements

The following improvements are suggested to assist MUDC in producing a comprehensive and sound LCA Review:

- PPS 21 Sustainable Development in the Countryside should be considered and reviewed as a relevant planning policy document relating to the protection of our landscapes.
- Increased reference and utilisation of the Corine Database and associated 'Landcover of the UK' for each LCA is suggested.
- It is suggested that an increased emphasis should be placed on the Landscape Condition of each LCA and its Sensitivity to change.
- The report would benefit from additional photos, increasing the reader's visual appreciation of each LCA.
- Conservation Areas, Areas of Townscape Character, Areas of Archaeological Potential, Archaeological Sites/Monuments, Local Landscape Character Areas and Historic Parks, Gardens & Demesnes should be considered as 'Key Features' of the LCA's.
- It should be considered whether existing policy controls are being implemented effectively regarding various development types throughout the District including new residential developments, extensions to agricultural developments and single turbine applications.

Final Analysis and Conclusions

How the process developed

- At the outset, GMDA met with MUDC to provide an introduction to the project.
- On the back of this initial meeting, GMDA completed a preliminary review of the LCA document including the identification of initial weaknesses for MUDC's consideration.
- The Landscape Consultancy Team presented these initial weaknesses to Council at the second organised meeting.
- After this, GMDA completed site visits and completed a more detailed analysis of the report, including the identification of strengths, weaknesses and suggested improvements that would help produce a more comprehensive and sound report.
- These were then considered by MUDC and a final LCA Review document was produced. GMDA outlined their final conclusions based on this final document.

Amended MUDC LCA Review

Relevant sections of the Council's LCA Review were amended taking into account GMDA's suggested improvements, the amendments are as follows:

- (i) Main report revised to include reference to PPS 21 Sustainable Development in the Countryside.
- (ii) Main report revised to include greater reference to the Corine Database and associated 'Landcover of the UK' document. This includes a new 'MUDC Corine Landcover and LCA's' Map, contained in Appendix 3.
- (iii) Main report revised to include commentary on Landscape Condition and Sensitivity to Change of each LCA.
- (iv) A new Appendix 4 comprising additional photographs of each LCA.
- (v) A revised Appendix 1, Table 2 (Key changes within LCA's) to include all Conservation Areas and all Historic Parks, Gardens & Demesnes as 'Key Features'.
- (vi) Minor changes to wording within Appendix 1, Table 2 (Key changes within LCA's) under suggested 'Action Points'.

In relation to point (v) above, GMDA had previously advised that Conservation Areas, ATC's, AAP's, Archaeological Sites/Monuments, LLPA's and Historic Parks, Gardens & Demesnes should be considered as 'Key Features' of the LCA's within the report. Following discussions between MUDC and the GMDA, it was deemed that the inclusion of the LLPA's and ATC's created an extensive list that was not directly beneficial to the LCA Review. Following further discussions it was also agreed not to include the AAP's in this 'list' as they have already been listed in the Council's Environmental Assets paper, along with LLPA's and ATC's, which forms part of the wider countryside assessment.

The amended Table 2 (key changes within LCA's) as mentioned above can be found in Appendix One of this document.

Final conclusions

This document details the Landscape Consultancy Team's review and audit of MUDC's Landscape Character Assessment Review which has been prepared as part of the Council's Local Development Plan preparation. This process was aimed at ensuring the findings of MUDC's LCA Review are sound and that it can be utilised to inform the preparation of their Local Development Plan, with particular focus on landscape considerations and relevant policies. MUDC have liaised and collaborated closely with the Landscape Consultancy Team throughout to ensure the final document is informed and comprehensive. GMDA are content that the issues identified throughout this review and audit process have been considered appropriately by MUDC, that suitable amendments have been made and that the resulting LCA Review is a more comprehensive and sound document.

Appendix One

LCA 17 Clogher Valley (The eastern portion of this LCA falls within Mid Ulster)		
Key landscape characteristics, features and values.	Key Intervening Changes to LCA since 2000	Action point
<p>NILCA 2000 'Distinctive, scenic lowland landscape with a secluded verdant character'</p> <p>'Farmsteads and cottages are interspersed with numerous archaeological sites. The latter are exceptionally prominent, as the raths, cashels and crannogs are often marked by groups of high trees'</p> <p>'In the centre of the valley, the small historic towns of Augher and Clogher are the sites of 17th and 18th Century Demesnes, surrounded by remnants of their designed landscapes'</p> <p>'Low lying area is confined between the ridges of Brougher Mountain to the north and Slieve Beagh to the south'</p> <p>'Development has been generally well integrated into the existing pattern of small hills, ridges and mature vegetation'</p> <p>'The skylines and the characteristically flat open bog areas are best kept open and free of development'</p> <p>SPG 2010 'Settlements of Brookeborough, Tempo, Fivemiletown, Clogher, Augher and Ballygawley also have distinctive landscape settings, typically comprising parkland or other historic features such as hilltop raths.'</p> <p>'Fine example of an undisturbed fluvio-glacial landscape. Lowland bog, fen, river and rare lake habitats, often ASSIs. Numerous raths, tree rings, crannogs, listed buildings, and small country houses. Marked concentration of Registered Parks, especially in the eastern part of the LCA.'</p> <p>SPG 2010 Wind Energy Sensitivity Rating: High Key features; Numerous HPGD's (Aughentaine, Blessingbourne, Clogher Park, Favour Royal, Corick House, Daisy Hill, Fardross, Killybrick, Killyfaddy Manor, Martray House and Spur Royal). Numerous ASSIs (Round lough, Lough Fadda, Cullentra Lough, Derrycloony Lough, Flymore Lough. Strategic Transport Corridor, Knockmany Hill and Neolithic Passage Tomb, Clogher Hillfort.</p>	<p>Except for some localised impacts of ribbon development and expansion of existing industry, this area has experienced few intrusive developments. The upgrade of the A4 between Ballygawley and Augher is a noticeable change although this has not been on the same scale as the Dungannon to Ballygawley section.</p>	<p>Potential need for greater policy control and/or tailored guidance in relation to siting design and external appearance of rural buildings.</p>

LCA 39 Glenshane Slopes (Majority of LCA falls within Mid Ulster Council)

Key landscape characteristics, features and values.	Key Intervening Changes to LCA since 2000	Action point
<p><u>NILCA 2000</u> 'The Glenshane Slopes are a relatively small upland area on the eastern fringes of the Sperrins'</p> <p>'The highest summit of Carntogher (464m) towers over the Glenshane Pass, forming a dramatic gateway to the Sperrins from the east'</p> <p>'This open moorland landscape is extremely sensitive to change since even relatively small elements in the landscape, such as electricity pylons or a single building are visible over long distances'</p> <p>'The only built development in this area is on the lower fringes of the uplands; any buildings or infrastructure (such as wind farm developments) on the upper slopes would be extremely visually intrusive and would threaten its intrinsic qualities of wild remoteness and isolation'</p> <p><u>SPG 2010</u> 'Very high scenic quality. Dramatic moorland landscape of sweeping slopes and summits'. 'Extensive area with a strong wild character on the tops, which are inaccessible by road, with gradual transition to more settled pastoral landscapes to the east.' 'Very exposed landscape with very high landscape and visual sensitivity.' 'Strong concentrations of archaeological sites at Crockmore, east of Carntogher, and in the northeast corner of the LCA, representing ancient landscapes that have been relatively untouched by change.'</p> <p><u>SPG 2010 Wind Energy Sensitivity Rating:</u> High</p> <p>Key features. Sperrins AONB, Carn/Glenshane Pass SAC/ASSI, Ballyknock ASSI.</p>	<p>Brockaboy wind farm (15 No. turbines) straddles the Causeway Coast and Glens and Mid Ulster Council boundaries – 3 No. turbines fall within Mid Ulster. This wind farm is widely viewed on approach from the east and south.</p>	<p>Potential need for greater policy control on all development in elevated natural grassland/peatland/moors and heathland areas to protect scenic quality and natural conservation interests.</p>

LCA 47 Loughgall Orchard Belt (Western portion falls within MUDC)		
Key landscape characteristics, features and values.	Key Changes to LCA since 2000	Action point
<p>NILCA 2000 'This LCA is characterised by low rolling drumlins which fall towards Lough Neagh to the north and to the slopes of the Blackwater valley to the west.'</p> <p>'The majority of the landform has good tree cover and is therefore not particularly sensitive to change. The more open land on the lower slopes and low lying areas is the most sensitive'.</p> <p>'This is a varied landscape, with a mix of scales and landscape patterns. In some areas there are pleasant long views across mixed farmland to farmsteads, churches and woodlots, but elsewhere, views are more contained by narrow tree-lined roads or regenerating scrub'.</p> <p>SPG 2010 'This is a well-maintained and diverse landscape. The characteristic orchards, parklands, wetlands and traditional buildings contribute to a relatively high scenic quality although there are no scenic designations as such'</p> <p>'This LCA does not have a strong wildness character. It has an active, agricultural landscape which is not particularly tranquil sense'</p> <p>SPG 2010 Wind Energy Sensitivity Rating: High to Medium</p> <p>Key Features Moy Conservation Area, Benburb ASSI, Benburb HPGD.</p>	<p>There have been few intrusive man made influences in this area in the intervening period.</p>	<p>Potential need for introduction of policy to protect main river corridor from inappropriate development.</p>