

Causeway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2013 – 2023 [draft]



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List of Abbreviations

AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
ASSI	Area of Special Scientific Interest
CCGHT	Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust
CBC	Coleraine Borough Council
CMS	Causeway Museum Service
DARD	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
DETI	Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment
DOE	Department of the Environment
MDC	Moyle District Council
NEELB	North Eastern Education and Library Board
NIEA	Northern Ireland Environment Agency
NITB	Northern Ireland Tourist Board
NNR	National Nature Reserve
NT	National Trust
ORNI	Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland
PPS	Planning Policy Statement
PSRNI	Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland
QUB	Queen's University Belfast
RDS	Regional Development Strategy
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SPA	Special Protected Area
SOUV	Statement of Outstanding Universal Value
SPG	Supplementary Planning Guidance
UU	University of Ulster
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UWT	Ulster Wildlife Trust
WHS	World Heritage Site
WHSO	World Heritage Site Officer

Executive summary to follow

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Setting the Scene

The Causeway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) provides recognition to the quality of Northern Ireland's Causeway Coast landscape. The AONB covers 4,200ha of land and extends along 18 miles (29km) of spectacular, rugged and dramatic coastline between Portrush and Ballycastle. Located between the Binevenagh and Antrim Coast and Glens AONBs, the Causeway Coast is one of three AONBs along Northern Ireland's Atlantic coast, and completes a network of eight AONBs throughout Northern Ireland and 46 including Wales and England.

AONB designations help to protect, conserve, promote and facilitate public access to landscapes of national importance for the people who live there, visitors and everyone who comes to enjoy their special qualities.

Despite its small size, relative to other AONBs, the Causeway Coast contains an extraordinary variety of rich landscape and seascape comprising dramatic cliffs and headlands, secluded bays and wild sweeps of sandy beach. The gentle sloping landscape of the Bush Valley provides a striking contrast to the area's wild coastal scenery. Here farming is the primary land-use and associated infrastructure integrates neatly to provide a pleasant and welcoming landscape. The area's landscape is the result of thousands of years of human interaction and management. This is evidenced by a long settlement history, rich archaeology, and strong cultural heritage. The Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site takes centre stage and represents a natural heritage resource of global importance.

A rich and fascinating variety of wildlife and biodiversity thrive on the many offshore islets and rocks, amid the cliffs and sand dunes, along the coast and within the peopled countryside. Approximately 9,000¹ people live within the AONB, largely in dispersed rural communities surrounding key villages which include Bushmills, Portballintrae, Ballintoy, Lisnagunogue and Portbradden. Bushmills, the largest settlement in the AONB, is home to the world famous Bushmills Distillery and represents a major gateway to both the AONB and Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site.

The Causeway Coast AONB provides for life's essentials, safeguards species and habitats, acts as an economic engine for the local area, and perhaps most importantly provides a sense of place and meaning as well as settings for healthy outdoor living, recreation and some of life's most joyous moments. For the adventurous the coastline affords excellent opportunities for outdoor recreation and world class visitor facilities. Those in pursuit of more relaxed exploration are treated to unparalleled opportunities for quiet enjoyment of the area's scenic beauty.

Economic and social incentives and pressures actively shape this important landscape. This Management Plan embraces change but aims to manage it in a way which conserves and transmits the values expressed by the landscape and its people to present and future generations

¹ 2011 NISRA Census Statistics

Management Context

The Causeway Coast AONB was designated in 1989 under the Nature Conservation & Amenity Lands (NI) Order 1985, laying the foundations for the present management structure. The legislation states that the Department of Environment (DoE) may formulate proposals for an AONB to:

- *Conserve or enhance the natural beauty or amenities of that area;*
- *Conserve wildlife, historic objects or natural phenomena within it;*
- *Promote its enjoyment by the public, and*
- *Provide or maintain public access to it*

This Management Plan is not a statutory document. Its aim is to conserve and enhance the landscape and seascape quality of the Causeway Coast AONB for the benefit of present and future generations. It reflects planning policies and development plans for the region and presents practical guidance for organisations and individuals who have an interest in protection of the AONB. It provides an evidence base and vision which help formulate policies for the area. It recognises and is informed by other plans and strategies which have an impact on the area, for example conservation, economic development and tourism provision.

The success of this plan relies on the readiness of local people and organisations to provide involved support and implement its recommendations. Without the commitment of local people and organisations, a sustainable future for the Causeway Coast's inhabitants and landscape are uncertain.

The first Causeway Coast AONB Management Plan, commissioned by the Environment Heritage Service (now NIEA), was published in 2003. The Plan was designed to guide the protection, management and enjoyment of special landscape qualities and set out a vision for the AONB together with 26 objectives and 123 actions to secure that vision. A review of the 2003 Plan was undertaken in 2008. Based on key findings from the review this plan aims to be a much more reader friendly document which baselines the current condition of the AONB, identifies relevant strategies and policies which impact on management, and present a clear and realistic Action Plan which identifies appropriate leaders.

This Management Plan covering 2013-2023, builds upon the 2003 plan, 2008 review and endeavours to secure and support community engagement to ensure a sustainable future for the landscape and its people.

Who Is This For?

This is a plan for everyone who lives in, visits, enjoys and uses the local area, including children and adults, businesses and community groups. It is also for:

- Organisations and funders who will help deliver the Action Plan
- Groups who seek to experience best practice in the sustainable use of natural resources and the conservation of natural and cultural values
- Public bodies which have a duty to conserve the important values of the AONB
- Councillors, Ministers and other public representatives who legislate for Northern Ireland and on whose support this plan relies.

How The Plan Was Produced?

Numerous organisations and individuals contributed to the production of this plan; a public consultation summary is available on the Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust (CCGHT) website. Throughout 2012 questionnaires were distributed at public meetings in and around the AONB and at meetings with organisations with management interests. Valuable feedback was received from a broad range of people who have both direct and indirect interests in the management of the area. A list of consultees is available in Appendix 1.

Alongside the consultation process a State of the AONB Report was produced which is available on CCGHT's website². This report gives an indication of trends in relation to the AONB's landscape and seascape, vernacular and cultural heritage, ecology and geology, environment, local communities and the economy.

The outcomes from the consultation process, alongside the State of the AONB report, feed directly into this Management Plan, which promotes the special qualities of the area, provides a long-term vision and series of management objectives for the next ten years. Two 5-year Action Plans are associated with the present Management Plan. The first covers years 2013-2017 and the second to be drafted during 2017 covers 2018-2023. The purpose of the Action Plan is to schedule specific actions and support the overall vision.

Three documents, the Causeway Coast AONB Management Plan, State of the AONB Report and the 5-year Causeway Coast AONB Action Plan provide an interlinked strategy which shapes the management activities of the Causeway Coast AONB and the management group.

² www.ccght.org/publications-library

How will this Management Plan change things?

- It provides an integrated and inclusive approach to AONB management
- It baselines the state of the AONB
- It raises awareness of key issues and challenges which must be addressed
- It provides a platform upon which to manage and monitor change
- It lists specific actions which need to be taken to ensure a sustainable future for the AONB and its people.

How should the Management Plan be used?

- To influence decision makers
- To monitor success
- To champion excellent protected area management
- To bring people together in a shared vision
- To provide mutual benefits
- To direct actions
- To promote enjoyment
- To stimulate economic growth
- To raise awareness of the AONB



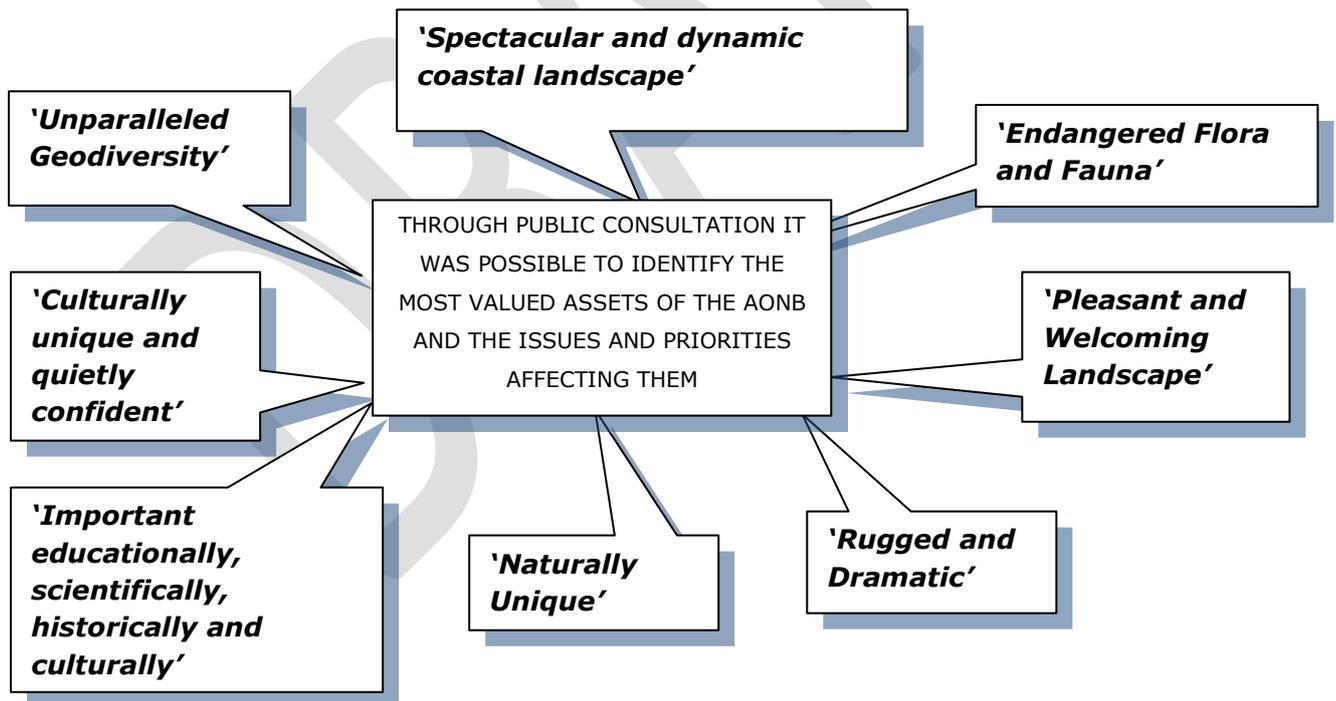
People's perceptions – A Vision for the Causeway Coast AONB

1. What kind of place is the Causeway Coast AONB:

Although the Management Plan operates within a 10-year timescale, the vision provides a compass which directs the development of the AONB over the next 30 years. The Causeway Coast AONB Management Group developed the following vision which summarises the views of those who live and work in the AONB:

"The Causeway Coast AONB will be recognised and promoted as a world class, spectacular and unspoilt landscape upon which a unique cultural history has developed. Vibrant and proud communities will inspire and implement exemplary management strategies, and welcome everyone to enjoy and learn about the area's outstanding natural and cultural heritage in a sustainable manner"

2. What people say about the Causeway Coast AONB:



3. What People Value:

- Inspiring Coastal Scenery
- Landscape Diversity
- Wild Sandy Beaches
- Rich Archaeology
- Intangible Heritage
- Opportunities for Recreation, Tourism and Quiet Reflection
- Rich Biodiversity

4. What people see as the challenges for future management of the AONB:

- Need for better protection of the AONB in regional policies to protect the environment, preserve biodiversity and conserve the natural assets of the AONB
- Significant access issues, including need for increased access and provision of appropriate access furniture
- Limited interpretation and public awareness of key heritage sites
- Dereliction of historic and architecturally important assets
- Uncertainty surrounding the introduction of National Parks in Northern Ireland
- Greater engagement with local communities and businesses.

5. What people want from this Management Plan:

Stronger policies which protect the environment and conserve the landscape values of the AONB:

"This Management Plan must provide a platform upon which to discuss better protection of the AONB with policy makers and to increase the statutory status of the plan. There is a need to engage positively with consultations regarding National Park introduction. This should include discussions about the right to roam".

Greater engagement with the local landowners, farmers and community to enhance the area's unique landscape values:

"This plan should encourage farmers, landowners and the community to support traditional landscaping techniques such as dry-stone walling. Where appropriate it should encourage habitat enhancement works such as scrub clearance, beach cleaning and litter picks. It should also support public realm enhancements which are in harmony with the natural landscape".

Increased Access and Quality Interpretation:

"Provision of increased access is a priority. Stiles, seating, bins and signage require significant updating to incorporate quality interpretation for visitors to the AONB. Development of graded walking and cycle routes as well bus routes could significantly improve connectivity with the WHS and other attractions within the AONB".

Sharing of the area's rich built and cultural heritage:

"The AONB has a unique built and cultural heritage. This plan should exploit opportunities to promote access and interpretation of historic sites. It is essential to include recent archaeological discoveries of global significance. Some important built heritage sites require sympathetic repairs and upgrades. The plan must present opportunities to work with and involve local historians in recording the natural and cultural history of the area".

A warm and homely welcome for local, national and international visitors:

"The plan should support tourism and marketing training for local businesses. Dereliction must be tackled to enhance the tourist experience. This can go hand-in-hand with assistance for local start-up businesses and indigenous enterprises".



Theme 1: The Natural Environment

1.1 Geology and Geomorphology

The outstanding landscape of the Causeway Coast AONB owes much to its geological history and many areas of the coast are designated for their unique geology³. The oldest rocks in the area date from the Jurassic Period and are displayed in small exposures at Portrush and White Park Bay. Fossils, in cretaceous white limestone (chalk), provide evidence of the animals which once inhabited ancient seas and provide a striking contrast to extensive black volcanic basalts. The different rates of erosion associated with this varied geology have created the dramatic coastal landscape seen today. The more resistant rocks remain as headlands and cliffs, while zones of weakness have been eroded to form caves, bays and beaches. The most important geological site within the AONB is undoubtedly the Giant's Causeway & Causeway Coast World Heritage Site. Created 60 million years ago during an episode of extensive volcanic activity, the world famous columns and cliffs owe their great number and regularity to the slow cooling and gradual contraction of the lava in a flooded valley.

Connections between geology and the built, industrial and cultural heritage of the area cannot be overlooked. Indeed the connections extend far beyond the boundaries of the AONB. The streets of Glasgow are cobbled with stone extracted above Carrick-a-Rede and evidence of extractive industries and associated buildings can be found within and around the AONB boundary.

In its simplest form geomorphology refers to landforms, landscapes and the processes which form them. The Causeway Coast AONB has an outstanding variety of landforms and active geomorphological processes for an area of its size. It is one of the few areas in Ireland where active landslips can be observed and are actively recorded and researched. Marine sediment and dune processes are not fully understood but continue to exert a huge influence on the landscape and seascape of the AONB. Recent studies of the subsurface geography and geology off the coast of the AONB suggest the area harbours large sediment resources, substantial geothermal potential and significant oil resources.



³ A solid geology map for the Causeway Coast AONB can be found in appendix 2

1.2 Biodiversity

The geodiversity and associated landscape and seascape of the Causeway Coast support a rich biodiversity. A fascinating variety of wildlife thrives on the many offshore islets and rocks, amid the cliffs and sand dunes, in the rivers and catchment areas and within the farmed countryside. The harsh environment of the Causeway Coast means that woodland is scarce and grassland accounts for the majority of land cover within the AONB.

The basalt and chalk cliffs support a range of communities associated with rock crevices and cliff ledges including typical maritime grasslands and cliff-top heath. Notable species on the basalt cliffs include Oysterplant, Scots Lovage, Spring Squill, Wilsons Filmy Fern, Thyme Broomrape, Hares-Foot, Clover, Common Juniper and Irish Ladies Tresses. In addition to habitat and plant diversity the cliffs are important for birds. Sheep Island ASSI and SPA is the second largest colony of breeding Cormorant in the British Isles. This coastal AONB also supports significant populations of breeding Fulmar, Black Guillemot, Razorbill, Kittiwake and Peregrine Falcon.

The sand dunes at White Park Bay and Bushfoot are characterised by a mosaic of grassland types which contribute to both the flora and fauna of the area. Multiple Orchid species have been recorded in White Park Bay and include the Frog Orchid, Pyramidal Orchid and Small White Orchid varieties.

Along the coast, caves, rock pools and intertidal beds are home to shellfish, seaweed, sea anemones, shrimp and crabs. Offshore, whales, basking sharks, seals and porpoise are common. The Skerries and Causeway marine SAC gives statutory recognition to European Priority Habitats along the coast including 'sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time', 'reefs' and 'submerged or partially submerged sea caves'. The river Bush is part of the migration pathway for Salmon and Trout on their way to and from our rivers and seas.



1.3 Farming

Above the sea the land is intensely farmed up to cliff-edge and a rich variety of wildlife thrives within the farmed countryside. Sheep and cattle farming are important alongside potato and barley production.

Numerous agri-environment schemes have been developed by DARD to encourage farmers and landowners to adopt environmentally sensitive management practices. The Environmentally Sensitive Area Scheme (ESA) operated from 1988-2006 and contributed significantly towards conserving the area's outstanding landscape qualities. The entire Causeway Coast AONB fell within the Antrim Coast, Glens & Rathlin ESA. The Northern Ireland Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS) was introduced in 1999 and encourages farmers to positively manage habitats, improve water and soil quality, enhance the landscape, protect heritage and tackle the effects of climate change. The current NICMS is funded under the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013. It aims to maintain 42% of agricultural land under the environmental enhancement agreement by 2013. DARD are currently working on a replacement scheme for NICMS. A key action in this plan ensures DARD will keep local landowners informed of relevant opportunities.

It is worth noting that conflicts have been observed between the NICMS scheme and European Single Farm Payment (SFP). In some cases it has been more economically sustainable for landowners to opt out of the available agri-environment scheme in favour of higher payments under SFP.

Environmental Designations

The number of environmental designations highlight the importance of the area's natural landscape and seascape:

Statutory Environmental Designations	
Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sheep's Island • Carrick-a-Rede • White Park Bay • Giant's Causeway & Dunseverick • Runkerry • Portballintrae • White Rocks • Ramore Head & The Skerries • Castle Point
Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Antrim Coast • The Skerries and Causeway marine SAC
National Nature Reserves (NNRs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giant's Causeway
World Heritage Site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast

Additional information about key habitats & designated sites can be found in Appendix 2.

1.4 Access & Recreation

The world famous Causeway Coastal Route (CCR) road is just one way to explore the Causeway Coast AONB. The Causeway Coast Way (CCW) is a 33 mile (53km) way-marked linear walking route from Ballycastle to Portstewart. This is one walking route in a series of way-marked trails which create a network of quality of walks throughout Northern Ireland. Outdoor Recreation NI (ORNI) is currently undertaking a review of the CCW with a view to improving access and interpretation along the route.

A series of cycle routes have been developed within the Causeway Coast AONB. These are promoted by Cycle NI and link into National Cycle Route 93. These include the Ballycastle and the Giant's Causeway to Benone Cycle Routes. The Giant's Causeway Coast Sportive offers cyclists a choice of three routes through the AONB and is fast becoming the most talked about sportive on the Irish cycling calendar.

The North Coast Sea Kayak Trail is a 70 mile (112km) nautical trail which, travelling with the flood tide, travels west to east from Magilligan Point in County Londonderry to Torr Head in County Antrim. The route recommends stops at a number of key sites within the Causeway Coast AONB.

Sailing, surfing, paddle boarding, diving and coasteering represent just a few of the other popular recreational activities in the area. There has been an explosion in the number of activity providers operating both within and around the AONB in recent years.

Translink, with support from the Rural Transport Fund operate the Causeway Rambler bus service from Coleraine to Carrick-a-Rede and return. Marketed as "a unique region with all the key ingredients for an exhilarating and fascinating trip", the service is currently restricted to the key tourist season between June and September. Nevertheless it makes an important contribution to reducing the social isolation experienced by rural residents and enables people to enjoy some of the most varied and interesting scenery in the country.

The Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust are currently leading a geodiversity audit and Action Plan for the wider Causeway Coast and Glens region. This will examine challenges and opportunities for developing access and learning opportunities at key geological sites within and around the Causeway Coast AONB.

Relative to other AONBs there is a high level of public access within the Causeway Coast. There are however significant opportunities to increase access to and from the sea. Approximately 750,000 visitors pass through the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site annually, however only a handful visit the spectacular Portcoon Cave. There is no shortage of qualified activity providers with the experience required to deliver safe access to and from the sea; however there are challenges in terms of developing economically sustainable products which both conserve and increase access to the areas outstanding landscape and seascape.

1.5 Landscape and Seascape Character Assessments

Landscape and Seascape Character Assessments are a means of describing variation in landscape and seascape character. The assessments can be as a framework for landscape and seascape management, a baseline for monitoring change and a basis for the development of plans. NIEA and the Department of the Environment's Marine Division have commissioned a Seascape Character Assessment⁴ which will consider views out to sea and back onto the land. The 2003 Management Plan for the Causeway Coast AONB divided the area into six smaller characteristic zones however these areas do not reflect any official designations. The key visual characteristics of these zones are summarised as follows:

Skerries Coast

- Elevated views to the distinctive island of the Skerries.
- Dunluce Castle is a key landmark.
- Unique distant views to Giant's Causeway, showing distinctive cliff profiles.

Bush Valley

- Bush River, flowing in a shallow, wooded gorge through Bushmills, then through open countryside and sand dunes to the coast.
- Settlements of Bushmills and Portballintrae give the area a settled and developed character.

Causeway Plateau

- The famous basaltic columns of the Giant's Causeway.
- Distinctive coastline, with numerous small rocky bays and small islands.
- Coastal heath is seen along the cliff.

Magpie Coast

- Contrasting black basalt and white chalk rock formations along the coast.
- Broad sandy beaches including White Park Bay.
- Sheep's Island dominates views out to sea.
- Evidence of former industries at the coast, including quarrying, fishing and kelp drying.

Kinbane Plateau

- Views of Rathlin Island.
- High steep basalt cliffs with no beaches.
- Inland landscape is strongly textured, due to rough grassland, dry-stone walls, bog plants, forest and gorse.

Ballycastle Valley

- Views to Ballycastle town.
- Smooth green pastures divided by dry-stone walls and gorse hedgerows.
- A relatively large number of trees mostly Pine with avenues of deciduous trees on the approach to Ballycastle.
- Views out to sea dominated by Rathlin Island and Fair Head.

⁴ Seascape Character Assessment reports are expected in Autumn 2013 and will be available from NIEA

1.6 Opportunities and Challenges

To meet the aims of AONB designation it is essential the landscape and seascape features & natural beauty of the Causeway Coast AONB are protected, enhanced and celebrated.

Unfortunately many of the qualities which underpin the natural environment of the AONB are finite and require action to ensure sustainable use and equitable sharing of benefits. Consultation with partners in the Causeway Coast AONB and engagement with the wider public has assisted with the identification of key issues and opportunities affecting the area's outstanding landscape and seascape values.

Since the publication of the first Causeway Coast AONB Management Plan in 2003 significant research has been undertaken in relation to the natural environment in Northern Ireland. This research has been delivered by a range of organisations at national, regional and local levels, and deals with issues including climate change, the marine environment and renewable energy. Together with the findings of the public consultation, this research has helped identify key issues and opportunities which have emerged in the past decade and which need to be addressed during the lifetime of this plan

1.6.1 Climate Change

The Natural Heritage Climate Change Review for Northern Ireland (NHCCR) commissioned by Department of Environment has considered the main opportunities and challenges potential climate change presents for Northern Ireland.

In terms of the natural environment the assessment advises that potential climate change may increase the vulnerability of terrestrial and marine environments, presenting risks to species, habitats and the services they provide. Some key challenges include:

- Decline in species due to declines in 'climate space' (i.e. suitable climate areas);
- Drier soils due to lower summer rainfall, leading to a loss of species and increased risk of wildfires;
- Increase in pests and diseases affecting a range of habitats;
- Reduced summer river flows and consequent impact on water quality;
- Flooding and coastal erosion due to increase in extreme weather events.

In addition to the NHCCR the National Trust commissioned a team of leading experts from Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster to investigate how the climate of Northern Ireland is likely to change over the next century and how these changes may impact on coastal sites including the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast WHS. The report suggested management and policy challenges these may present.

The detailed report entitled 'Future Coastal Scenarios for Northern Ireland' and its summary 'Shifting Shores' outline the likely changes to the Northern Ireland climate as follows:

- Warmer annual temperatures – annual increases ranging between 1.5-2.5 degrees by 2080;
- Wetter winters and drier summers – precipitation to increase by 20% in winter and decrease by 40% in summer with a corresponding 20% decrease in soil moisture by 2080;
- Sea level rise of between 85cm and 1m by 2100;
- Increased frequency of extreme storm surge events with present 1-50 years events occurring every 1-3 years by 2050.

Anticipated impacts at coastal sites over the next 25-100 years include:

- Increased coastal erosion and flooding;
- Changes to and degradation/loss of important habitats and wildlife;
- Increased land instability.

Predicted impacts of climate change require consideration of appropriate responses to ensure that the best possible approaches are developed to protect and conserve the natural environment of the Causeway Coast AONB and the wider region. There is a need to continue to increase awareness and understanding with policy makers about the impacts of climate change and the need for a cross departmental approach to address its implications for the environment. At a local level the challenge lies in developing management practices which respond effectively to the impacts of climate change.



1.6.2 Renewable and Non-Renewable Energy Development

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) has responsibility for energy regulation in Northern Ireland and its Strategic Energy Framework sets an ambitious target of 40% of the regions energy consumption to be provided by renewable sources by 2020. The Framework states that the majority of the region's renewable energy generation will be derived from wind. Proposals for wind energy development along the coast have sparked debate among key stakeholders. Proponents for renewable energy argue schemes are necessary to curb greenhouse gas emissions. Conversely, many stakeholders oppose renewable energy schemes on the basis of adverse impact on natural resources, visual amenity and landscape character. In light of recent decisions to pursue on and off-shore renewable and non-renewable energy developments along the coast of Northern Ireland, it is likely that the energy debate will have a significant impact on the AONB. Key schemes in the planning or development phase include:

- Tidal energy
- Oil extraction in the Rathlin Basin
- On-shore and off-shore wind turbines
- Geothermal Energy (and)
- Fracking

Whilst development of the renewable energy sector and associated technologies are both desirable and necessary in terms of government targets and greenhouse gases reductions, all developments must be sensitive to the landscape and seascape values of the AONB. In most cases development and installations of the technologies will not directly impact on the landscape and seascape values, however associated on-shore infrastructure could have a significant impact.

Dialogue with government and regulators is essential to ensure that policies are in place now, to minimise visual impact of all current and potential schemes. Current electricity and pipeline infrastructure, or lack thereof, will require significant investment and development to cope with future energy generation, extraction and storage. The primary aim of any development scheme must be to conserve or enhance the outstanding values of the AONBs in which they operate. Given forward planning there is no need for conflict between the economic aspirations of an energy company and the desire to respect, conserve and enhance the areas outstanding natural beauty for wider economic, social and environmental benefits.

The Northern Ireland Utility Regulator for Electricity, Gas and Water⁵ (UERGNI) is an independent non-ministerial government department set up to ensure the effective regulation of the electricity, gas and water and sewerage industries in Northern Ireland. This plan includes actions for significant engagement with the regulator.

⁵ <http://www.uregni.gov.uk/>

1.6.3 The Marine Environment

The Marine and Coastal Act (2009) includes provisions for marine planning, marine licensing, marine nature conservation, marine fisheries, the establishment of a Marine Management Organisation as well as management of migratory and freshwater fisheries and coastal access. Northern Ireland is included in the Marine Policy Statement. This includes the marine waters of the Causeway Coast AONB.

Currently passing through the Northern Ireland Assembly is the Northern Ireland Marine Act. This will provide legislation for Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) and will bring together multiple users and people interested in the ocean to make informed and coordinated decisions about how to use marine resources sustainably, balancing both current and potential future uses. The act will create a new designation of Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) to protect features of biological and geological importance. There are currently no MCZs or MSP on the Causeway Coast. The consultation document for this Act provides a comprehensive tabular guide to agencies with responsibility for Northern Ireland's Marine Area:

Responsibility for the Northern Ireland Marine Area		
Organisation	Region	Marine Function
Department of the Environment (DOE) Marine Division	Inshore Inshore & offshore	Nature Conservation: Designation and monitoring of ASSIs, SACs, SPAs and MCZs; Marine Assessment and Licensing responsibilities; Marine Policy and Legislation Developing Marine Plan
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) Fisheries Division	Inshore & offshore	Fisheries and Aquaculture policy Aquaculture licence Enforcement of fisheries legislation Administer fisheries grant schemes Oversight of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission (FCILC)
Department for Regional Development (DRD)	Inshore	Ports and Harbour policy and legislation for Northern Ireland NI Water
Department for Transport (London)		Shipping
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI)	Inshore	Tourism Energy/Renewable Energy Telecommunications
Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC)	Offshore	Energy/Renewable Energys

The Crown Estate		Management, stewardship and leasing of foreshore and seabed areas
Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFM DFM)	Inshore	Sustainable Development
Food Standards Agency (NI)	Inshore	Responsible for classification and monitoring of shellfish harvesting areas
Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)	Offshore	Designation of SACs/MCZs in the offshore region

Skerries and Causeway marine SAC

The Skerries and Causeway marine SAC was designated for the habitats: 'reefs', 'sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater all the time' and 'submerged or partial submerged sea caves' listed in Annex I of the Habitats (Habitats Directive) and the Annex II species *Phocoena phocoena* (Harbour Porpoise). The Common Seal (*Phoca vitulina*) and the Grey Seal (*Halichoerus grypus*) are additional features of this site.

The Skerries and Causeway marine SAC contains a wide variety of ground types, depths (down to 155m), tidal strength (up to 6 knots) and exposure to wave action (to a wave base 70-80m deep). This produces a complex mosaic of habitats that contain many rare and priority species. Many of the rare habitats and species present are there as a result of the warming influence of the Gulf Stream, the variation in underlying geology of the reef, the complex tidal currents and the interaction between reef and sandbank in this area. It is also an important site for marine mammals, particularly the Harbour Porpoise, *Phocoena phocoena*.

Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site

The Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site includes 120ha of sea and contains the *Girona*, a designated Historic Wreck Site safeguarded under the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973. This wreck represents a significant period in European history. On 26th October 1588, the *Girona*, a galleas of the Spanish Armada, sank off Lacada Point, some three months after sailing from La Corunna. Following the battles in the English Channel she sailed northwards up the North Sea, round the north of Scotland and then turned south for Ireland, picking up the crews of several other Armada ships before being driven on to the rocks by a severe storm. Only nine of the 1,300 men on board are believed to have survived the sinking of the *Girona*, an event commemorated in the name of the bay close to where she sank, Port Na Spaniagh.

1.6.4 Northern Ireland Ecosystems Assessment

The Northern Ireland Ecosystems Assessment (NEA) produced by the Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) is the first analysis of Northern Ireland’s natural environment in terms of the benefits it provides to society and economic prosperity. The NEA provides an assessment of the extent and condition of Northern Ireland’s habitats, an analysis of the current state of the ecosystems, looks at changes over time, examines the factors driving current changes and provides recommendations on how Northern Ireland’s land and sea can be better managed to deliver a wide range of benefits.

The Ecosystems Approach represents a new direction for landscape and habitat management. The complexities of ecosystem services and their interactions are only now becoming better understood and significant research is underway to progress this approach. Knowledge and understanding of the ecosystems approach at public and political levels needs to be more widely promoted to facilitate its incorporation into decision-making processes. Application of this ‘Ecosystems Approach’ is advocated by NIEA in the Natural Heritage Vision & Strategic Plan 2020. This Management Plan embraces the ecosystems approach, but cautions again the term’s use as a buzz word with little real meaning or value.

Some findings of the NEA are relevant to the future needs of the Causeway Coast AONB. These include:

Relevant Northern Ireland Ecosystem Assessment Findings	
Landscape Element	Information
Enclosed Farmland	Due to agricultural intensification, the NEA identifies loss of habitat and species biodiversity in enclosed farmland. Hedges and earth-bank boundaries are important for biodiversity, however many have been removed in the past, largely as a result of increased farm field sizes.
Marine	The NEA points to evidence that there is damage to marine habitats and deterioration of water quality in coastal areas. The coastal and marine environments are valuable for cultural heritage, recreation and tourism.
Coastal Margin	Coastal habitats in the NEA include sea cliffs, shingle, sand dunes, salt marsh and lagoons. These sites have a high biodiversity value with seabird populations as well as being important sites for recreation and? tourism. However the quality of these sites is variable due to pressures from development, recreation and tourism.
Semi-Natural Grassland	The NEA identifies this habitat as having undergone a major decline due to fragmentation and agricultural intensification and is now primarily used for low intensity livestock grazing. Management of grazing intensity is identified as particularly important to avoid damage to soils and plants, to maintain grassland biodiversity.

1.6.5 Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) – Causeway Coast & Glens Cluster Council Area

The Causeway Coast and Glens Council Cluster LBAP⁶ encompasses the entire Causeway Coast AONB and transcends Council boundaries. It is the first plan written to reflect the new Council structure proposed for 2015 under the Review of Public Administration. It therefore represents a significant opportunity for the various organisations in the area to work in partnership to deliver effective environmental management.

The LBAP for the Causeway Coast & Glens Cluster considers key threats affecting habitats and species and identifies actions for biodiversity and habitat protection and conservation. The major factors associated with biodiversity loss are a) habitat damage & fragmentation b) invasive species and c) pollution. Specific issues relevant to the various habitats found in the Causeway Coast AONB are summarised in table below:

Key Factors Threatening Habitats in the AONB	
Habitat Type	Factors
Coastal Habitats	Reclamation Coastal Squeeze Cutting & Grazing Erosion Invasive Species Pollution Unregulated Shore-based Shellfish collection Litter
Grassland & Farmland	Inappropriate Grazing Regime Burning Agricultural Improvement Habitat Fragmentation Abandonment Litter
Marine	Physical Disturbance Water Pollution Over Exploitation of Marine Resources Invasive Species Litter
Wetlands	Agricultural Run Off Drainage Invasive Species Litter Recreation Inappropriate Management Land-Use Change Litter

⁶ The Causeway Coast and Glens Council Cluster LBAP can be obtained at www.ccght.org/publications-library

1.6.6 Invasive species and spread of disease

The emergence of a number of diseases affecting the forests and woodland in Northern Ireland in recent years has raised serious concerns in the environment sector. In particular, the *Phytophthora ramorum* (Sudden Oak Death) disease has led to significant felling in the neighbouring Antrim Coast & Glens AONB. The arrival of the *Hymenoscyphus Pseudoalbidus* (Ash Dieback) disease in Northern Ireland poses a significant threat to the Ash population in the region. Whilst woodland cover in the Causeway Coast AONB is very low, the disease could have an adverse impact on the hedgerows and consequently the biodiversity and landscape of the AONB.

1.6.7 Tourism and Recreation

The Causeway Coast AONB is one of the most celebrated and renowned areas of Northern Ireland. It boasts Northern Ireland's only World Heritage Site and according to the National Trust's 2011 Business Plan, the area's natural beauty attracts over 1 million tourists each year and contributes at least £100 million to the regional economy. Whilst this brings potential for significant economic benefits to the area, many feel it is not realised due to the day-trip 'bus in, bus out' nature of tourism. This tendency for 'day-tripper' tourists reflects a larger issue of poor access and a focus on Ireland as a destination. The demand to develop facilities, such as quality accommodation to serve the fledgling tourism industry and tourist recreation, exerts significant pressure on the natural environment of the AONB. Sustainable tourism development lays at the heart of this plan and is outlined in greater detail in Theme 3: Sustainable Communities.

1.6.8 The Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site Management Plan and Action Plan 2013 – 2019

The Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast WHS is the most popular visitor attraction in Northern Ireland and initiatives at the WHS have a significant impact on the wider Causeway Coast AONB. The review of the WHS Management and Action Plans has coincided with the review of the Causeway Coast AONB Management Plan and thus presents an opportunity to ensure WHS and AONB initiatives complement each other. Both the AONB and WHS plans have been written in partnership with and on behalf of the Causeway Coast AONB Management Group and World Heritage Steering Groups.

Theme 2: The Historic Environment

The historic environment of Northern Ireland is a precious asset which has the potential to tell a story of 9,000 years of human habitation. Generations have made significant changes to the landscape by building dwellings, defences, workplaces, places for ritual, worship and burials. All of these features are valuable elements of our heritage and provide tangible links to our past, hold information on how our predecessors lived, and thus warrant protection.

2.1 Built, Cultural and Archaeological Heritage

The landscape of the Causeway Coast AONB reflects a long and rich history of human activity and interaction. There are significant opportunities to protect, enhance and interpret the area's built, cultural and archaeological heritage.

Whitepark Bay is believed to be one of the first human settlements in Ireland and evidence of Neolithic settlers is often exposed within the bay and surrounding area, particularly in the form of worked flints. One of the five roads from Tara, the ancient capital of Ireland, is said to terminate at Dunseverick Castle. This castle was perched at the edge of a promontory for defensive purposes, and its Irish name, *Dun Sohairce*, is said to be derived from the first chieftain who fortified the site. Between 300 and 800 AD the Causeway Coast along with the Antrim Glens, Rathlin, Islay & Kintyre in Scotland formed part of the ancient Kingdom of Dalriada.

Located on the spectacular coast road, Dunluce Castle is associated with the McQuillan and McDonnell families and is documented from the 16th Century. The 'dun' name and rock-cut souterrain suggest early Christian occupation on the rocky headland. Recent excavations, as part of a five-year archaeological research programme, have unearthed fascinating remnants of a 17th Century town and gardens. NIEA plan to develop access, interpretation and the tourism potential of the outstanding built and cultural heritage exhibited at Dunluce.

Another key landmark, Kinbane Castle, is situated on a white limestone headland between Ballycastle and Ballintoy. The remains of a three storey tower and enclosure are registered as State Care Historic Monuments and the area offers spectacular views to Rathlin Island.

Lissanduff Earthworks in Portballintrae consists of a pair of large concentric ring forts. One is clay lined and designed specifically to hold water for what is presumed to be have been water rituals. The other would have served as a fortified settlement for people and animals. The site dates to the Bronze Age (3,000BC) and has yet to be fully understood or archeologically excavated. It was at Portballintrae harbour, in May 1967, that the first of 12,000 artefacts recovered from the wreck site of the Spanish Galleass 'La Girona' came ashore. Recovered treasure included gold and silver coins, jewellery, silver plates and bronze cannon.

The Girona wreck is a designated Historic Wreck Site and represents a significant period in European history. On 26th October 1588, the Girona, a galleas of the Spanish Armada, sank off Lacada Point, some three months after sailing from La Corunna. Only nine of the 1,300 men on board survived the sinking of the Girona, an event commemorated in the name of the bay close to where she sank, Port Na Spaniagh.

Bushmills, the main village in the AONB, has a rich heritage much of which can be attributed to the MacNaghten family of the George Lanyon designed Dundarave House. The early history of the village is obscure; however records of five licensed distilleries in 1782 indicate that a significant settlement was in existence before the end of the 18th Century. By the end of the 19th Century the village contained an unusual number of watermills, no less than seven between the Salmon Leap and Woodville, with a further three along the St Columb's Rill tributary. These watermills powered an exceptional variety of industries, including corn and flax mills, a paper mill, a spade mill, a foundry and by the late 1800's a hydro-electric generating station which powered the World's first hydro-electric tramway which connected the village to the Giant's Causeway.

Bushmills contains some wonderful examples of period architecture and is fortunate to have examples of work by the famous architect Clough Williams-Ellis who designed the Old Grammar School and the Causeway School. Market Square, the modern focus point of the village was created around 1840. The village was designated as a Conservation Area by the Department of the Environment (DoE) in 1992 under the Planning (NI) Order 1972. The 'Bushmills Conservation Area' booklet produced by the DoE provides a concise overview of the area's history and architectural development.

Although over half of the AONB's listed buildings are located in Bushmills, important architectural heritage can also be found in Portballintrae, including the Old Coastguard Station built in 1874 and Seaport Lodge. The thatched cottage overlooking the harbour is the last remaining example of the style of cottage that once surrounded the Bay. Across the bay is Runkerry House which was built in the 18th century by Edward MacNaghten of Dundarave.

The historic environment is not limited to built and archaeological heritage. The Causeway Coast AONB has a rich cultural heritage – most notably the myths and folklore associated with the Giant's Causeway which has long inspired poetry, tales and music. The ancient giant, Finn MacCool (Fionn MacCumhail), is closely associated with the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site. Legend tells that Finn created the Giant's Causeway as a means of getting across the channel to face his rival the Scottish giant Benandonner.

The importance of the area in terms of the development of earth science cannot be overlooked. The rocks of the area, particularly those at Ramore Head and Skerries ASSI, were used to settle an international argument in favour of a group known as Vulcanists who believed that basalt rock once existed in a molten state. Their views were fiercely contested by a group known as Neptunists who believed the origin of all rocks was crystallisation and precipitation from a primeval ocean. The rocks at Ramore Head provided a perfect outdoor laboratory in which to settle the argument.

2.2 Industrial Heritage

Whiskey distilling in the Bushmills area can be traced back to 1494, but in 1608 a licence to make “aquavita” was granted to Sir Thomas Phillips, and this was the beginning of, reportedly, the world’s oldest distillery. The water used in the manufacture of this product has always come from St Columb’s Rill, a tributary of the River Bush. The water used for the distillation rises in peaty ground and flows over basalt rock. Bushmills is unusual in that the major processes - malt distillation, blending, maturation and bottling, are all carried on at the same site.

Chalk, or white limestone, were quarried at various places along the coast and burnt in lime kilns to reduce it to a powdery mixture, which was spread over the fields, to reduce the acidity of the soil. Seaweed was used on the soil and burnt in kilns to produce kelp, which was used in the making of soda for the linen industry and in the manufacture of iodine. In the form of dulse and carrageen it is edible and considered by some a delicacy. Kelp production was important within the World Heritage Site. Fishing supplemented farming. The most famous salmon fishery was located at Carrick-a-Rede. Lobsters and crabs were trapped along the coast, and sea trout and herring netted.

The Giant’s Causeway Tramway, the first hydro-electric powered railway line in the world opened in 1883. It covered the six miles from Portrush to the Giants Causeway, and helped establish the hitherto neglected natural wonder as one of the World’s great attractions.

Remnants of the various industrial activities are littered throughout the Causeway Coast AONB, but are poorly recorded and in many cases local residents are unaware of their existence. A great example can be found in the form of a concrete runway which extends up to the cliff edge above Portmoon. In WWII this was used to launch unmanned drones carrying dyed strips, providing target practice for anchored naval ships.

2.3 Connections between in-situ and ex-situ heritage

In many cases artefacts unearthed or discovered both on and off-shore within the AONB have been transported out of the AONB for preservation and protection in institutions in Northern Ireland and further afield. Connections between these artefacts and the AONB are often forgotten; however they provide an important link and could potentially channel tourists and researchers back to the area.

2.4 Issues & Opportunities- Historic Environment

Various initiatives have been delivered in the Causeway Coast AONB to preserve and promote the historic environment including the Bushmills Townscape Heritage Initiative, conservation work and excavations at Dunluce Castle and restoration work at Portmoon Bothy.

There is however significant progress to be made regarding the historic environment of the AONB with the following key issues identified during the public consultation exercise:

- *Loss of traditional construction practices*
- *Loss of traditional buildings*
- *Dereliction of built heritage*
- *Lack of access to traditional/historic buildings*
- *Lack of interpretation of the area and history*
- *Lack of awareness of historic environment*

2.4.1 The Economic Value of Historic Environment

Conservation of the historic environment is economically significant. A study of the value of Northern Ireland's Historic Environment, commissioned by the Department of the Environment and published in 2012 presented a number of key findings which are relevant to the Causeway Coast AONB:

- the historic environment is a major contributor to the NI economy
- it plays an important role in creating and sustaining jobs and leveraging additional investment
- its contribution to the local economy is much lower relative to neighbouring jurisdictions
- There is significant potential to develop the historic environment in NI.

2.4.2 Public, Private, Voluntary Partnerships

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency is responsible for conserving historic monuments and buildings. They offer a range of initiatives to support repair and maintenance of the built environment. NIEA Built Heritage advise other government departments, such as DARD and Planning Service - who in turn contribute to an Architectural Heritage Fund. The Association of Building Preservation Trusts and the Ulster Architectural Society aim to ensure our built heritage is conserved to the best possible standards. They work in partnership with additional funding bodies and stakeholders to maximise the conservation of historic buildings.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive, National Trust and Heritage Lottery Fund encourage the voluntary sector to get involved in conservation and presentation of the historic environment. Public consultation for this plan revealed a wealth of stakeholder-led ideas and initiatives to access, interpret, enhance and celebrate the rich historic heritage of the Causeway Coast AONB. Whilst funding opportunities are available, meaningful partnership working arrangements need to be developed between NIEA Built Heritage, the various architectural societies and local groups in the area to build upon the enthusiasm which exist.

2.4.3 Funding for Preservation and Restoration

There are numerous funding bodies which support preservation and/or restoration of our built heritage, particularly where projects present significant community access, skills development and learning opportunities. The Heritage Lottery Fund in particular has a variety of relevant schemes in the following key sectors:

- Buildings and monuments
- Industrial, maritime and transport
- Cultures and memories
- Land and natural heritage
- Museums, libraries and archives

Successful applications must emphasise long term sustainability and present a 'business plan' for operation and continued maintenance beyond initial funding. Within the Causeway Coast AONB public, private and voluntary partnerships will be essential to maximise the potential benefits from a range of funding sources.



Theme 3: Sustainable Communities

3.1 Settlements in the AONB

Bushmills, formerly known as Portcaman, developed as an industrial town on the banks of the River Bush and the River has long provided the main focal point of the village. The settlement developed with the water powered industries of the 1600's to become one of the main centres for corn milling, flax processing, spade manufacture and whiskey distilling.

The village owes much of its development to the McNaghten family of the Grade A listed Dundarave House which lies between the village and the WHS. The Mac Naghtens built many of the prominent buildings in Bushmills, including the Clock Tower and Courthouse.

Bushmills is home to the world famous Bushmills Distillery, reportedly the oldest licensed distillery in the world which attracts over 110,000 visitors per year. Bushmills is the gateway to the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site, and is also a Conservation Area, designated in 1992 in recognition of the historic built fabric of the settlement.

In 2008 Bushmills population was estimated at 1,343. Within the Bushmills and Ballylough Super Output Area (2011 Census):

- 20.55% of the population were aged under 16 years and 21.28% were aged 65 and over
- 48.12% of the usually resident population were male and 51.88% were female
- 42 years was the average (median) age of the population
- 51% of the population were in paid employment and 8% of the population were unemployed
- 55.5% of homes were owner occupied whilst 40.7% were rented

Portballintrae lies at the mouth of the Bush river valley and developed as a small fishing village. The Harbour is well protected within a small horseshoe bay and is home port to several fishing vessels, though gradually pleasure craft are replacing working boats. It was at the harbour in May 1967 that the first of 12,000 artefacts recovered from the wreck site of the Spanish Galleass came ashore. The recovered treasure included gold and silver coins, jewellery, silver plates and a bronze cannon.

Across the bay is Runkerry Headland and Runkerry House built in the 18th century by Edward MacNaghten of Dundarave. Another important historical site in Portballintrae is Lissanduff Earthworks located near the car park overlooking Bushfoot Strand. This consists of two large circular earthworks with concentric ramparts. One is clay lined and appears to have been designed specifically to hold water for what is presumed to have been water rituals. The other is a more typical lios or rath and would have served as a fortified settlement for people and animals. The site dates to the Bronze Age (3,000BC) and has yet to be fully understood or archaeologically excavated.

Classic examples of architectural heritage can still be found in the village including the Old Coastguard Station built in 1874 and Seaport Lodge. The thatched cottage overlooking the harbour is the last remaining example of a style of cottage that once surrounded the Bay.

The once small fishing settlement has experienced rapid growth since the 1970's and is now a popular tourist destination. Significant residential development, primarily holiday home provision has considerably altered the character of Portballintrae.

In 2001 the population of Portballintrae was 734; however more recent estimates in 2008 suggest a slight decline in the population in line with an overall 6% decline in the Dunluce Ward area. In 2001:

- 12% of the population were aged less than 16 years and 33.4% were aged 60 and over
- 48.9% of the population were male and 51.1% were female
- 47 years was the average (median) age of the population
- 84% of homes where owner occupied whilst 16% were rented

Ballintoy* is located between Ballycastle and the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast WHS. The name Ballintoy has two translations, one commonly refers to it as the 'Town of the North' while another translation refers to it as 'The place of the Axe'.

The limestone harbour and Parish Church are distinctive features of the village. The harbour, built from limestone blocks and surrounded on the landside by limestone cliffs was once a hub for north coast fishing, boat building and local industries. The well built lime kiln stands as a testament to the harbour's industrial past, burnt lime would have been drawn away by horse and cart to help build the numerous stone cottages and rural halls in the district.

A narrow winding road takes you down to the harbour of Ballintoy. A notable building adjacent to the harbour is 'Bendhu House' and was built, by the Cornish artist Newton Penprase, over a 40 year period from 1935. The Harbour is well sheltered from the Atlantic by a series of black basalt islands and looks out across Boheeshane Bay to Larry Bane Head, Sheep Island, Rathlin Island and Scotland.

Lisnagunogue* is located approximately 4km north-east of Bushmills on the main A2 Coast Road. The main focal point within this hamlet is the public house, whilst Dunseverick Castle, a short distance to the east is a prominent local landmark.

Dunseverick* Castle & Earthworks are Scheduled Historic Monuments. Surrounded by the ocean Dunseverick was also a key ancient site in Ireland lying at the northern end of one of the royal roads from Tara, the seat of the Kings of Ireland.

Portbradden* is a picturesque fishing village under the cliff at the end of White Park Bay. The small hamlet offers stunning views out across Whitepark Bay to Ballintoy Church and the basalt islands known as the Parks which shelter the harbour of Ballintoy. The name means 'Port of the Salmon' as it is the site of an ancient salmon fishing station and still has a working slipway for fishermen.

*Settlement specific statistics are not available for Ballintoy, Lisnagunogue, Dunseverick or Portbradden

3.2 The Economy of the AONB

Many of the settlements in the AONB, including Portballintrae, Ballintoy and Portbradden developed as fishing villages and supported industries primarily associated with the production of lime and kelp. Bushmills, on the banks of the River Bush, attributes its growth to the development of water-powered industries. These primary and traditional industrial activities have declined over time due to decline in fish stock and advances in industrial methods.

Agriculture has and continues to play a major role in shaping the Causeway Coast landscape and is an important economic activity within the AONB. Agricultural buildings are prominent in the landscape with good examples of clachans and 19th Century farm houses surrounded by barns and outbuildings.

The AONB has a thriving, but as yet, fledgling tourism industry which supports a wide range of associated businesses. The Causeway Coast AONB and the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site (WHS) are economically important for Northern Ireland as a whole. The WHS alone attracts over of 750,000 visitors a year and is the leading tourism attraction in Northern Ireland. Public consultation identified a need for greater distribution of tourism benefits to the wider Causeway Coast and Glens region. There is wide consensus that tourism tends to benefit key sites such as the Giant's Causeway, Carrick-a-Rede and the Bushmills distillery, but the area currently lacks the infrastructure to distribute benefits more widely e.g. quality accommodation and 'experience branding'. Notable initiatives in recent years which have helped raise the profile of the Causeway Coast AONB and which have contributed to its development as an attractive tourist destination include:

3.2.1 Causeway Coast & Glens NITB Signature Project

In 2004 a vision for the future of the Northern Ireland tourism industry was defined in an aspirational plan called the Strategic Framework for Action. This strategy introduced the concept of Signature Projects to align tourism investment to those developments which would act as the catalyst to create an attractive international profile for Northern Ireland. The Causeway Coast & Glens was one of five Signature Projects identified for its potential to create international attractions and deliver a world class visitor experience. Key partners worked together to develop interpretation resources at key points along the Causeway Coastal Route. New infrastructure included information panels, benches and way marking to enhance tourist offering and orientation.

3.2.2 Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre

The new Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre opened to the public in June 2012. Innovative interpretation provides a first class visitor experience which takes visitors through a journey of discovery, learning about the area's rich history, geology, biodiversity and myths and legends. Facilities at the Visitor Centre include an illuminating exhibition showcasing the myths and the science associated with the formation of the site; interactive media which display information about site management and conservation work; high quality interpretation including audio guides; Tourist Information Centre and Bureau de Change; cafe and retail facilities and shuttle bus access and park & ride facility.

3.2.3 Causeway Coastal Route (CCR) Alive Project

The CCR Alive project provides visitors with a comprehensive and innovative mobile and online guide to the North Coast. The initiative showcases interactive content of the Causeway Coastal Route featuring key sites in the Causeway Coast AONB including Dunluce Castle, the Giant's Causeway, Kinbane Castle, Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge, Ballintoy Church and Bendhu House.

3.2.4 European Charter for Sustainable Tourism

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (ECST) is a practical management tool for ensuring that tourism contributes to the balanced economic, social and environmental development of protected areas in Europe. The Causeway Coast and Glens region was awarded the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in 2011.



3.3 Opportunities and Issues – Sustainable Communities

3.3.1 Village Plans

A significant number of community groups operate in the Causeway Coast AONB. These groups help coordinate activities relating to village development, tourism, history, culture, events and festivals. The development of village plans represents a key opportunity to engage local communities with activities and initiatives which help deliver AONB management.

Current Village Plans include:

- The Bushmills Village Plan 2010-2013 developed by the Bushmills Village Forum in conjunction with Moyle District Council and Supporting Communities NI;
- The Ballintoy Village Plan facilitated through the 'Community Places Programme' and covers the period 2011-2016;
- The Portballintrae Village Plan developed in 2011 through the 'North East Region Rural Development Programme'.

The objectives of these village plans focus on:

- Increasing coordination between the Councils, agencies and community;
- Improving village environment, facilities, services and the quality of life;
- To promote understanding and enjoyment of village culture and heritage; and
- To encourage economic investment and tourism opportunities.

3.3.2 Future Tourism

Tourism is recognised as a major contributor to the region's economic competitiveness. The Tourism Area Plan (TAP) identifies a number of key opportunities and issues which need addressed if tourism in the Causeway Coast & Glens is to develop sustainably.

Working in partnership is identified as a key opportunity. There are a large number tourism focused organisations working in the area, including various local agencies and authorities. This can create confusion and duplication of resources. There is a significant need for enhanced communication and cooperation across sectors to ensure effective tourism management.

Connected with this is tourism branding. The Causeway Coast & Glens brand is recognised as a strong destination, however with a large number of organisations operating in the area, the challenge lies in developing a clear brand strategy with joint marketing and promotion.

There are also significant opportunities to build on the many successful initiatives delivered in recent years. The new visitor centre at the Giant's Causeway has a key role to play in dispersing visitors throughout the AONB and wider region. This is based on the 'hubs and spokes' approach-encouraging people to visit key attractions and towns/villages, which in turn help to disperse visitors along 'spokes'. The Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast WHS has a key role to play. There is need to engage with tourism operators and transport providers to realise the wider benefits of the AONB and WHS designations through innovation and collaboration.

The Causeway Coast & Glens Region has been awarded the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in protected areas. A Tourism Area Plan has been developed and within the Causeway Coast AONB there are significant opportunities to progress work under the Tourism Charter to promote the area as a sustainable and world class tourism experience.

3.3.3 Public Transport

Translink are responsible for providing a public transport service within and around the AONB. The Causeway Rambler bus service operates from Coleraine to Carrick-a-Rede and return but is currently restricted to the peak tourist season between June and September. Nevertheless it makes an important contribution to reducing the social isolation experienced by rural residents and enables people to enjoy some of the most varied and interesting scenery in Northern Ireland.

Translink, in partnership with the National Trust, provide a park-and-ride service to and from the Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre with the option to travel by bus to the Grand Causeway Stones. Provision of the park-ride-service has contributed significantly to increased visitor retention within Bushmills Village. With proposed interpretation and tourism developments at Dunluce there are significant opportunities to maximise benefits derived from current park-and-ride provision and scope to expand connections to other sites within and around the AONB.

At the time of writing Ulsterbus Service 252 (Antrim Coaster) operates twice daily throughout the year and connects all coastal settlements between Portstewart and Belfast, Service 172 connects coastal settlements between Portstewart and Ballycastle, whilst Service 171 takes the more direct inland route connecting Coleraine and Ballycastle. Geographically the closest railway stations are Portrush, Dhu Varren, University and Coleraine. As the terminus of the Portrush branch line from the Belfast to Derry~Londonderry line, there is significant scope to improve bus connections to and from Portrush Railway Station to sites within the AONB.

Improving sustainability, quality and frequency of public transport services is key to maintaining and sustaining a quality tourism product.

3.3.4 Seasonal Events

The north coast hosts many local, national and international sporting and cultural events such as the NW200 International Road Races, Northern Ireland International Airshow, Portrush Raft Race, Giant's Causeway Coast Sportive, Causeway Coast Surf Festival, Bushmills Salmon and Whiskey Festival, the Oul' Lamas Fair, Rathlin Maritime Festival, Atlantic Sessions Music Festival and many more...In a single May weekend the NW200 attracts over 100,000 visitors from the UK, Ireland and further afield.

Visitors require accommodation, food and various other amenities. There is significant potential to secure and disperse benefits derived from all festivals and events into the wider Causeway Coast and Glens Area. The Causeway Coastal Route can be marketed as an event or experience in itself, for those travelling to the north coast.



The Causeway Coast AONB in 2023 – Vision, Aims and Objectives

In 2023:

- Realisation of the 20 year Causeway Coast AONB vision will be well developed.
- Management of the Causeway Coast AONB will be an outstanding example of good practice in protected area management.
- The Causeway Coast AONB will have a dedicated management group sufficiently resourced to protect the outstanding landscape for the benefit of local people and visitors.
- The Causeway Coast Management Group will adapt to changing circumstances and provide strong leadership and direction for the future of the AONB.

A 30 year vision for the Causeway Coast

By 2043 the Causeway Coast AONB will be:

“Recognised and promoted as a world class, spectacular and unspoilt landscape upon which a unique cultural history has developed. Vibrant and proud communities will inspire and implement exemplary management strategies, and welcome everyone to enjoy and learn about the area’s outstanding natural and cultural heritage in a sustainable manner”

Aim and Objectives

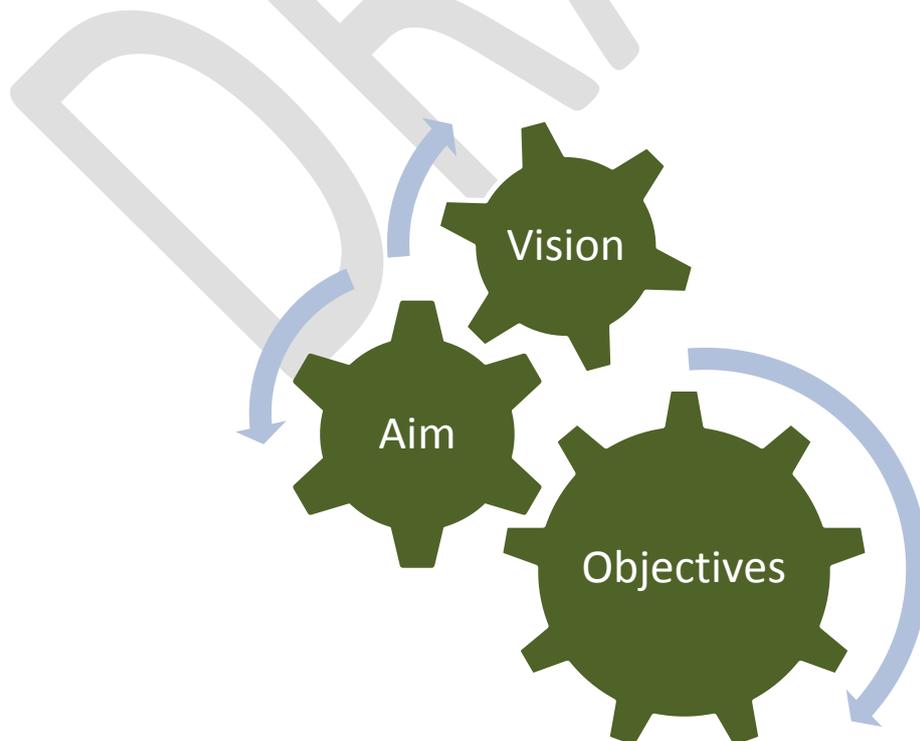
The aim and objectives of this Management Plan integrate with the vision and are informed by analysis of opportunities and issues within the AONB. Details of actions to deliver the objectives are contained in the attached five year Causeway Coast AONB Action Plan 2013 – 2017. An additional second five year Action Plan will be published in 2017 following a review of the current plan.

To help make progress towards the long-term vision within the period of this plan, the Management Group **aim** to:

"Protect, enhance and promote the Causeway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) for the benefit of the people who live there and the visitors who come to enjoy it, for present and the future generations"

The following **objectives** should ensure realisation of the management plan aims

1. Conserve and enhance the natural environment
2. Raise awareness, enjoyment and increase access to the area's exceptional biodiversity and geodiversity
3. Protect, enhance and increase access to the historic fabric of the AONB and associated cultural traditions
4. Promote vibrant and sustainable communities with a strong sense of identity and access to economic opportunities.





CAUSEWAY COAST & GLENS
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