

**FERMANAGH AND OMAGH DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Position Paper 14

**Landscape Character Assessment**

December 2015

**Landscape Character Assessment of Fermanagh and Omagh District Council**

**Purpose: To provide members with a Landscape Character Assessment for Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and to highlight those areas most vulnerable to change within the district.**

**Content: The paper provides information on:**

1. **The Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment for Fermanagh and Omagh District and its key findings;**
2. **An assessment of the scenic quality, sensitivity to change and the overall capacity of each Landscape Character Area to absorb development; and**
3. **A strand of the Countryside Assessment of the plan area and is to be read in conjunction with the Environmental Assets Paper, Strategic Settlement Evaluation and Development Pressure Analysis.**

**1.0 Introduction**

1.1 Landscape Character Assessment (LCA)[[1]](#footnote-1) is the process of identifying and describing variation in character of the landscape. LCA documents, identifies and explains the unique combination of elements and features that make landscapes distinctive by mapping and describing character types and areas.

1.2 The Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area comprises a mixture of landscapes which include mountain valleys, open moorland, river valleys, drumlins, lakelands, low lands, raised bogs, rolling farm land, cliffs and mountains. These landscapes provide a rich resource of productive agricultural land, habitats for nature conservation, archaeological and historical features and remains which illustrate ways in which the land has provided for human occupation and activity in the past. It also provides for many recreational needs and has the potential to become an increasingly important tourist asset.

1.3 Landscapes of national importance have merited designations as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The landscapes within Fermanagh and Omagh include part of the Sperrin Mountains, designated as an AONB in 2008. The purpose of the designation is to protect and conserve the scenic qualities of the area and promote their enjoyment.

1.4 The AONB forms a backdrop to much of the district in the north east, with the mountain valleys of the Glenelly and Owenkillew rivers lying below an expanse of open moorland. The Strule Valley, numerous drumlin features, the scenic and valued resource of the Lakelands, dramatic cliffs and mountains such as Cuilcagh, lowlands such as Arney, Garrison and Camowen Valley, areas of lowland raised bog and rolling farmland are other important landscapes within the District. There is a particular remoteness and wilderness to many of portions of the District.

1. **Regional Planning Policy**

2.1 The Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS) places

Sustainable Development at the heart of the planning system. The SPPS defines the three pillars of sustainable development planning authorities should deliver on in formulating policies and plans. On the environment pillar, the SPPS sets out the need to protect and enhance the built and natural environment, including landscape character. It states that, in formulating policies and plans, planning authorities will be guided by the precautionary approach in that, where there are significant risks of damage to the environment, its protection will generally be paramount, unless there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest. The SPPS further states that our environment must be managed in a sustainable manner in accordance with the Executive’s commitment to preserve and improve the built and natural environment and halt the loss of biodiversity.

2.2 In directing ‘other types of development’ in the countryside, beyond those for which the SPPS sets out specific Regional Strategic Policy, it states that where there are areas of the countryside which exhibit exceptional landscapes, and visual amenity value such as lough shores, and certain views and vistas, development should only be permitted in exceptional circumstances. Where appropriate these areas should be designated as Special Countryside Areas (SCA) in the Local Development Plan (LDP) and appropriate policies brought forward to ensure their protection from unnecessary and inappropriate development. Local policies may also be brought forward to maintain the landscape quality and character of Areas of High Scenic Value.

2.3 Paragraph 6.76 of the SPPS states that the LDP process has an important role for councils in identifying key features and assets of the countryside and balancing of the needs of rural areas and communities with the protection of the environment. This paper, along with the Development Pressure Analysis (Paper 15) and the Environmental Assets (Paper 5), will provide the evidence base for the purposes of bringing forward an appropriate policy approach to development in the countryside.

**3.0 The Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment 2000**

3.1 All of the Northern Ireland landscape has been classified by the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment 2000 (NILCA 2000) which was compiled by Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). The NI landscape has been subdivided into 130 different landscape character areas, each with a distinctive character, based upon local patterns of geology, land form, land use, cultural and ecological features. The Fermanagh and Omagh District contains 26 Landscape Character Areas, some of which are shared with neighbouring districts (Appendix 2, Map1).

3.2 On 28th April 2015, NIEA published the draft Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment (NIRLCA) for consultation. It identifies 26 regional landscape character areas, and is intended to form a framework for updating of local-scale assessments which will replace the NILCA 2000. Of the 26 regional landscape character areas 7no are located within the Fermanagh and Omagh District (Appendix 3, Map 2).

3.3 NILCA 2000 also identified Areas of Scenic Quality (ASQ) and defined them as landscapes of regional or local importance for their scenic quality, i.e. important landscape resources in their own right, regardless of location or setting. They represent a second tier (below AONBs) in the hierarchy of landscape classifications. There are 4 Areas of Scenic Quality within Fermanagh and Omagh District - Lough Melvin, Derrin Mountain, Colebrooke Estate and Bessy Bell.

3.4 In addition to NILCA 2000, NIEA Wind Energy Development in Northern Ireland’s Landscapes; Supplementary Planning Guidance (2010) (SPG) provides a broad, strategic guidance in relation to the visual and landscape impacts of wind energy development. It contains an assessment of each of the 130 LCAs by referencing the characteristics and values associated with each LCA. Although this guidance is specifically concerned with wind energy development it is considered a useful source for identifying those landscapes within Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area that are vulnerable to change.

3.5 Within the SPG each LCA is given an overall sensitivity level using a five point scale ranging from high to low. Of the 26 LCAs that fall within the Fermanagh and Omagh district, 23 have been given either a high or a high to medium sensitivity rating. Slieve Russel, Derrylin and Kinawley and Lough Bradan have been categorised as a medium sensitivity and Slievemore categorised as a medium to low rating. It is acknowledged within the guidance that there may be considerable variation in sensitivity level within each LCA, reflecting the fact that the LCAs are broad character or identity areas. The overall sensitivity level given is the level that prevails over most of the individual LCA’s geographic area.

**4.0 Development Plan Designations**

4.1 The Islands Countryside Policy Area as identified in the Fermanagh Area Plan 2007 changed in title to Special Countryside Area (SCA) following the introduction of PPS 21. SCAs are regarded as exceptional landscapes such as mountains, stretches of the coast or lough shores and certain views or vistas. The quality of the landscape and unique amenity value is such that development should only be permitted in exceptional circumstances. The Islands of Lough Erne, Lough Macnean and Lough Melvin are SCAs.

4.2 Local Landscape Policy areas (LLPAs) are areas considered to be of greatest amenity value or local significance within and adjoining settlements and therefore worthy of protection from undesirable or damaging development. Within the Fermanagh Area Plan 2007 there are 235 Local Landscape Policy Areas (LLPAs) within and adjoining the majority of the settlements.

4.3 The Omagh Area Plan1987-2002 designated formal Landscape Policy Areas (LPAs). These are areas of especially high amenity or of local significance. They should remain in their present use and only schemes that add to the landscaping of these sites should be encouraged. There are a number of LPAs which have been designated within or adjoining a few of the settlements within the former Omagh District. These pre-date the LLPA definition as contained within the Fermanagh Area Plan 2007 and are therefore a slightly lesser type of designation. There are LPAs within the following settlements:-

* Fintona
* Dromore
* Carrickmore
* Gortin
* Loughmacrory
* Sixmilecross

4.4 The features or combination of features that contribute to the environmental quality, integrity or character of an LLPA/LPA are specific to individual settlements and differ from place to place. Details of the LLPAs/LPAs including maps indicating their boundaries are contained within the Fermanagh Area Plan 2007 and the Omagh Area Plan 1987-2002. As part of the plan preparation process, all existing LLPA and LPA designations will be reviewed and any additional LLPAs identified.

**5.0 Other Landscape Designations**

5.1 Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area has the distinction of having the first UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation) European Geopark in the United Kingdom and Ireland with designation of the Marble Arch Caves Global GeoPark in 2001. The Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark, which straddles counties Fermanagh and Cavan, became the world’s first cross border Geopark in 2008. It is jointly managed by Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and Cavan County Council. The decision, announced by the UNESCO General Conference in Paris on 17th November 2015, saw the Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark become Northern Ireland’s second only UNESCO supported location alongside the Giant’s Causeway World Heritage Site and puts it on a par with other UNESCO sites in Ireland such as the prehistoric monuments at Newgrange. UNESCO Global Geopark status is awarded to areas with internationally important geological heritage that also have a sustainable tourism strategy so that they benefit the local and regional economy.

5.2 The Sperrin AONB covers a substantial area of the northeast of the District. Lying in the heart of Northern Ireland the Sperrin AONB encompasses a largely mountainous area of great geological complexity. Designated first in 1968 under the 1965 Amenity Lands Act, and latterly in 2008 under the 1985 Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands Order (NCALO) with a revised boundary, it covers an area of 118,206 hectares and stretches from the Strule Valley in the west to the perimeter of the Lough Neagh lowlands in the east. This area presents vast expanses of moorland penetrated by narrow glens and deep valleys. In its south the Burren area is noted for its lakes, sandy eskers and other glacial features. The area is rich in historic and archaeological heritage and folklore. The NCALO designation is much more orientated towards positive management. NIEA’s aim is to develop and facilitate partnerships that deliver conservation of the natural and built environment and enhanced recreation provision, in an efficient, effective and inclusive manner.

5.3 The Fermanagh and Omagh Council area has a rich variety of archaeological sites and monuments, buildings and other structures such as Devenish. The council area also contains a wealth of remains of industrial heritage, all of which are reminders of economic development in the area. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency is responsible for the identification, recording, updating and protection of all known archaeological and sites of historical importance.

**6.0 Key Findings**

6.1 The 26 LCAs within the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area identified within the NICLA 2000 were reviewed and analysed to enable the sensitivity of each LCA and its ability to absorb further development to be ranked as high, medium and low. In doing so it was recognised that some types of landscapes have a greater ability to absorb development than others. For instance, a rolling, drumlin landscape with small field patterns will generally make new development less intrusive in the landscape compared to a flat, open landscape with large field patterns. Some areas will also be more sensitive due to their high quality or scenic landscape such as in an AONB.

6.2 This paper provides a broad strategic picture of those parts of the district that are considered to be particularly vulnerable to change. It is acknowledged that even within identified areas there may be considerable variation in the levels of vulnerability which reflects the strategic overview provided. The characteristics were scored for each LCA through an analysis of the descriptions in the NICLA 2000 reports and SPG for Wind Energy Development in Northern Ireland’s Landscapes. The suggested score values are as follows:-

**High** – where a landscape characteristic has a high or dominant presence within the LCA.

**Medium** – If it is unclear if a characteristic is dominant or not.

**Low** – where a landscape character has a low presence in the LCA or is absent.

6.3 The NICLA 2000 reports do not indicate the level of sensitivity to change for all LCAs. In some instances the clues to the ability to absorb further development may be contained under the heading ‘*Principles for Accommodating New Development’.* If no such information is found, it may be inferred that the landscape has a strong capability of accepting change and therefore a score of ‘low’ in terms of sensitivity should be recorded.

**High sensitivity** – where the landscape is very vulnerable to change and would be adversely affected by new development which would result in a significant change in landscape and visual characteristics and values.

**Medium sensitivity** – where the landscape is moderately vulnerable to change and would only be adversely affected by new development in localised areas.

**Low sensitivity** – where the landscape is not vulnerable to change and where new development would not adversely impact on the landscape and visual characteristics and values.

6.4 Taking into account the key landscape characteristics, level of scenic quality, principles for accommodating new development and sensitivity to change of each LCA (Appendix 4), a conclusion may be drawn on:-

1. The overall capacity of a landscape to absorb further development;
2. The identification of areas of countryside of special landscape quality where any development would be undesirable; and
3. The identification of areas where rural character is not under threat from excessive development pressure.

6.5 Areas identified as being vulnerable to change include the following:

* The **Garrison Lowland LCA 1** has a high scenic quality. It is located in west Fermanagh, bounded by Lough Melvin to the south and River Erne to north. It forms part of Lough Melvin Area of Scenic Quality which was identified within the NICLA 2000. Its sensitivity to change is also high as Lough Melvin is a designated ASQ and SAC. There are numerous ASSIs and Raths within the LCA. According to the SPG the overall sensitivity of this LCA for wind energy development is considered high to medium. The overall capacity of the landscape to absorb development is considered to be low.
* **Lower Lough Erne LCA 2** has a high scenic quality. It includes the northern Lough Erne, Co. Fermanagh. The interaction between the lake and land is a defining characteristic. The Cliffs of Magho contribute also to the high scenic quality of the area. There are various ASSI designations for limestone at the western end of the Cliffs of Magho. The LCA is rich in monuments and ecclesiastical sites. The overall sensitivity to change is considered high. According to the SPG the overall sensitivity of this LCA for wind energy development is considered high. The overall capacity of the landscape to absorb development is considered to be low.
* **Croagh and Garvaghy River LCA 3** which lies to the north of Lower Lough Erne has a high scenic quality. It is an isolated area of barren Pettigoe Plateau which has a remote and isolated character. The extensive moorland and blanket bog are largely intact and contribute to landscape character. The sensitivity of this LCA to change is considered high. Part of the LCA is within Derrin Mountain ASQ. There is an ASSI, SAC and Ramsar nature conservation designations. According to the SPG the overall sensitivity of this LCA for wind energy development is considered high. The overall capacity of the landscape to absorb development is considered to be low to medium.
* The **Lough Navar and Ballintempo Upland LCA 4** has a high scenic quality. It is bounded by Cliffs of Magho to the north and Ora More to the south. It lies within the highly scenic Fermanagh karst landscape. The overall sensitivity to change of the LCA is considered medium to high. Within the LCA there are several SACs, Glennasheever ASSI and much of the landscape is part of the UNESCO Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark. According to the SPG the overall sensitivity of this LCA for wind energy development is considered high to medium. The overall capacity of the landscape to absorb development is considered be low to medium.
* The **Lough MacNean Valley LCA 5** is located in south west Fermanagh, bordering County Leitrim and has a high scenic quality. It lies within the highly scenic Fermanagh karst landscape and its valley sides adjoining the lough are also considered scenic. Its overall sensitivity to change is consider medium to high. Lurgan River Wood ASSI is located within this LCA. Part of the area is in the UNESCO Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark. According to the SPG the overall sensitivity of this LCA for wind energy development is considered high. The overall capacity of the landscape to absorb development is considered to be low to medium.
* The **Knockmore Scarpland LCA 6** is located west of Enniskillen and Sillees valleys and has a high scenic quality. It is within the highly scenic Fermanagh Karst landscape with a wealth and diversity of landscape features. The landscape has a high sensitive to change. There are a number of designated ASSIs and SACs within the LCA. The southern part of the LCA is part of the UNESCO Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark. According to the SPG the overall sensitivity of this LCA for wind energy development is considered high. The overall capacity of the landscape to absorb development is considered to be low.
* **Cuilcagh and Marlbank LCA 9** is located in south west Fermanagh and adjoining Counties Leitrim and Cavan. It has a high scenic quality and is located within the open karst landscape. Cuilcagh Mountain is located within this LCA. There is a large number of earth science, ecological and cultural heritage features including Cuilcagh Mountain ASSI and Ramsar site. It is located within the UNESCO Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark. The landscape would be highly sensitive to change. According to the SPG the overall sensitivity of this LCA for wind energy development is considered high. The overall capacity of the landscape to absorb development is considered to be low.
* **Upper Lough Erne LCA 11 is** located in south Fermanagh and adjoins Co. Cavan. It has a high scenic quality. The landscape comprises of rolling low drumlins and flooded hollows. The landscape is dominated by water as the channel of the River Erne splits and joins, widens and narrows around the islands of various shapes and sizes. The natural habitats, bird life and wealth of archaeology within this LCA are vulnerable to change. Most of the lough is designated as ASSI, SPA and Ramsar. The area also has a wealth of archaeology. The sensitivity to change within this LCA is considered high. According to the SPG the overall sensitivity of this LCA for wind energy development is considered high. The overall capacity of the landscape to absorb development is considered to be low.
* **Enniskillen LCA 13** is located at the southern part of Lower Lough Erne which has a high scenic quality and lies within the Fermanagh Lakeland landscape. Enniskillen town is located within this LCA. The interaction between the lough, islands, shoreline and drumlins contribute to the scenic quality. There are a number of features within this LCA such as estates and associated woodlands, islands, and many archaeological sites. The overall sensitivity of this LCA to change is considered medium. According to the SPG the overall sensitivity of this LCA for wind energy development is considered high. The overall capacity of the landscape to absorb development is considered to be medium to high.
* The south western section of **Clogher Valley LCA 17** from Lisbellaw to Clabby lies within the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area. It has a high scenic quality. An area around Lisbellaw lies within the highly scenic Erne Lakeland landscape. The Colebrooke Estate is an ASQ. It has a rich historic heritage and landscape pattern. According to the SPG the overall sensitivity of this LCA for wind energy development is considered high. The sensitivity to change is considered medium as a strong sense of enclosure is provided by trees and hedgerow which will accommodate development. The overall capacity of the landscape to absorb development is considered to be low-medium.
* The south western part of the **South Sperrin LCA 24** lies within the Fermanagh Omagh and District Council area. It is within the Sperrin AONB designation and is considered to be of a high scenic quality. This LCA has an unspoilt character and many features that make it highly sensitive to change. According to the SPG the overall sensitivity of this LCA for wind energy development is considered high. The overall capacity of the landscape to absorb development is considered to be low.
* The eastern section of the **Bessy Bell and Gortin LCA 26** lies within the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area. It is partially within the Sperrin AONB and is of high scenic quality. Bessy Bell is an ASQ. The upland summits, steep slopes and river corridors are particularly sensitive due to their open and exposed nature. It should be noted that within this area is the Strule River Valley which was recognised in the Omagh Area Plan as an area of high landscape value and merited additional protection. According to the SPG the overall sensitivity of this LCA for wind energy development is considered high. The overall capacity of the landscape to absorb development is considered to be low.

6.6 In addition to these, all Ramsar sites and European designated sites (Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)) as identified in the Environmental Assets paper are considered to be vulnerable to change (Appendix 5, Map 3).

6.7 Areas within Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area with a medium sensitivity to change include the following:

* **Sillees Valley LCA 7** is located within Co. Fermanagh, south of Lower Lough Erne. It is a distinct and well defined low lying area with drumlins and has a moderate scenic quality. Whilst most of the LCAs landscape is broad, open and exposed to view the undulating landscape and overgrown hedgerows provide a sense of enclosure and potential screening therefore it has the potential to accommodate additional development. According to the SPG the overall sensitivity of this LCA for wind energy development is considered high to medium. The overall capacity of the landscape to absorb development is considered to be low-medium.
* **Newtownbutler and Rosslea Lowlands LCA 12** is located in Co. Fermanagh, south of Slieve Beagh. The scenic quality of this undulating landscape is quite good and is enhanced by the many small lakes, estates with woodland and remnants of parklands. Much of the landscape has a low sensitivity with its drumlins, strong field patterns and individual trees and parkland which could lend itself to appropriate scaled development. According to the SPG the overall sensitivity of this LCA for wind energy development is considered high to medium. The overall capacity of the landscape to absorb development is considered to be medium-high.
* **Lough Bradan LCA 14** which is situated on the borders of Counties Tyrone and Fermanagh, has a varied scenic quality with attractive open upland areas and lower, farmed drumlin areas. The broad convex rounded summits of the upland areas has extensive forestry and other man-made features which would lend itself to appropriate scaled development. Other areas of heather moorland and bog would be more sensitive to development given its more exposed nature. According to the SPG the overall sensitivity of this LCA for wind energy development is considered medium. The overall capacity to absorb development is considered to be medium.
* **Irvinestown Farmland LCA 15** lies to the north of Enniskillen, with Lower Lough Erne lying to the south west. The LCA is moderately scenic with a strong rural character over most of its area. This LCA offers a high degree of enclosure and potential screening and has relatively few distinctive skylines, settings, views or major natural or cultural interests which lends itself to being able to absorb additional development into the landscape. According to the SPG the overall sensitivity of this LCA for wind energy development is considered high to medium. The overall capacity to absorb development is considered to be low-medium.
* **Brougher Mountain LCA 16** lies on the borders of counties Tyrone and Fermanagh and to the north of the Clogher Valley lowlands. The south west end of this LCA which lies within the Fermanagh and Omagh council area, is highly scenic forming part of the Erne Lakeland landscape. The LCA is classified as having a medium sensitivity to change and with careful siting with the natural features, development could be absorbed into the landscape. According to the SPG the overall sensitivity of this LCA for wind energy development is considered high to medium. The overall capacity to absorb development is considered to be medium.

* **Slieve Beagh LCA 18** is situated on the borders of counties Tyrone and Fermanagh with a medium scenic quality due to its landscape condition with abandoned farms, piecemeal afforestation and peat cutting having affected its quality. This broad convex upland area is relatively sensitive. However, large areas have been planted out in forestry hence reducing its sensitivity. The presence of man-made influences such as forestry, the LCA is able to absorb additional development with careful siting into the landscape. According to the SPG the overall sensitivity of this LCA for wind energy development is considered high to medium. The overall capacity to absorb development is considered to be medium.
* **Omagh Farmlands LCA 22** is situated in Co. Tyrone at the foothills of Bessy Bell. Omagh town is located within this LCA. The scenic quality of the area is relatively good with its distinctive drumlins and river valleys (Strule, Drumragh and Camowen). A small portion of the LCA to the north lies within the highly scenic area of the Sperrin AONB. Whilst this area within the AONB is highly sensitive, other areas within the LCA have a reduced sensitivity due to a high degree of enclosure afforded by landform and vegetation. Thus, the area to the south of the AONB where there is a strong settled character and high degree of enclosure, has the ability to absorb additional development through careful siting. A precautionary approach to development should be applied to areas which lie within the flood plains of the river valleys. Within the AONB, whilst there is an ability to absorb additional development, consideration should be given to the scale, design and massing. According to the SPG the overall sensitivity of this LCA for wind energy development is considered high to medium. The overall capacity to absorb development is considered to be high-medium.
* **Beaghmore Moors and Marsh LCA 25** lies within counties Tyrone and Derry/Londonderry to the south and east of the South Sperrins. Most of this LCA lies within the Sperrin AONB of which the western half lies within the Fermanagh and Omagh Council area. It has a distinctive character and many important landscape values with irregular ridges and mounds throughout the area. The area is generally open and exposed in character with a number of sand and gravel quarries particularly on the southern edges of the LCA. Extensive conifer plantations have taken place throughout the LCA which provide opportunities for development. According to the SPG the overall sensitivity of this LCA for wind energy development is considered high. The overall capacity to absorb development is considered to be low.
* The western section of the **Carrickmore Hills 43** lies within the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area. This LCA, located on the edge of the Sperrin AONB, is an area of high scenic quality with its small loughs and views from Mullaghcarn. Although the distinctive rocky skylines are sensitive to change the lowland fringes, due to the rolling landform and tree cover, provide opportunities for further development. According to the SPG the overall sensitivity of this LCA for wind energy development is considered high to medium. The overall capacity to absorb development is medium.

6.8 Areas within Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area with a low sensitivity to change include the following;

* **Arney Lowlands LCA 8** is located in south Fermanagh bordering the Cuilcagh and Marlbank LCA. This is a broad, river valley floor distinguished by wide, flat spaces between the low hills. Its sensitivity relates primarily to the landform of low hills which could be overwhelmed by inappropriately scaled development. There is some degree of screening and enclosure offered by the hedgerows, scrub woodland and raised bogs. According to the SPG the overall sensitivity of this LCA for wind energy development is considered high to medium. The overall capacity to absorb development is considered to be high.
* **Slieve Russel, Derrylin and Kinawley LCA 10** is located in south Fermanagh adjoining Co. Cavan. It has no areas designated as scenic quality. This is a relatively open upland area with limited natural and cultural heritage interests. There are areas degraded and affected by mineral development and other intrusive influences which detract from the landscape character. Its sensitivity to change is within the medium range and with appropriate scaled development. According to the SPG the overall sensitivity of this LCA for wind energy development is considered medium. The overall capacity to absorb development is considered to be medium.
* **Fairy Water Valley LCA 21** is situated in west Tyrone is an area of relatively low scenic value with the exception being the Drumquin valley. There is a sense of remoteness within the LCA with its inaccessible waterlogged landscape in poor condition. The overall scenic quality is considered low. There are some extensive blocks of conifers on the upper slopes and stands of mixed woodland on the steep escarpment have medium sensitivity to change. Development is mainly scattered along the minor roads where sensitivity is lower in the undulating foothills to the south and south west. The open flood plain areas are sensitive to development and should be avoided. In general the LCA would be able to absorb additional development in the more sheltered and the non-exposed areas. According to the SPG the overall sensitivity of this LCA for wind energy development is considered high to medium. The overall capacity to absorb development is considered to be high to medium.
* **Camowen Valley LCA 23** is situated in Co. Tyrone, south of the Sperrin Mountains. This LCA is not particularly high in scenic quality other than a small portion to the north west that lies within the setting of the Sperrin AONB. The undulating topography has been influenced by man-made features of extensive woodland which provides good opportunities for development. However, the rocky outcrops such as those at Crocknashinnagh would be highly sensitive to development. According to the SPG the overall sensitivity of this LCA for wind energy development is considered high to medium. The overall capacity to absorb development is considered to be high.
* **Slievemore LCA 44** is situated in an upland area in Co. Tyrone between Pomeroy and Garvaghy. It is an area of low scenic quality with broad ridge tops, extensive heather moorlands and conifer plantations. Much of the landscape is relatively low-lying and not visually sensitive and as a result, it is well suited to development. According to the SPG the overall sensitivity of this LCA for wind energy development is considered medium to low. The overall ability to absorb development is considered to be high.

**7.0 Conclusion and Recommendation**

7.1 This paper reflects the current position of Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area as of November 2015.

7.2 From the key findings, it is evident that Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area has a variety of contrasting landscapes, some of which are particularly sensitive to change due to the quality of their landscape features and have therefore a low capacity to absorb new development. These include Lough Melvin, Lower and Upper Lough Erne, Lough Macnean, the higher summits of the Sperrin AONB, the Cuilcagh Mountain which lies mainly within the UNESCO Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark and the Strule River Valley. It is therefore recommended that these areas are afforded greater protection from development so that their natural environments are sustained and enhanced.

7.3 Thus, it is recommended that policy options for greater policy control should

 be explored for the following areas:-

* The shores and islands of upper and lower Lough Erne, the shores and islands of upper and lower Lough Macnean and the shores and islands of Lough Melvin – for all types of development.
* The High Sperrins in relation to high structures such as wind turbines and telecommunication masts.
* The Cuilcagh Mountain – for all types of development.
* The Strule River Valley – for all types of development.

It is also recommended that this paper should be sent to NIEA to establish whether the forthcoming Regional Landscape Character Assessment NI would raise any additional factors that would require consideration as part of the LDP process.

7.4 This Landscape Assessment forms part of the Countryside Assessment and will be taken into account when formulating the LDP. It will also form part of the **Sustainability Appraisal** and should be used to inform the **Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)**.

7.5 The appraisal of sustainability must be carried out for the Plan Strategy and Local Policies Plan respectively (Sections 8 (6) and 9 (7) of the Planning Act 2011). As the sustainability appraisal (SA) for each of these development plan documents will incorporate an assessment of environmental effects, it must also comply with the requirements of the European Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of effects of certain plans and programmes of the environment (the SEA Directive).

7.6 The purpose of SA is to promote sustainable development through integration of social, environmental and economic considerations into the preparation of plans and programmes such as local development plans. It must be carried out in conjunction with, and parallel to, the development of the LDP and integrated with the plan process and will involve an iterative process of collecting information, appraising reasonable alternatives and identifying likely significant effects on the environment.

1. See Appendix 1 for details of abbreviations used in this paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)