



Local Development Plan

**Lough Neagh / Lough Beg
Special Countryside Area (SCA)**

Special Countryside Area (SCA) – Lough Neagh and Lough Beg

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to provide the background, rationale and methodology for the designation of a Special Countryside Area (SCA) along the shoreline of Lough Neagh, Lough Beg and Lower River Bann, hereafter referred to as the Lough-shore SCA.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Regional Development Strategy requires the protection of designated areas of countryside from inappropriate development. One of the central objectives of the RDS is the protection and enhancement of the environment through an approach to development and policy formulation, which has the condition of the environment as a central deciding factor. The RDS points out that designating special areas for protection is an effective way of ensuring our wildlife and natural landscapes retain their individual characteristics.
- 2.2 The concept of an SCA is introduced within the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS). The SPPS highlights that some areas of the countryside exhibit exceptional landscapes, such as stretches of lough shores, and certain views or vistas, wherein the quality of the landscape and unique amenity value is such that development should only be permitted in exceptional circumstances. The SPPS goes on to state that where appropriate these areas should be designated as SCAs in Local Development Plans, and appropriate policies brought forward to ensure their protection from unnecessary and inappropriate development.¹

3.0 Community Plan

- 3.1 A key aim of MUDC Community Plan is to increase the protection of our natural environment through the improvement of our air and water quality, whilst simultaneously allowing for greater access to and development of our natural assets including Lough Neagh.
- 3.2 The Community plan recognises how our natural assets contribute to the health and well-being of our local community. The intrinsic value to health and well-being of such assets relates to their potential to provide opportunities for physical activity such as walking and cycling; and improve quality of mental health. The Community Plan also recognises the important role our environment has to play by encouraging the sustainable development of our natural heritage assets as part of the District's green and blue infrastructure.
- 3.3 The 'Environment' chapter of the MUDC Preferred Option Paper (POP) emphasises the importance of giving appropriate consideration to environmental issues in the allocation of land for future development. The Councils preferred approach for protecting the districts environmental assets is by setting out clear constraints at a strategy level and providing a balanced approach by delivering key policies to control

¹ *Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland*, Department of the Environment, September 2017, para 6.75, page 55.

development in a consistent and sustainable manner. The POP highlights 6 key environment measures for the district, including the following two;

- *'Protect the shoreline of Lough Neagh and Lough Beg for their nature conservation interests'*
- *'Protect sites of international, national and local conservation importance and built heritage assets in the countryside and protected species through appropriate designations and policies'*

In line with the Councils preferred designation approach, the POP suggested the introduction of a Special Countryside Area (SCA) at the Lough Shore.

4.0 Rationale for a Special Countryside Area

- 4.1 Lough Neagh represents one of the world's most important wetlands. In the main the shores of the lough remain relatively undisturbed, comprising areas of marsh, woodland and a maze of wet meadows, reed beds and scrub. Most of the immediate lough-shore remains undeveloped apart from some farming, forestry and fishing activities. As a consequence this has meant the wildlife habitats remain relatively undisturbed and the lough remains a lonely, vast sheet of water, open in character. In contrast the wider lough-shore environment represents one of Ireland's most densely populated areas of countryside, which is a hive of activity, for farming, fishing and other rural enterprises.
- 4.2 A key suggestion within the Preferred Options Paper was that the LDP will need to explore policy options for greater policy control above and beyond what currently exists within the Lough Neagh / Lough Beg / Lower River Bann fringes, for all types of development. The POP identified a designation approach as the preferred mechanism to strengthen the desire to protect, conserve and enhance the lough-shore and it's setting of international / national importance through the designation of an SCA.
- 4.3 The shorelines of Lough Neagh, Lough Beg and Lower River Bann all currently benefit from a degree of protection afforded to them through the numerous existing environmental designations, namely; Ramsar, Special Protection Area and Area of Special Scientific Interest. Importantly however, these designations do not confer absolute protection against development; the purpose of these designations is to ensure that nature conservation considerations are taken into account before any decision affecting their future is made. Whereas within an SCA no development will be acceptable unless it is for the consolidation or in-situ replacement of existing development. The designation of an SCA along the Lough-shore would allow for a greater degree of protection of this unique landscape from inappropriate development.
- 4.4 The Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment 2000 (NILCA) also informed the Council's preparation of the lough-shore SCA. The NILCA document identifies and describes the variation in character of all of Northern Ireland's landscapes. The Mid Ulster district is made up of 22 no. detailed landscape character areas. In particular the distinctive landscape of the Lough Neagh / Lough Beg / Lower River Bann shores were identified in the NILCA through LCAs 48, 52, and 64 (see Map B). The NILCA document also identifies the entire lough-shore as an Area of Scenic Quality. This Area of Scenic Quality directly informed the designation of Area of High Scenic Value designation within the former Magherafelt Area plan 2015 and for this reason it is considered to be a significant factor in drawing of the boundaries for the lough shore SCA.

- 4.5 The Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment (NIRLCA) was released in 2016 to provide an evidence base which could be used by planners, developers and the public to enable informed decisions to be made in the interests of planning, management and the protection of Northern Ireland's landscape. NIRLCA identified fewer, more strategic landscape character areas than the earlier Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment 2000 (NILCA). The regional landscape character assessments are less detailed than the original 130 LCAs but nonetheless the information contained within complement the existing LCAs. NIRLCA identifies a single LCA around the entire shore of the Lough – 'The Lough Neagh Basin'. This regional landscape character assessment stresses the tranquil, unspoilt nature of the lough-shore and highlights that much of its shoreline is inaccessible.
- 4.6 In addition, a development pressure analysis focussing on the Lough / River shore fringes was also carried out. From this examination of pressure analysis it was evident that there was some residential development encroachment upon the immediate lough-shore, particularly within the central section of the Lough. It is considered that this localised pressure analysis therefore supports the case for the designation of an SCA along the lough / river fringes to preclude inappropriate development in order to protect this unique landscape for future generations.
- 4.7 Notwithstanding the above, it is acknowledged that the LDP must also provide for vital and vibrant rural communities by accommodating sustainable and appropriate levels of growth within the countryside, proportionate to the extent of existing rural communities and their associated employment. To this end it is considered necessary to allow for certain exceptions within the designated SCA to accommodate appropriate and necessary development relating to recreation / open space opportunities which would benefit the wider public interest and also development relating to the traditional fishing industry, which is so integral to the lough-shore community.
- 4.8 The proposed policy wording for identified Special Countryside Areas (SCA's) is suggested as follows:

POLICY SCA 1– SPECIAL COUNTRYSIDE AREAS

The LDP will introduce Special Countryside Areas, at Lough Neagh / Lough Beg, at Slieve Beagh and in the High Sperrins (see Map A). Within these SCA's there will be a presumption against all new development in order to protect the quality and unique amenity value of these unique landscapes.

Within the Special Countryside Areas, new development will conflict with the plan except where it comprises one of the following exceptions;

- *ancillary open development relating to appropriate recreation / open space uses, which have been demonstrated to be in the wider public interest; or*
- *in-situ replacement of an existing building of a similar size and character.*
- *communications apparatus to serve a recognised 'not spot'.*

Within the Lough Neagh / Lough Beg SCA the policy will allow for consolidation or minor expansion of existing development relating to the commercial fishing industry, including jetties, slipways, and ancillary buildings, where it has been demonstrated that it is essential for the efficient operation of an active and established commercial fishing enterprise (for criteria refer to relevant Housing Countryside Policy)

Within the Slieve Beagh and High Sperrins SCA's the policy will allow for the provision of essential electricity transmission or supply infrastructure of demonstrable regional importance.

5.0 Methodology of SCA Boundary

- 5.1 Within proposed SCA planning permission will only be granted for development proposals which meet the relevant exceptions as set out in proposed **Policy SCA1** above. The proposed Lough Neagh, Lough Beg and Lower River Bann SCA typically includes remote, scenic and unspoilt areas that are highly sensitive with little capacity to absorb development and has been identified in its entirety (see MAP A). Although largely self-protecting due to their inaccessibility and remoteness, it is considered that this area should be kept free from potential development unless it can be clearly established to be in the public interest. The Council therefore proposes to designate this area as an SCA in order to protect its unique scenic quality and landscape sensitivity.
- 5.2 In establishing the boundary of the SCA, a desktop study of the Lough Neagh / Lough Beg and Lower River Bann fringes was carried out in March 2016. This desktop exercise focused on the latest Ordnance Survey ortho-photography for the western Lough Neagh, Lough Beg and Lower River Bann shores. In addition to the latest ortho-photography the desktop survey utilised the DAERA Natural Environment Map Viewer²

² Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs website
<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/services/natural-environment-map-viewer>

and the Corine Land Cover data³ (see Map C). From these sources the general composition of the various habitat types were deduced, e.g.

- Natural woodland (i.e. have not been planted in uniform pattern)
- Plantation woodland (i.e. have been planted in uniform pattern)
- Scrub
- Unimproved grassland
- Improved grassland
- Swamp / reedbeds / fen
- Amenity grassland
- Buildings

5.3 From this visual assessment a preliminary SCA boundary was plotted on Geographical Information Systems (GIS). A field survey of this area was also carried out in April 2016 to supplement the desktop study. The desktop and field surveys also had regard to the international, national and local environmental designations, the relevant Landscape Character Area boundaries and the Area of Scenic Quality set out within NILCA and also the Area of High Scenic Value designated along the shores of Lough Beg within the Magherafelt Area Plan 2010.

5.4 In addition the ortho-photography was also overlaid with the GIS shapefile data for the following international, national and local environmental designations;

- Ramsar
- Special Protection Area (SPA)
- Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI)
- Area of High Scenic Value (AoHSV) Magherafelt Area Plan 2015
- Area of Scenic Quality (AoSQ) NILCA

5.5 The above designations were based on either the unique biodiversity value of the land and/or its unique scenic value. The SPA, ASSI and to a lesser extent the Ramsar skirt the shores of Lough Neagh and Lough Beg to incorporate unspoilt habitats, comprising of a mixture of natural woodland, scrub, unimproved wet grassland, swamp and reedbeds. The AoHSV was designated within the Magherafelt Area Plan 2015 and was based on the AoSQ identified within the NILCA 2000 document.⁴ The AoHSV was designated in recognition of the Lough Shore's unique landscape quality and tended to incorporate a much wider area than simply the lough shore.

5.6 Wherever possible the SCA would utilise an existing international, national environmental designation or an existing area plan designation as a guide, with the ultimate aim of protecting those unspoilt and unmanaged habitats. On occasion it was considered that the boundary of the SCA should vary from those of the existing environmental designations so as to include or exclude particular sites. For example, on occasions, additional areas beyond existing environmental designations were included for a variety of reasons, namely that they;

- i. possess a high degree of scenic value,
- ii. protected open vistas and allow for important views towards or from the lough / river,

³ NERC Environmental Information Data Centre
<https://doi.org/10.5285/32533dd6-7c1b-43e1-b892-e80d61a5ea1d>

⁴ Northern Ireland Landscape Assessment 2000, Department of the Environment, 2000

- iii. possess significant biodiversity value, or
- iv. lie within the Q100 Climate Change flood level⁵ - a precautionary approach was adopted.

- 5.7 The SCA seeks to protect the most unspoilt and unmanaged landscape along the lough/river shore from all forms of development. For this reason neither the AoHSV / AoSQ were adhered to rigidly, as they are considered to extend too far from the lough shore, into the wider western lough shore area. It is considered inappropriate, with some minor exceptions, to extend the SCA beyond the lough shore due to the densely settled nature of the low lying lough margins.
- 5.8 The environmental designations of the Ramsar and SPA are not present along the most northerly stretch of the SCA, approximately from Glenone to Newferry, and therefore at this location the SCA is informed in the main by the AoHSV and also by the information gathered from the desktop and site surveys. As the AoHSV covers a relatively wider geographical area and veers much further from the shoreline than the Ramsar and SPA, the SCA was not rigidly guided by it. Rather the SCA included at this northerly location, in the main, the unspoilt and unmanaged portions of the AoHSV which for the most where located along the river-shore.
- 5.9 Just as there are areas beyond the existing environmental designations included within the SCA, similarly there were occasions when the SCA boundary *excluded* certain portions of land which lay within the existing environmental designations. The existing environmental designations, particularly the Ramsar, SPA and ASSI, were designated a considerable time ago, ranging from the 1970's to the 1990's and since the confirmation of these designations there has been significant habitat change along the lough shore, due in large part, to both the encroachment of development and also to changes in agricultural practices.⁶
- 5.10 The desktop survey, supplemented by field site visits, identified some areas which lie within the environmental designations that would not warrant protection under an SCA. Such sites include improved agricultural grassland, areas of new development and areas of amenity grassland. It is for this reason, on occasion, that the boundary of the SCA excludes some land that lies within the existing environmental designations. In addition sites which already allow for a degree of public accessibility to the lough/river shores were also excluded from the SCA to allow flexibility for appropriate development opportunities.

6.0 Justification of Special Countryside Area boundary

- 6.1 On a detailed level the boundary of the SCA was defined largely by physical features such as hedgerows, field boundaries, streams, drainage ditches, changes in ground level, field patterns, tree lines and topography. Land uses, land in public ownership and significant groups of trees were also criteria used in defining the boundary. Wherever possible occupied properties, existing development and amenity grassland were excluded from the SCA. In cases where a physical limit was difficult to establish the boundary coincides, wherever possible, with an underlying existing designation

⁵ As defined by Department for Infrastructure, Rivers Agency

⁶ Lough Neagh SPA / ASSI Mapping Project Report, Kane Ecology, 12th September 2016 or NIEA, NED Map Viewer terminology

e.g. Ramsar, Special Protection Areas (SPA), Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI), Area of High Scenic Value (AoHSV).

- 6.2 The proposed Lough Neagh, Lough Beg and Lower River Bann SCA consists of three composite parts i.e. the northern, central and southern sections. These three composite parts have been broken down into 8 no. detailed maps and 8 no. detailed ortho-photography sheets (see Appendices 1 & 2). The northern section comprises the land to the immediate south of Glenone, along the shore line of the Lower River Bann and up to and including the western shores of Lough Beg. The central section includes the Toome area and the stretch of Lough Neagh, around Traad Point and Ballyronan in the north and as far as Curran Quay to the south. The final and third section of the SCA is based around the southern shores of Lough Neagh and considers of the areas around Ardboe, Moortown and Brockagh/Mountjoy. The summary of the justification for the SCA boundary has been broken up into these three parts below:

Northern section of the Special Countryside Area

Maps No.01 – 02 (see Appendices 1 & 2)

Map 1

- 6.2 There are no international or national environmental designations along the northern section of the SCA. The Lough Beg / Lower River Bann fringes were however formally designated as an Area of High Scenic Value within the Magherafelt Area Plan 2015. This designation gave recognition to the unique quality of landscape in this area and was based primarily on the Area of Scenic Quality identified within the NILCA document. The AoHSV commenced to the immediate south of Glenone and runs in a southerly direction along the river/lough shore until it meets the former Cookstown Borough Council District near Ballyronan.
- 6.3 Whilst the AoHSV is a useful tool in identifying areas of high scenic value which may require additional protection through inclusion within the SCA, it was noted from the desktop and field surveys that the AoHSV extended much further inland from the lough-shore than was intended for the SCA. For instance the AoHSV includes a significant degree of improved agricultural grassland and existing built development on the higher ground to the west of the lough shore fringes. The AoSHV has therefore been used as a guide for the SCA rather than a definitive boundary to be strictly adhered to.
- 6.4 The land to the immediate east and south of Glenone, is a designated Local Landscape Policy Area (LLPA GE03 – Magherafelt Area Plan) and was designated as such due to its river setting and its associated vegetation are considered visually important landscape features. To the immediate south and west of this LLPA the land is for the most part characterised by a mixture of improved grassland and large conifer plantations which are owned and managed by Forest Service NI for productive forest purposes. Due to the commercial nature of these forests and the low biodiversity value of the improved agricultural land the SCA excludes these features and instead focuses on the unimproved grassland in close proximity to the river. This area is literally a field or two deep at this location and all the fields are within the Q100 climate change flood extent.

- 6.5 Moving southwards, towards Ballynease, the countryside is characterised by residential farmlands. This area is relatively highly populated, albeit within the open countryside, and for this reason the SCA does not extend into this area and again continues to follow the shoreline of the Lower River Bann. The SCA at this point skirts around and excludes an existing gun club and includes a number of marshy, low lying fields, as well as some fields of semi-improved grassland.
- 6.6 To the immediate south lies a significant area of worked peatland associated with the operations of Bulrush Peat Company Ltd. These peat reserves currently form part of the operations of Bulrush Peat Company Ltd and for this reason the SCA excludes this particular area of peatland. The SCA does however include the Ballymacombs More ASSI which lies to the immediate south east of this area. This ASSI comprises approximately 28 hectares protected because of its important deposits of diatomite.



Photo 1 – Taken near Newferry Road, looking eastwards towards Ballymacombs Bog

- 6.7 To the immediate south east of Ballymacombs More ASSI are the existing facilities at the Newferry Watersports Centre. This area has a significant facilities including a carpark, picnic area, toilet facilities, slipway, jetty and mooring points. The extent of this existing development makes this area a natural termination point of the SCA which can then be picked up again to the immediate south of Newferry.

Map 2

- 6.7 The Lough Beg element of the SCA contains arguably the most scenic landscapes within the SCA. This landscape is enhanced by views to historic designed houses such as Ballyscullion House and its historic park garden and demesne, wooded parkland and by the attractive riverside setting, punctuated by historic assets such as Church Island. The fringes of Lough Beg are characterised by belts of deciduous woodland on wet low lying land, and by extensive areas of lowland raised bog on the flat valley floor.
- 6.8 This area of the SCA is largely self-protecting due to its low lying, marshy nature and its remoteness from road networks. Much of the land within the SCA along its lough-shore are within the Q100 Climate Change Flood Level and for this reason is unlikely to come under pressure for development by private agencies or individuals. Nonetheless because of the important environmental designations along the shores of Lough Beg and because of its unique scenic quality this area has been included within the SCA to protect this sensitive landscape.
- 6.9 The AoHSV extends far enough from the lough-shore to include Ballyscullion House and its demesne. It is apparent however that the surrounding land is for the most part improved agricultural ground. The key historic features which combine to create the Ballyscullion House demesne's intrinsic character are already afforded a degree of protection through the historic demesne designation and the SCA therefore has not included much of this more elevated area. To the east and north east of Ballyscullion House historic park garden and demesne however the Ramsar and SPA designations exclude a number of copses of mature woodland. These are considered to be important features within the locality and would frame views of this area, particularly when viewed from the Lough. For this reason these trees and the areas of semi-improved grassland which lie between them have been included within the SCA.



Photo 2 - Taken at the shore line of Lough Beg near Ballyscullion House, showing Spear's Wood in the distance.

- 6.10 Moving further south the SCA is largely self-defining at this point due to the clear differences in the landforms and habitats. The SCA follows the line of the Ramsar and

SPA for the most part as the land included within these designations is lower lying, marshy ground. Whereas the land to the west of the SCA is more elevated and well drained, improved grassland.

- 6.11 Further south the boundary is again largely defined by the Ramsar and SPA designations. That said there are a number of minor anomalies wherein the SCA has extended beyond these designations to include a number of small low lying, marshy fields. From the orthos and the site visits there was no discernible reason why these fields were excluded from the Ramsar and SPA. They too were undrained, lower lying, marshy fields and on that basis were included within the SCA.
- 6.12 The lands to the north east of SDC Trailers are within the AoHSV however given the extent of existing industrial and agricultural development this area has been excluded from the SCA. Similarly the area of farmland to the northeast of 'The Elk' public house, whilst included within the Ramsar, is characterised by improved agricultural land which does not warrant inclusion within the SCA.

Central section of the Special Countryside Area

Maps No.03 – 05 (see Appendices 1 & 2)

Map 3

- 6.13 Moving southwards towards Toome the landscape changes to one defined by flat, improved agricultural grassland that runs tight up to the banks of the Lower River Bann. The Ramsar and SPA at this location merely include the riverbank and little else. Due to the nature of this agricultural land and the confined, limited extent of the environmental designations it is considered that there is no requirement for an SCA at this location.
- 6.14 To the south of the A6 road, close to the riverbank at Bannside, there is a significant level of existing development comprising of detached residential properties and the Eel Fishery building. At this location the level of existing development and the very limited area of unspoilt riverbank render an SCA at this point unnecessary.
- 6.15 Similarly, to the south of Hillhead Road there are a number of residential properties whose curtilage runs tight up to the river bank. To the immediate south of these dwellings is an area of improved agricultural grassland and beyond this lies an existing Lough Neagh Sand Traders (LNST) landing point. Given the level of existing development both residential and industrial it is considered unnecessary to protect this location through an SCA. Furthermore given that the LNST's facilitate and support significant growth throughout Mid Ulster and the wider NI economy it is considered that important landing points should be excluded from the SCA so as not to hamper the economic activity on such sites. Moving westwards a small wedge of wet woodlands has been included within the SCA but beyond that there is another LNST landing point which has also been excluded for the same reason as outlined above.
- 6.16 To the east of Ballymaguigan the SCA will for the most part follow the line of the existing SPA designation along the lough shore. The desktop and field studies identified that the SPA designation at this location marks a clear distinction between the lower lying, marshy lough shore fringe and the more elevated and improved agricultural land that lies to the west of the SPA.

Map 4

- 6.17 This section of the SCA with its low lying margins is largely self-protecting due to its inclusion, for the most part, within the Q100 Climate Change flood level. Unlike the northern portion of the SCA however a greater degree of development pressure has been experienced at this location given the more densely populated nature of the area. The proposed SCA at this location also includes some sites beyond the key underlying designations and the Q100 Climate Change flood level which are important for a variety of reasons including, priority habitats, protection of important views and the maintenance of an important wildlife corridor.
- 6.18 To the south of Ballymaguigan lies Traad Point on the shores of Lough Neagh. Traad Point comprises a significant area of wet woodland and ponds. The line of the SPA designation most accurately reflects the extent of the lower lying marshy ground and it is for this reason that the SCA generally follows the SPA at this location. The obvious exception is the small commercial conifer plantation that has been excluded to the north of the Traad Point site. The AoHSV extends well beyond the Traad Point site to the west however it is considered that this area should not be afforded protection under an SCA as this is improved agricultural grassland.
- 6.19 To the south of Traad Point and to the north of Ballyronan the SCA is limited to a narrow strip of ground, no more than a field deep at the lough shore. This ground, to the east of Shore Road is relatively lower lying ground that affords some important views of the lough from the road. The ground to the west of Shore is higher ground and is characterised by residential farmland and therefore no need to protect within the SCA.



Photo 3 – Taken from Shore Road, between Traad point and Ballyronan, showing one of the limited number of open vistas of the lough

- 6.20 The SCA breaks where it meets the settlement limits of Ballyronan and commences again on the southern side of the village. The land to the immediate south of the village is within the Ramsar and in the interests of maintaining a continuous wildlife corridor wherever possible it is suggested that this low lying lough shore field should be

included within the SCA. Continuing southwards the SCA maintains a presence on the lough shore, utilising the underlying designations of Ramsar and SPA as a guide. There are some exceptions to this, such as the inclusion of improved agricultural fields on the lough shore to protect important public views of the lough and to maintain a continuous wildlife corridor.

Map 5

- 6.21 Parts of this area of the lough shore are low lying lough margins and this area is often densely settled, with lines of houses fronting onto looping roads but there are also empty areas of marsh, fen and woodland close to the lough shore. These are a maze of wet meadows, reed-beds, woodlands and scrub, with pastures and settlements on slightly higher ground. This section of the SCA is valuable not only for its scenic qualities but also for its nature conservation importance.
- 6.22 To the east of Ballylifford the SCA does not stray far from the lough shore, and includes the low lying fields that fall within the Ramsar and SPA. The SCA deliberately does not extend beyond the lough shore to the west, as this ground is characterised by slightly more elevated, improved agricultural land. Some fields which extend beyond the underlying environmental designations have been included within the SCA as the desktop and field surveys identified that they were unimproved grassland within the Q100 flood level.



Photo 4 – Taken near Kinturk Road, at the lough shore, looking northwards

- 6.23 Continuing south, the existing jetty at Curran Quay has been excluded from the SCA as this area was identified in the Cookstown Area Plan as a Tourism Opportunity Zone (TOZ). Mid Ulster District Council, within its Preferred Options Paper, has already identified the use of TOZs as an important mechanism to encourage appropriate levels of tourism development and that this concept will be carried forward in the draft Plan Strategy.
- 6.24 The land to the south, south east of Curran Quay is arguably the most densely populated rural area of Mid Ulster. For this reason the SCA does not extend too far westwards but rather closely follows the shoreline and constitutes not more than a field depth of unimproved grassland. At this location there are numerous existing public/private jetties with associated development. One option to map this area of SCA is to draw the line to exclude all the existing development however given the level of development at this location this could be confusing to all stakeholders. It is therefore considered that the most logical way of mapping the SCA at this location is to include all of these jetties within the SCA but allow for a degree of development through an

appropriately worded SCA policy. The policy could allow for a level of development such as consolidation and minor expansion of existing development. In this way the SCA would protect the lough shore from inappropriate development whilst at the same time accommodate Mid Ulster's vibrant fishing industry.

- 6.25 To the east of Moortown the SCA follows the line of the Ramsar and SPA to include the lower lying agricultural fields at the lough shore. The SCA breaks at 'The Battery' and then commences again to the immediate south of the settlement limit. At this location the SCA excludes a small area of amenity grassland and children's play park. Further south the SCA follows a mixture of the Ramsar and SPA designations to include small copses of wet woodland and some unimproved grassland.

Southern section of the Special Countryside Area

Maps No.06 – 08 (see Appendices 1 & 2)

Map 6

- 6.26 The Southern section of the SCA is mainly encompassed within the Lough Neagh Peatlands LCA. Much of the area has been previously worked for peat and has been extensively modified through extraction; there are distinct sharp changes of level marking areas where peat extraction has taken place. There are areas of regenerating birch and willow scrub and farmland, wherever drainage permits. The landscape is strongly influenced by the traditional road pattern, which mirrors that of the peat workings. This is however a varied landscape with an important shoreline landscape and a valuable sense of isolation and tranquillity. The wetland and shoreline landscapes on the edge of Lough Neagh are extremely sensitive and highly valued for their scenic quality and wildlife interest. They fall within the 'Lough Neagh Shores Area of Scenic Quality'. Extensive areas are designated as an ASSI and the area is part of the extensive Lough Neagh/Lough Beg Special Protection Area, which recognises its international significance as a habitat for breeding birds. The open and flat nature of this area is particularly sensitive to the visual impact of inappropriate development.
- 6.27 To the south of Moortown the SCA follows the line of existing field boundaries. These fields are lower lying fields of unimproved grassland. At this location the SCA follows the line of the SPA. Moving southwards the SCA extends beyond the underlying environmental designations of Ramsar and SPA to include the scheduled monuments of the Ardboe High Cross and Abbey. The SCA does not stray far from the lough shore due to the improved residential farmland located on the slightly higher ground to the west.



Photo 5 – Taken from the ruins of Ardboe Church, looking eastwards towards the lough

- 6.28 Moving south, southwest the SCA utilises the Ramsar and SPA designations, as well as including some additional fields beyond these designations which fall within the Q100 climate change flood level. It is only when the SCA moves to the immediate south of Ardboe does it venture further from the shoreline and include significant tracts of land. The reason for doing so is primarily to include significant portions of natural woodland which are so prevalent along this stretch of the lough shore. In places the

SCA follows the line of the Ramsar and in other occasions the line of the SCA. In addition the SCA goes beyond these designations at times to include either lower lying fields that flood or to include areas of important natural woodland.

Map 7

- 6.29 As the SCA moves further south it retracts to include only the lough shore fringe. This is due to the presence of the existing road network that runs close to the lough shore at this point. There is a significant degree of existing residential and agricultural development fronting onto and accessing off the road network and for this reason the SCA does not venture far from the lough shore. The SCA at this point utilises mainly the Ramsar and SPA lines.
- 6.30 To the east of Brockagh/Mountjoy the SCA continues to include the lough shore fringes, no more than a field deep. This is due to the significant level of development that lies close to the lough at this location. Indeed the SCA has been drawn to exclude an existing football club and associated development close to the lough shore. Moving southwards the SCA continues to utilise the designations of Ramsar and SPA to ensure that only the lower lying, unimproved grassland, natural woodland and fenland is included.



Photo 6 – taken from the northern site boundary of Brockagh GAA, looking eastwards towards the lough

Map 8

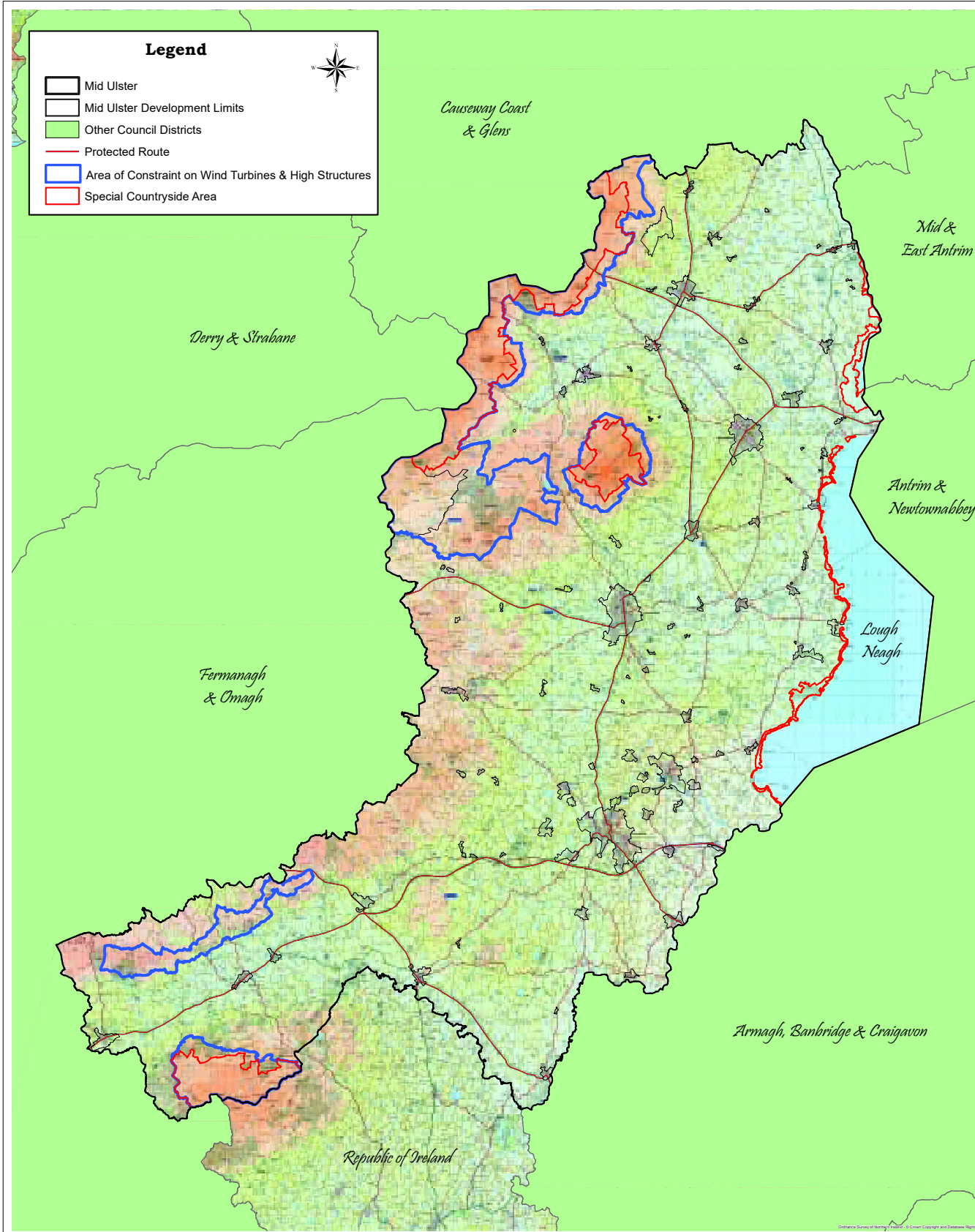
- 6.31 The southwestern area of Lough Neagh includes some of the most densely populated areas of farmland along the lough shore. This entire area is characterised by low lying farmland, significant portions of which are prone to flooding and has been shaped to a degree by man-made influences, such as peat extraction.
- 6.32 Due to the densely populated nature of this area of the lough the SCA stays close to the lough shore. It is at this point that the Ramsar designation becomes less of an influence on the SCA designation as it extends far beyond the lough shore fringe and heads in a westerly direction to include a large area of densely populated farmland. Due to the SCA's intention to protect only the unspoilt and unimproved land along the lough shore, at this point the SPA becomes the most influential designation in terms of defining the SCA.
- 6.33 As the SCA heads southwards it utilises the SPA and literally only includes the lough shore fringe of lower, unimproved grassland. The SCA skirts around and excludes existing development such as the football/recreation ground at Washingbay. The SCA continues to use the SPA designation as a guide right up to Mid Ulster's boundary with Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Council.

7.0 Summary

- 7.1 In the context of the regional policy and the analysis of existing and potential development pressures, landscape character, the Council considers the Special Countryside Area designation along the shores of Lough Neagh, Lough Beg and the Lower River Bann, as indicated Maps No.01 – 08 to be justified, in order to exercise control over new development to meet the objectives of regional planning policy.
- 7.2 The Council considers that the Special Countryside Area (SCA) designation is necessary to protect this valued landscape of recognised international landscape quality from existing and future development pressures and to maintain its unique amenity value.

Map A

Mid Ulster Area of Constraint on Wind Turbines & High Structures and Special Countryside Area



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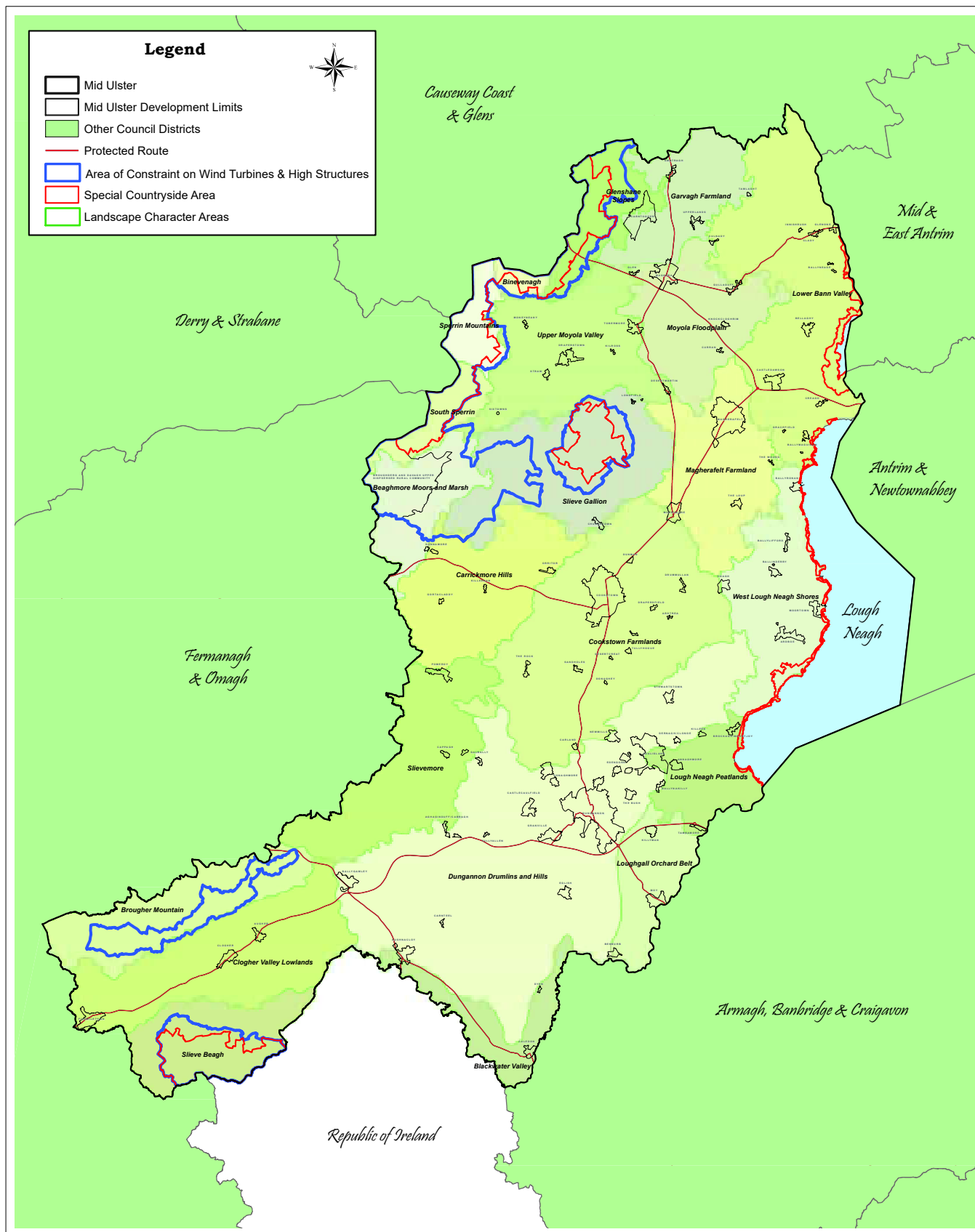
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Map B Mid Ulster Landscape Character Areas



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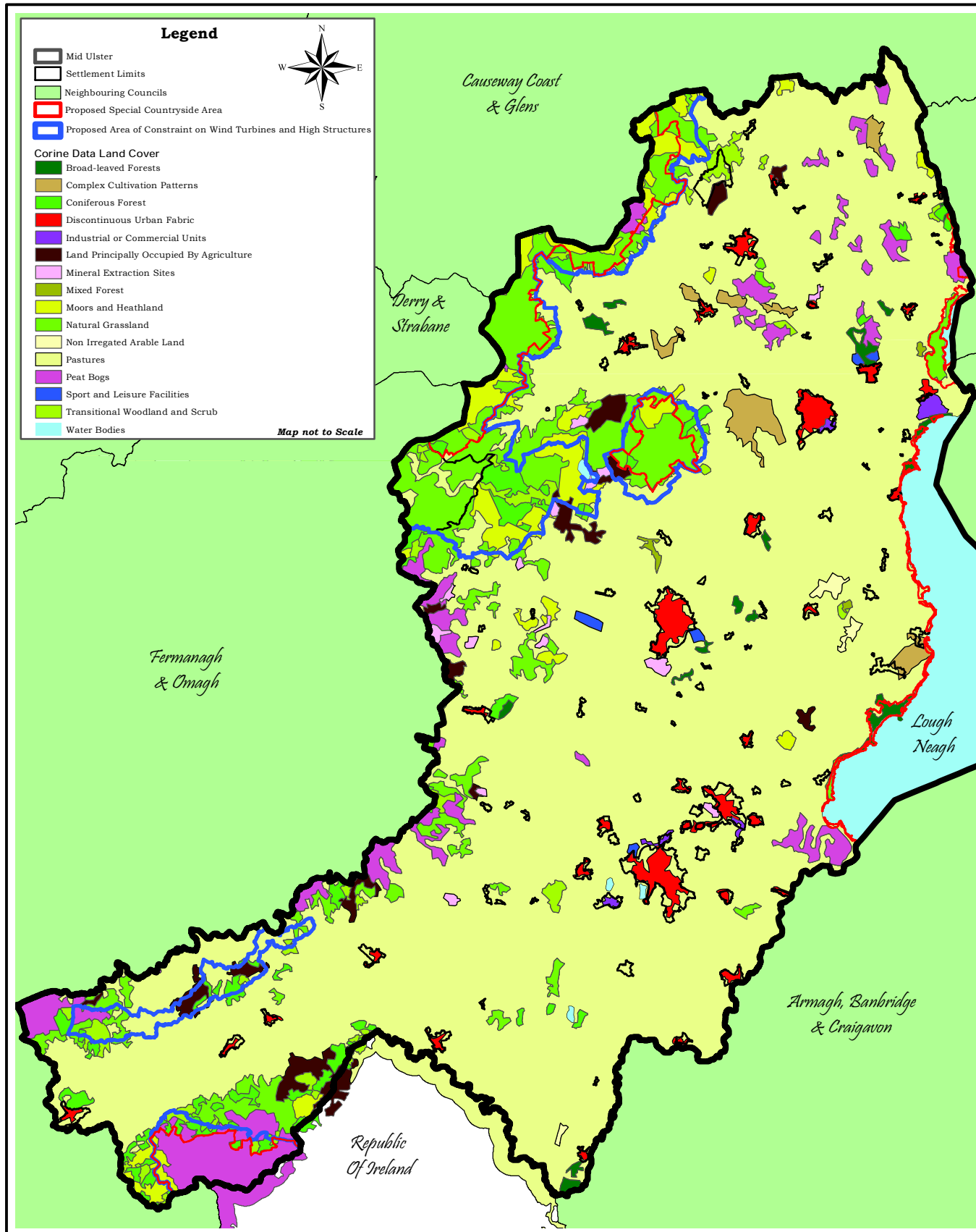
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Map C - Mid Ulster CORINE Land Cover Map



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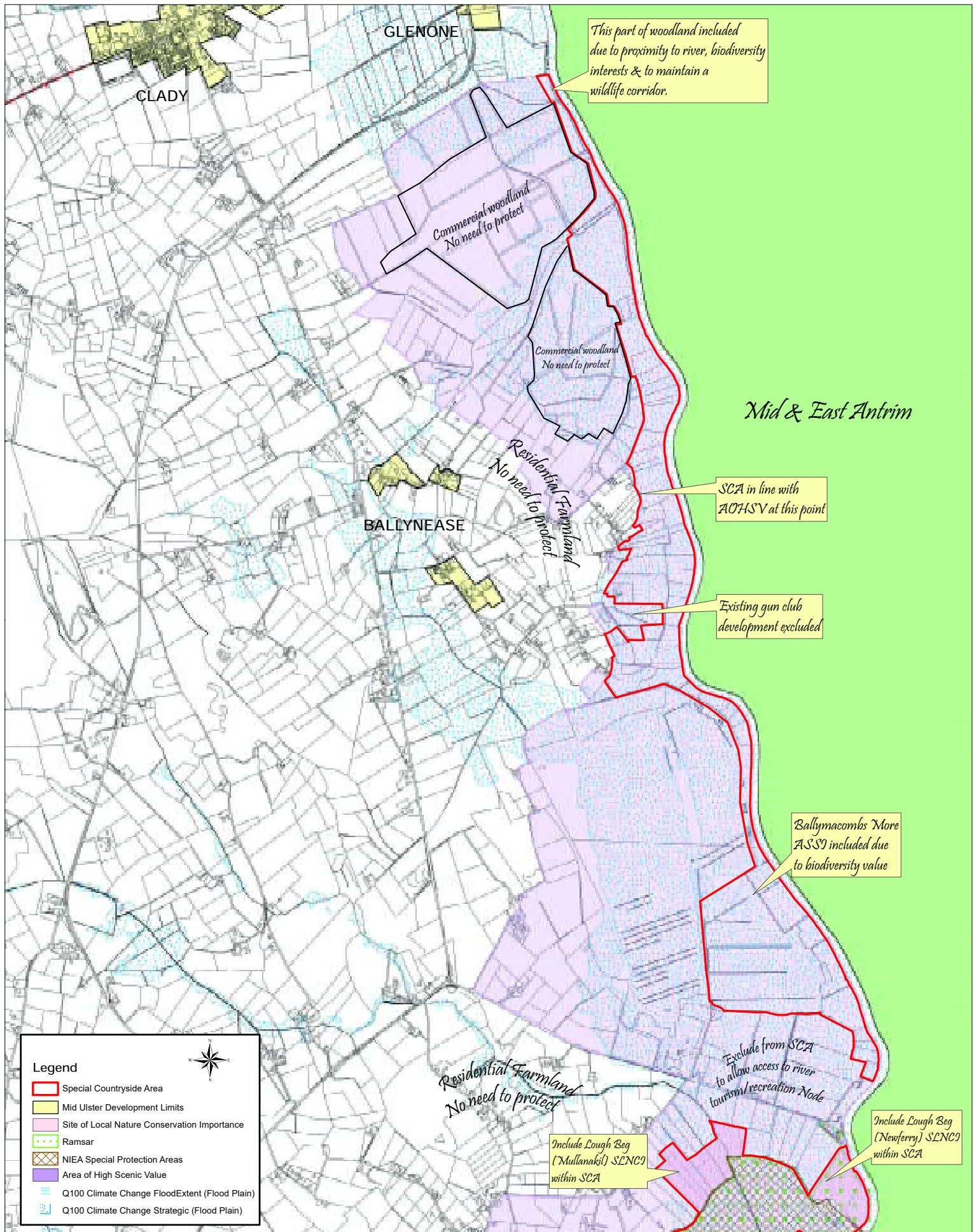
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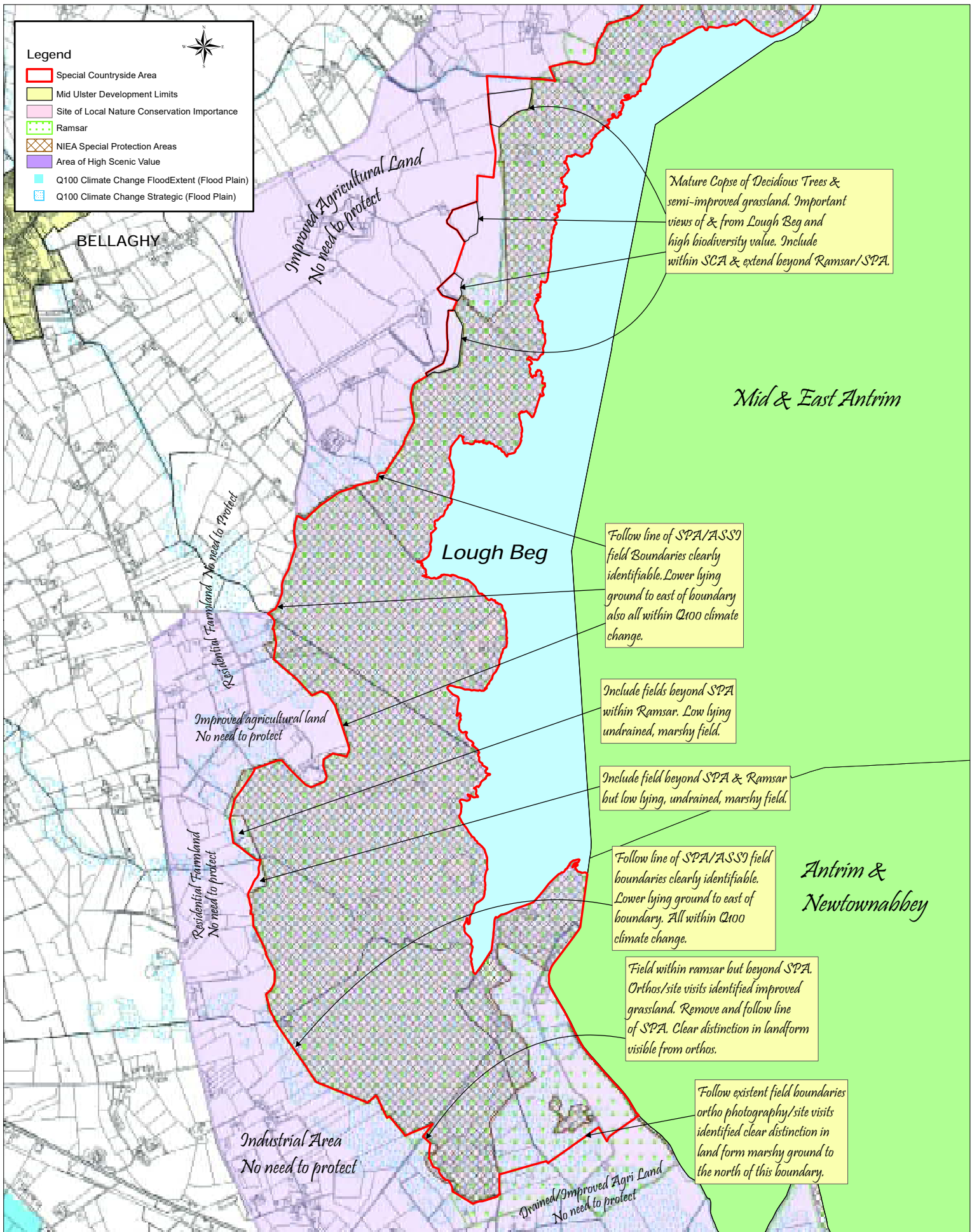
Appendix 1 Maps 1-8

Proposed Special Countryside Area (SCA) at Lough Neagh/Lough Beg.

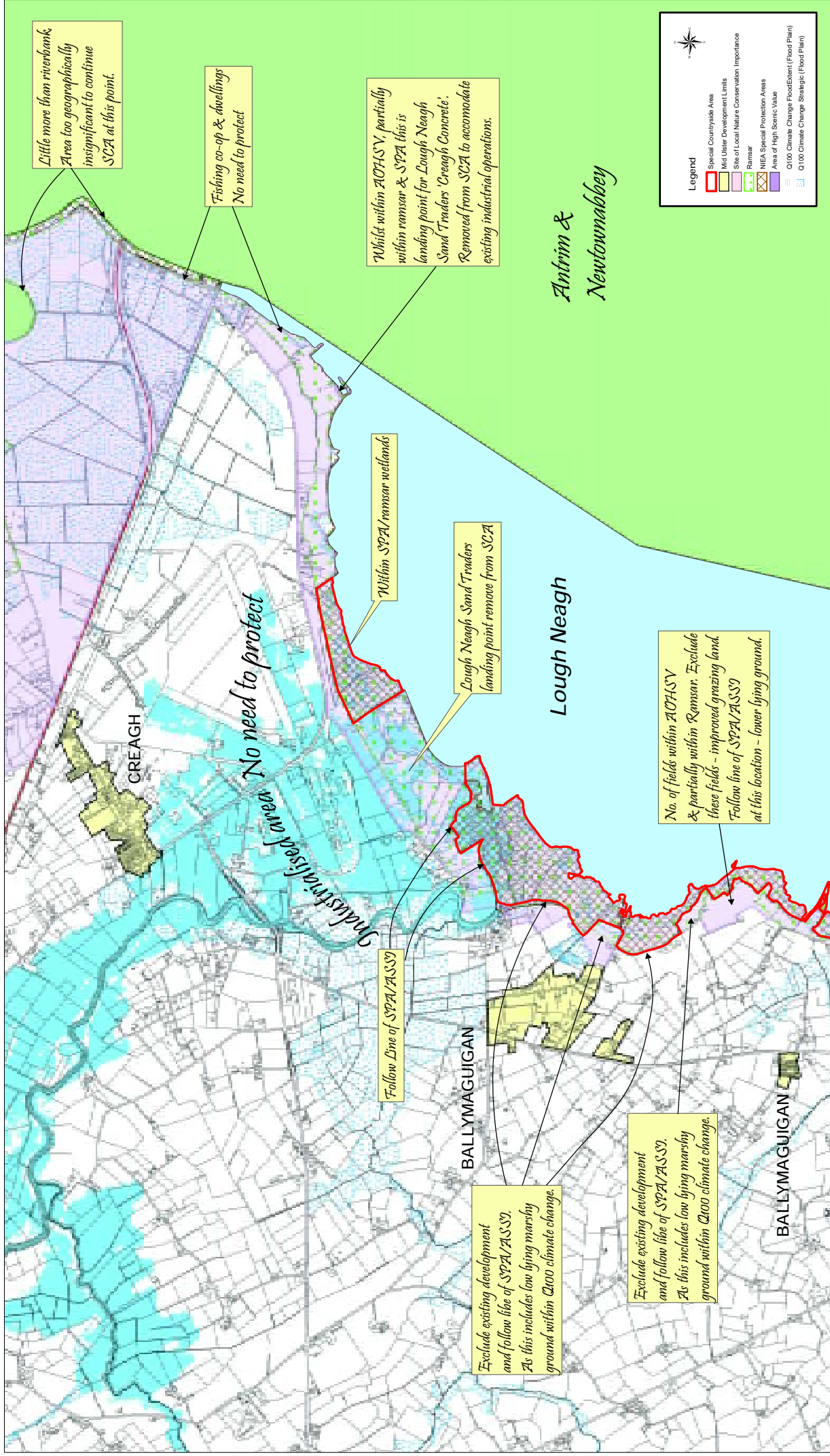
Lough Neagh/Lough Beg Special Countryside Area Map 1



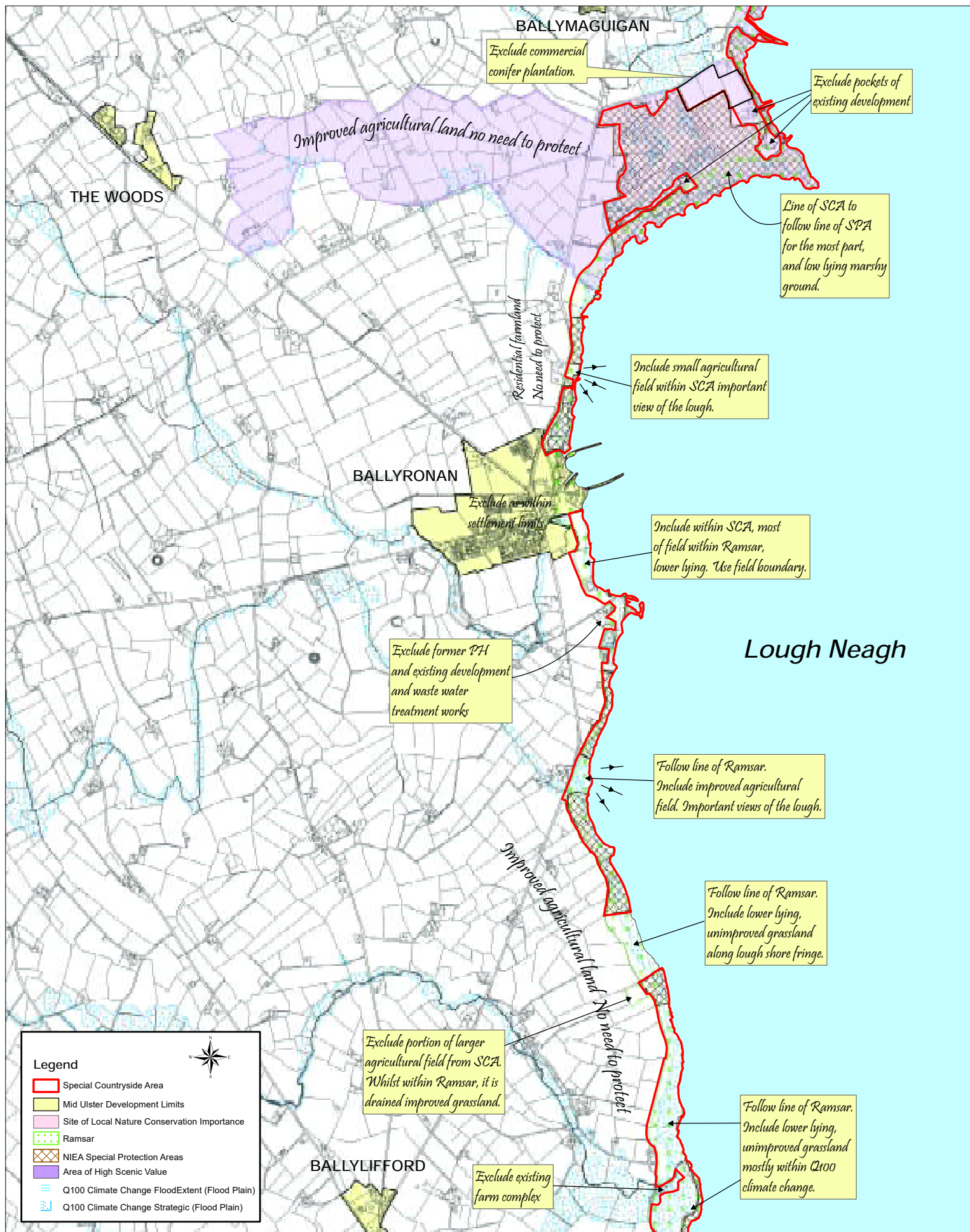
Lough Neagh/Lough Beg Special Countryside Area Map 2



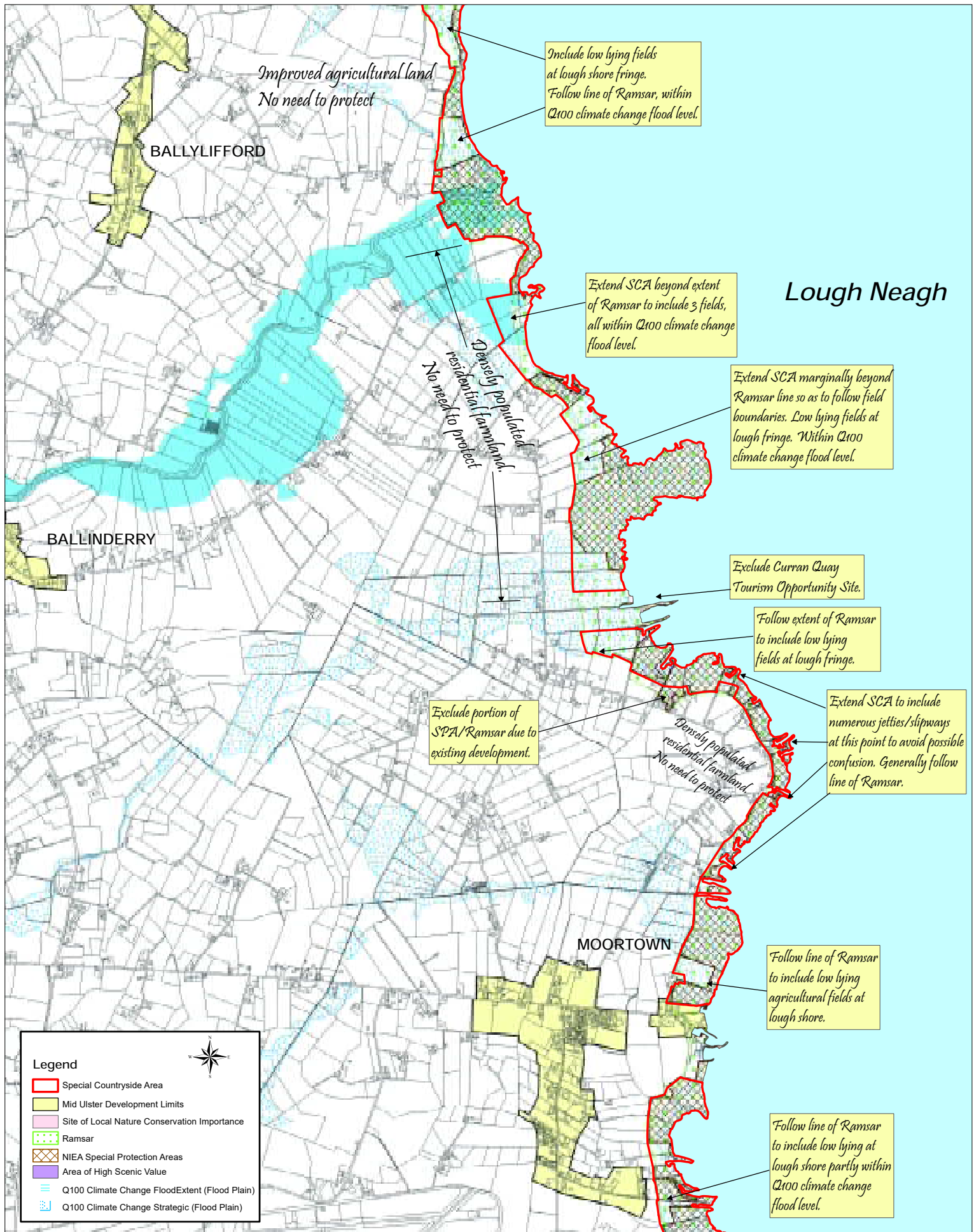
Lough Neagh/Lough Beg Special Countryside Area Map 3



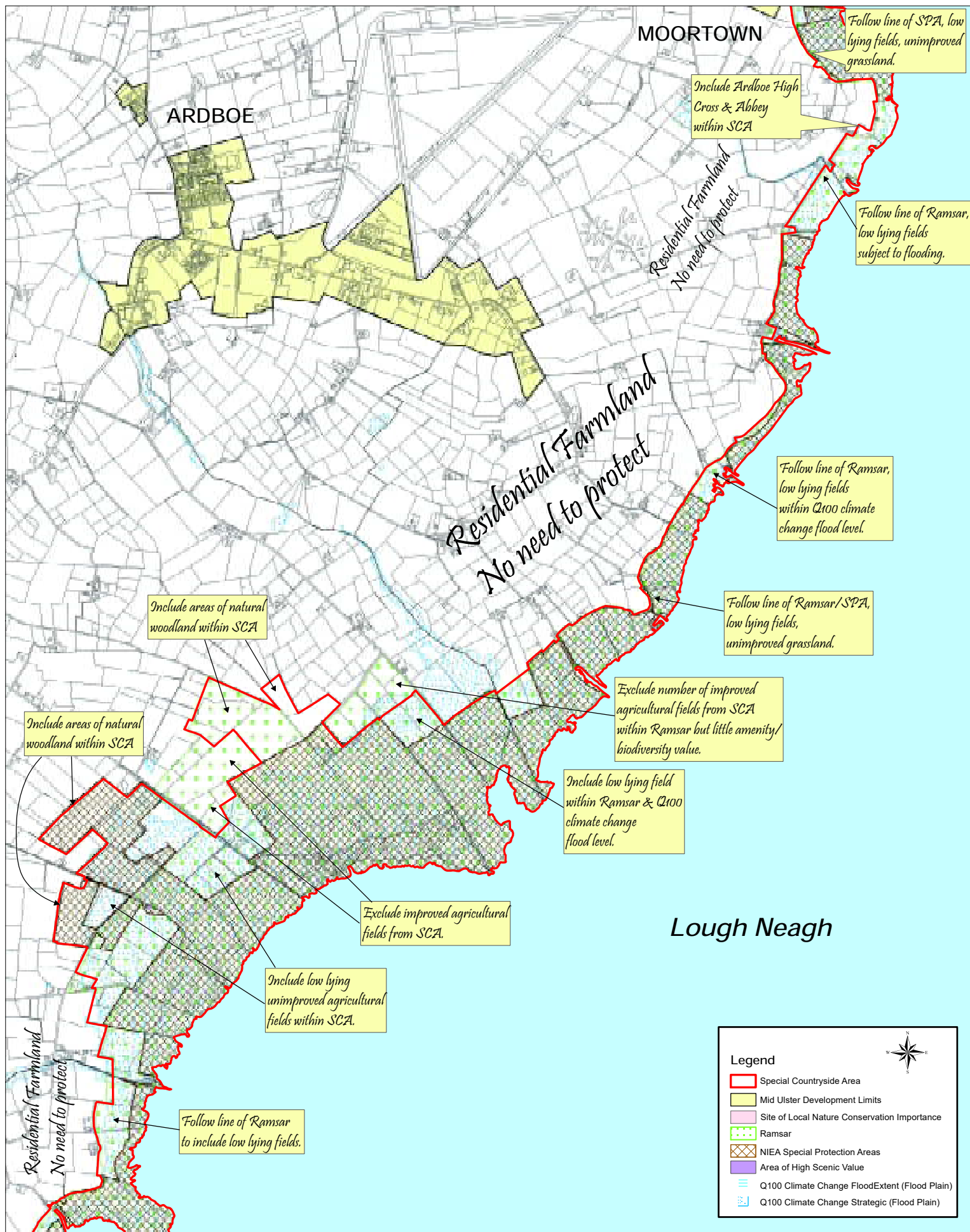
Lough Neagh/Lough Beg Special Countryside Area Map 4



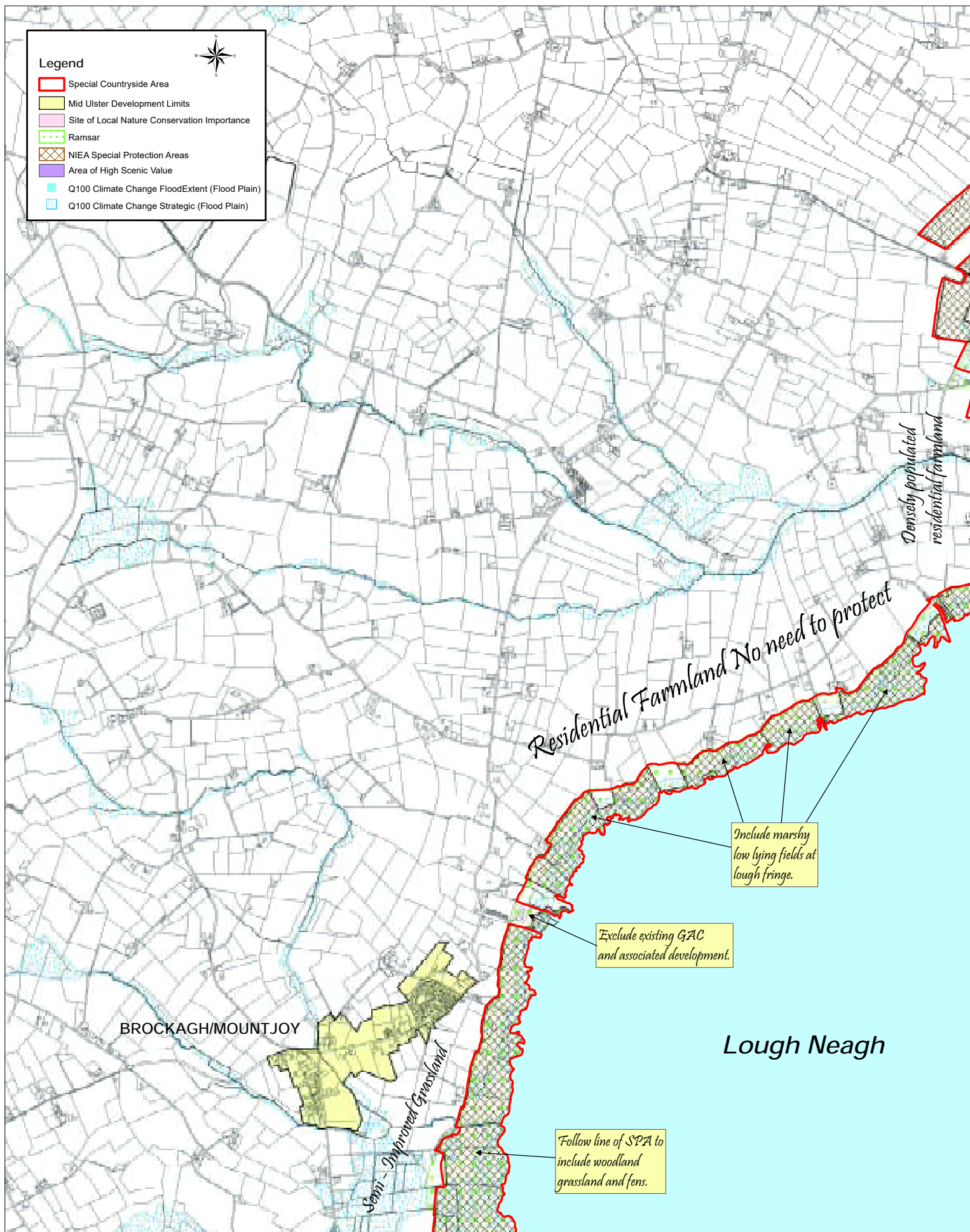
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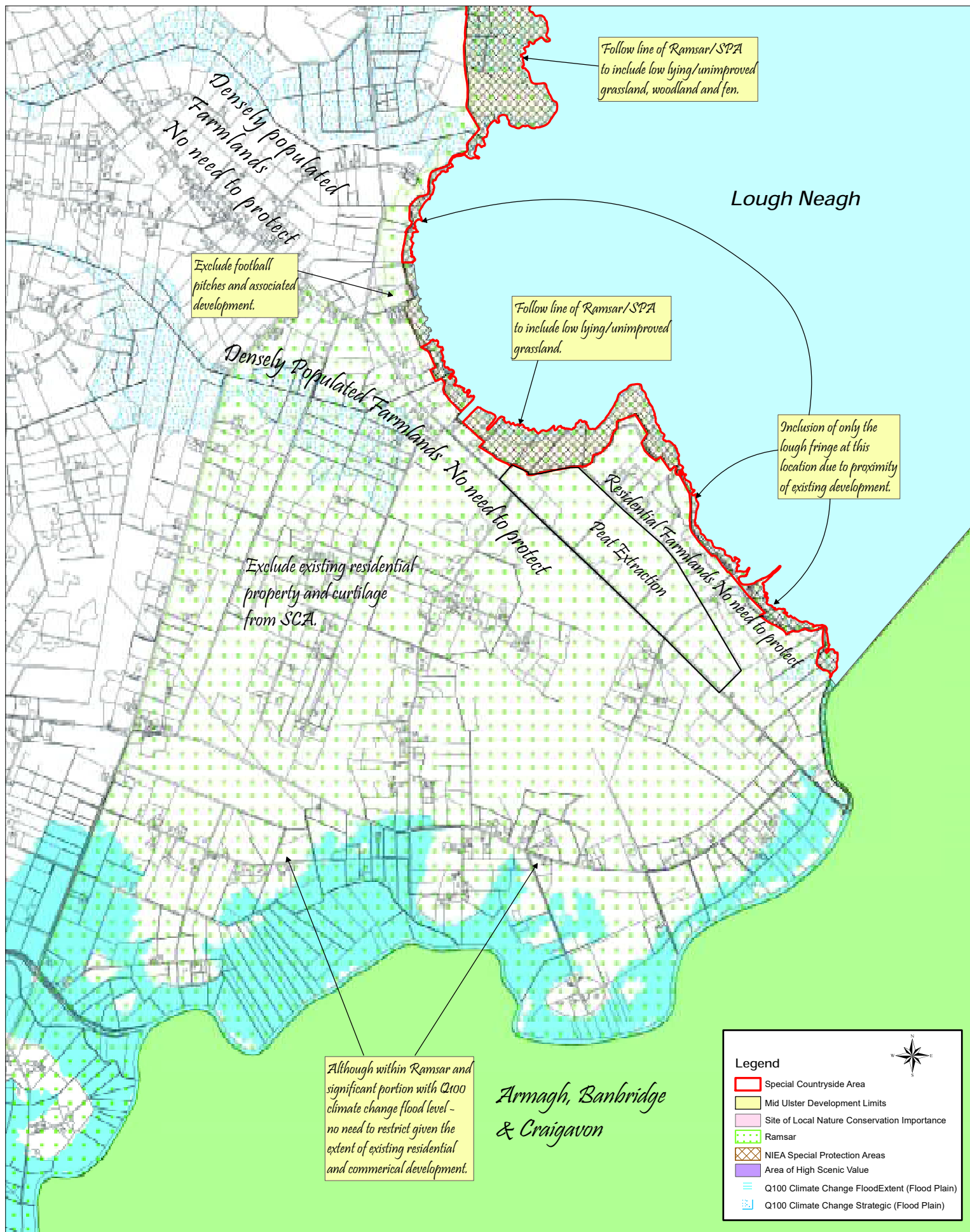
Lough Neagh/Lough Beg Special Countryside Area Map 6



Lough Neagh/Lough Beg Special Countryside Area Map 7



Lough Neagh/Lough Beg Special Countryside Area Map 8



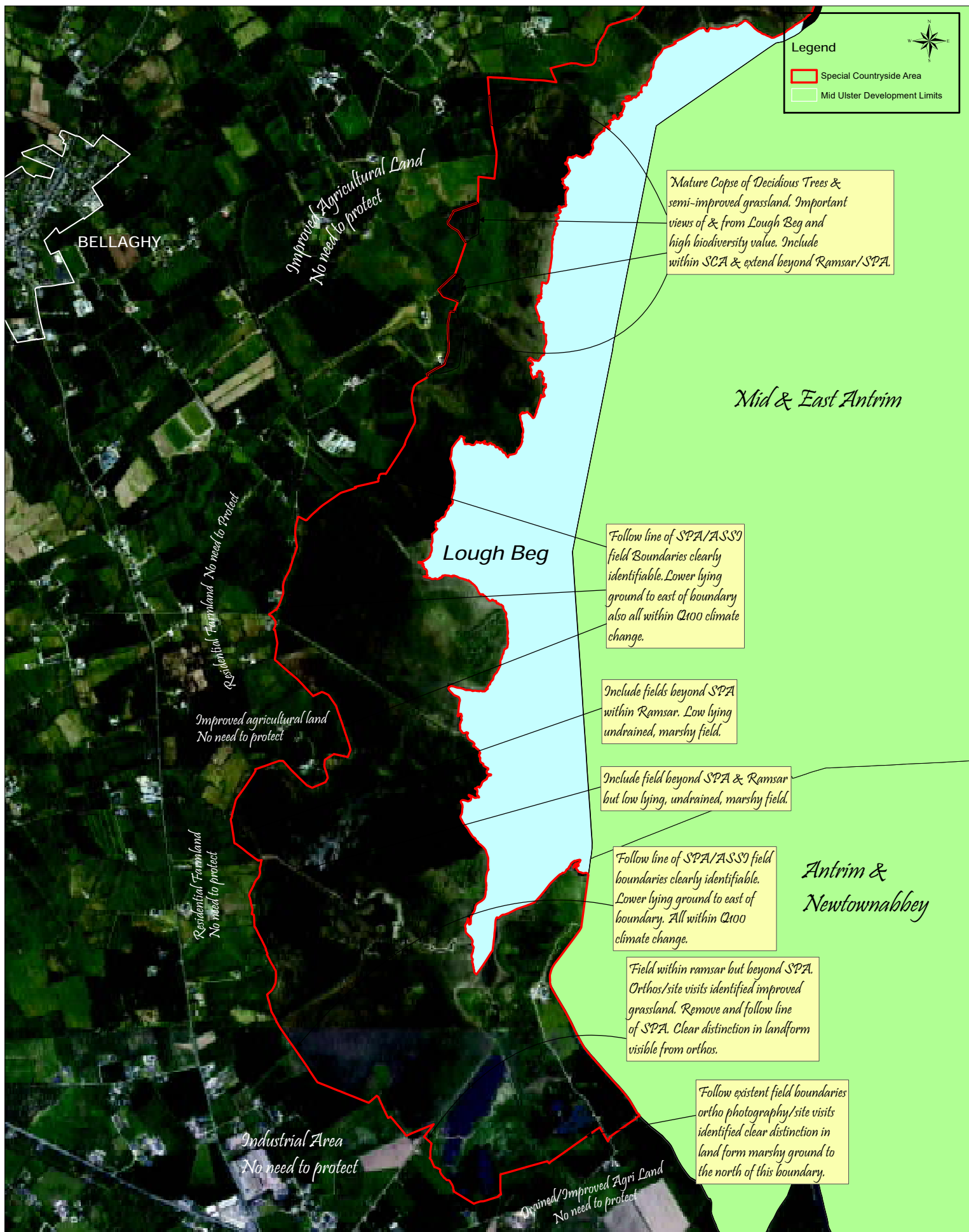
Appendix 2

Proposed Special Countryside Area (SCA) at Lough Neagh/Lough Beg. Ortho-photography

Lough Neagh/Lough Beg Special Countryside Area Map 1



Lough Neagh/Lough Beg Special Countryside Area Map 2



Lough Neagh/Lough Beg Special Countryside Area Map 3



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Lough Neagh/Lough Beg Special Countryside Area Map 4



Lough Neagh/Lough Beg Special Countryside Area Map 5



Lough Neagh/Lough Beg Special Countryside Area Map 6



Lough Neagh/Lough Beg Special Countryside Area Map 7

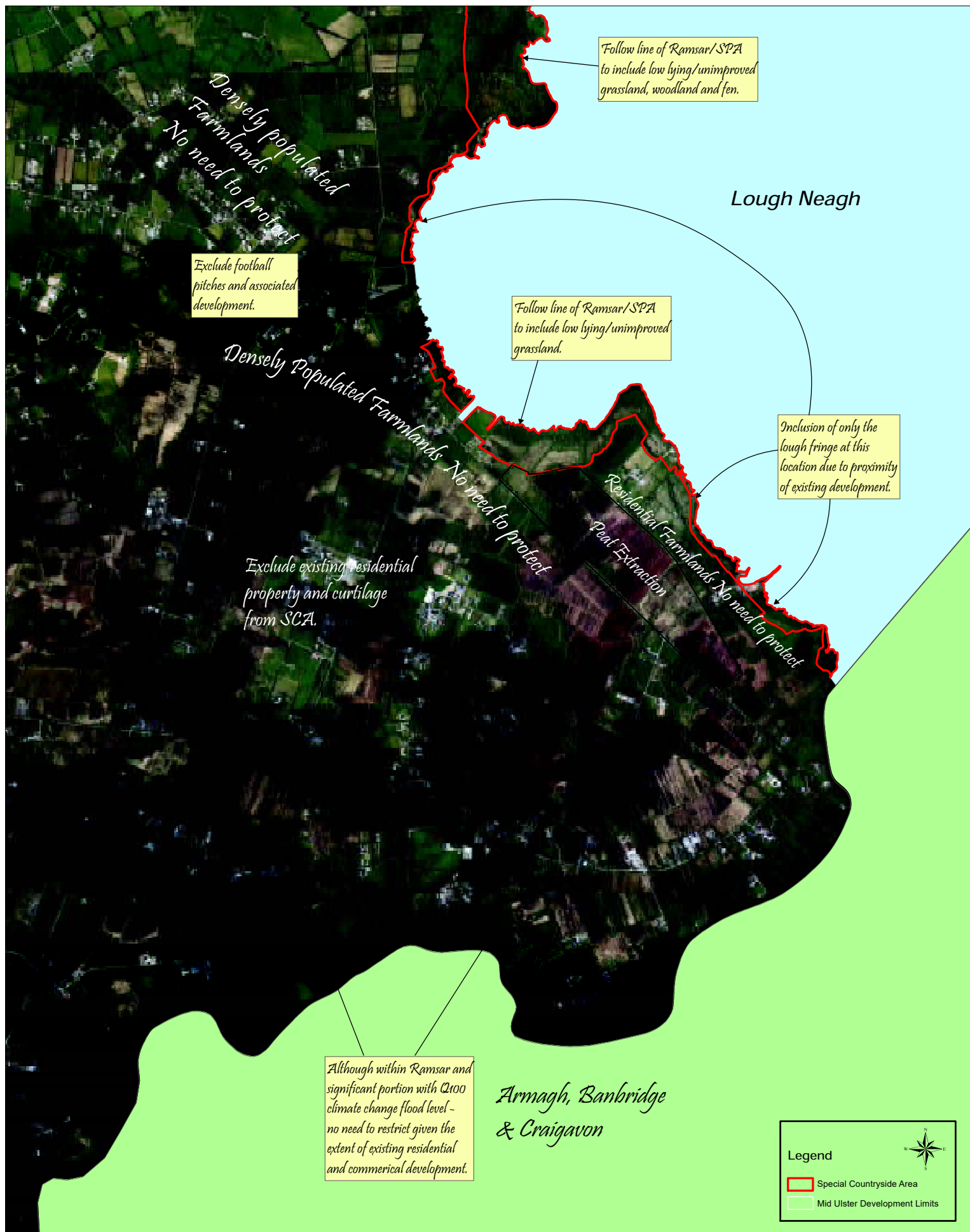


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Lough Neagh/Lough Beg Special Countryside Area Map 8

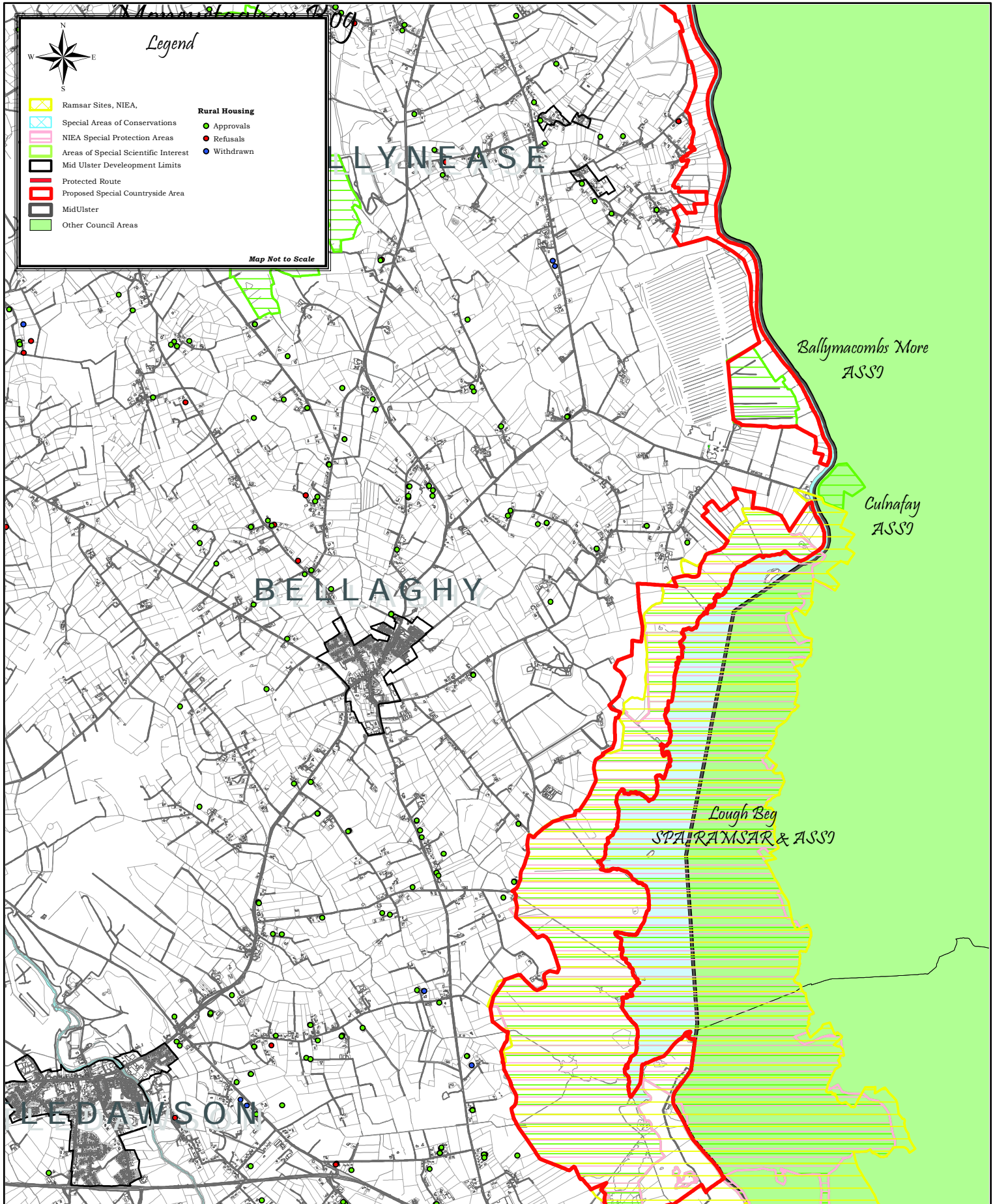


Appendix 3

Lough Neagh/Lough Beg Development Pressure Analysis Maps

SCA Pressure Analysis Map 1

Mid Ulster Rural Housing 06/2010 - 10/2017



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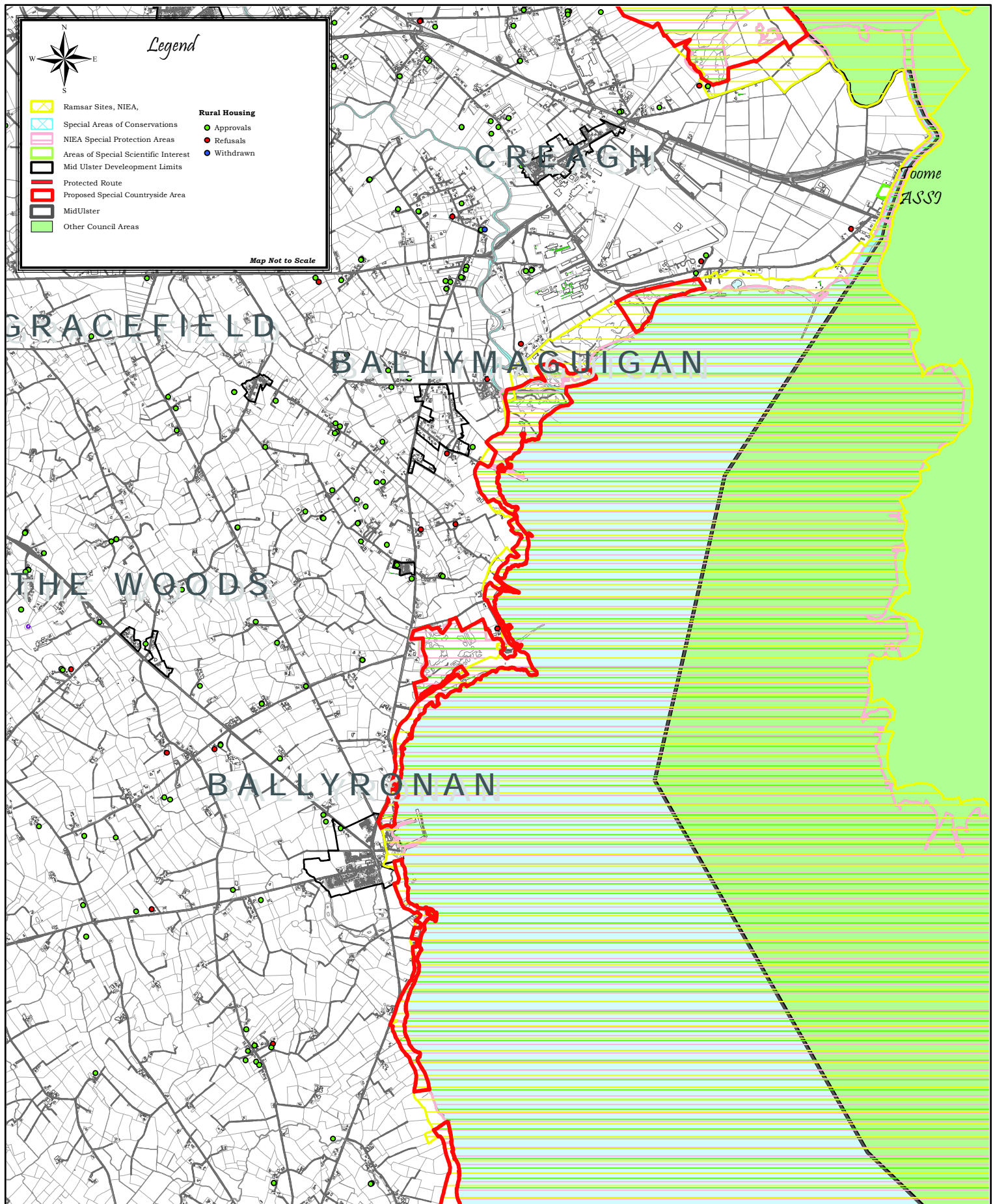
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SCA Pressure Analysis Map 2

Mid Ulster Rural Housing 06/2010 - 10/2017



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SCA Pressure Analysis Map 3

Mid Ulster Rural Housing 06/2010 - 10/2017



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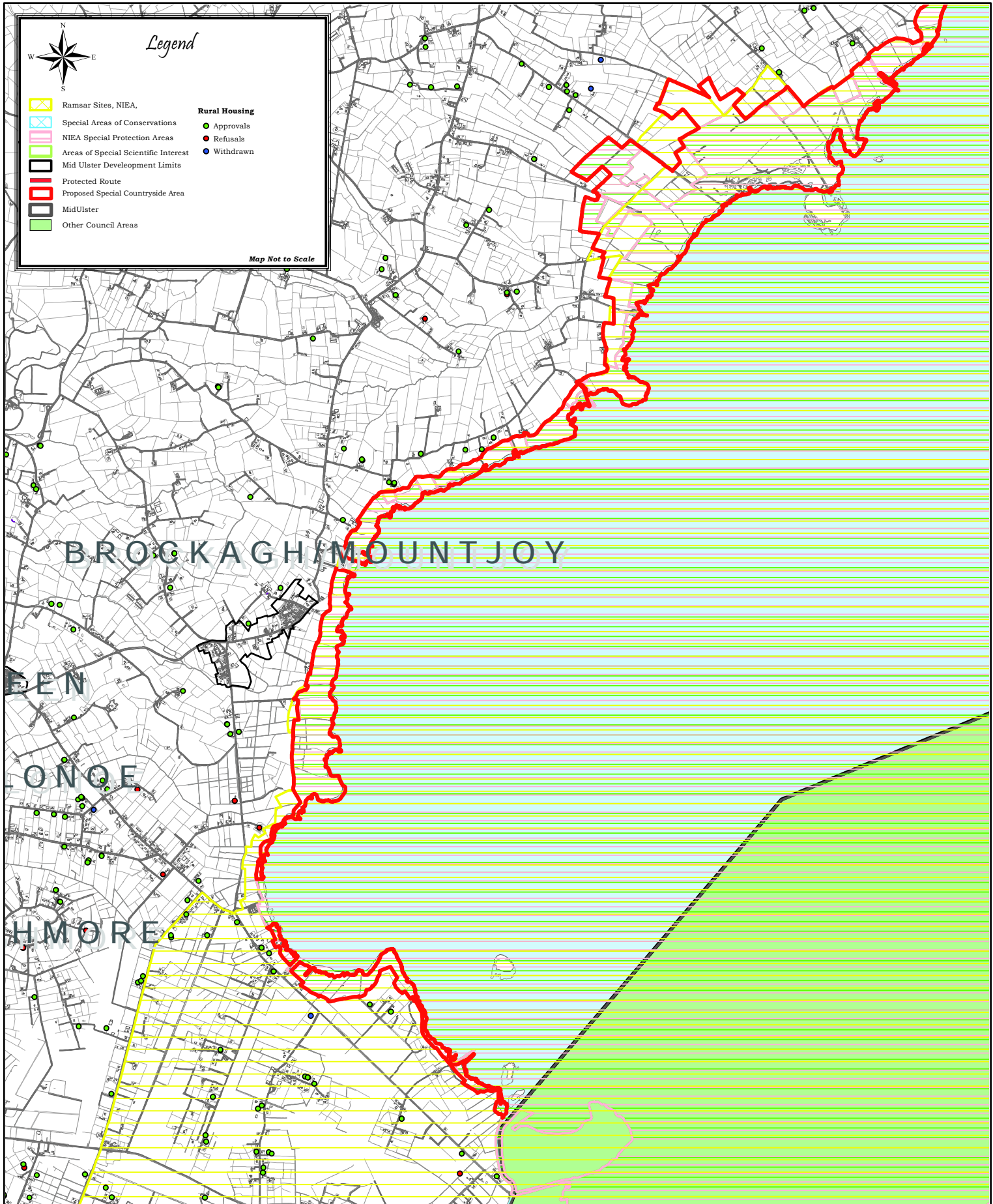
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SCA Pressure Analysis Map 4

Mid Ulster Rural Housing 06/2010 - 10/2017



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