



# **BINEVENAGH**

**AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY**

## **MANAGEMENT PLAN**

### **2010-2020**

“  
*Ah, kind friends, I'm just come here tonight to sing to all of you  
About this place, likewise my love, she lives down near the sea;  
She was born in Magilligan with its mountains bold and grand  
And the first place that I saw my love it was down upon the Strand.  
Through Blnevenagh Rock so lofty where the ravens build their nest  
I ofttimes took her for a stroll and clasped her to my breast  
And just as we're returning after walking the whole day  
Near to sweet Duncrun I pressed her hand and this to her did say,  
We will never leave Magilligan, my Mary dear and I,  
For if we leave Magilligan I'm sure we both would die...*

Eddie Butcher, The Shores of Sweet Benone, 1966

”

Cover  
Photograph by Aidan Gilfillan, Bellarena Primary School



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“My congratulations go to the Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust and to all those who participated in developing this first management plan for the Binevenagh Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is never easy to arrive at a concise statement of what it is that makes an area special to those with widely differing interests. Even harder is to agree a course of action to ensure that the area’s outstanding landscape qualities are placed foremost in the minds of those who can shape its future.

This plan is testament to the determination and abilities of those who came together to develop it and to the enthusiasm of the local community and others who contributed to it. It also speaks volumes of the special place this landscape clearly has in the hearts of those who live in or visit the area.

With the help of all those the plan identifies as key partners, I am confident I will see Binevenagh’s outstanding living landscape continue to provide inspiration and sustenance to its residents and visitors in the future.”

Edwin Poots  
Minister for the Environment



Binevenagh is a very special place and a bit of a well kept secret in terms of Northern Ireland’s landscape.

Previously known as North Derry Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), it was one of the first such designations in Northern Ireland in the mid 1960s. Its redesignation in 2006 some 40 years later as Binevenagh AONB has helped raise the profile of this very special landscape.

What makes Binevenagh unique is the range of landscape within a relatively compact area. The extensive coastline features wide sandy beaches, dune land, seaside towns and estuaries backed by a distinct cliff line and upland area.

The development of this plan, facilitated by the staff of the Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust, is a key step forward in how the many and varied interests interact with Binevenagh’s landscape. Binevenagh AONB Management Forum was

established to provide a sounding board for these interests.

The management plan and subsequent action plan is the result of an extensive year long consultation but the process is far from over at this point. These are the first steps in realising the potential sustainable management of this landscape as a place where people live, work and play. It provides us with food, acts as our playground, classroom, home and a place to engage the outdoors. Steeped in cultural and natural heritage it is different things to different people and this reflects in the plan.

This is the first time such a management plan has been developed for the area. It is a visionary document which hopes to inspire those involved in the AONB to work in partnership to deliver for the AONB and not one individual or organisation.

AONBs in Northern Ireland differ from elsewhere as there is no statutory duty to develop a management plan.

However, just because we don’t have to prepare a plan doesn’t mean that it’s not worth doing.

Perhaps this challenges us to make the plan work because we believe it is the right thing to do.

Many thanks are due to all those who have contributed to the process so far in particular the Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust and the Binevenagh AONB Management Forum.

Binevenagh AONB deserves to be looked after. I urge you to get involved regardless if you live, work or play in this landscape.

Richard Gillen  
Chairman, Binevenagh AONB  
Management Forum





Binevenagh Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is one of 9 such areas in Northern Ireland, including the Causeway Coast AONB and the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB on the north coast. It is also part of a 49 strong family of AONBs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The AONB designation recognises landscapes of national importance and helps to protect these landscapes for the people who live and work there and for visitors who come to enjoy their special qualities.

Binevenagh AONB is a landscape on the edge, a frontier, situated as it is in the North of Ireland's far northwest corner, a place literally looked up to from all sides.

Binevenagh Mountain's craggy basalt face looks north to the Atlantic, forming a strong contrast with the level polder fields beneath. Where they meet the coast to the west, the wide sweep of Magilligan Strand gives way to the subtle beauty of Lough Foyle, which is so rich in value to over wintering birds. Binevenagh's proud profile is bounded to the east by the intimate landscape of the Bann Estuary,

whilst southwards it rolls away towards the Sperrin Mountains.

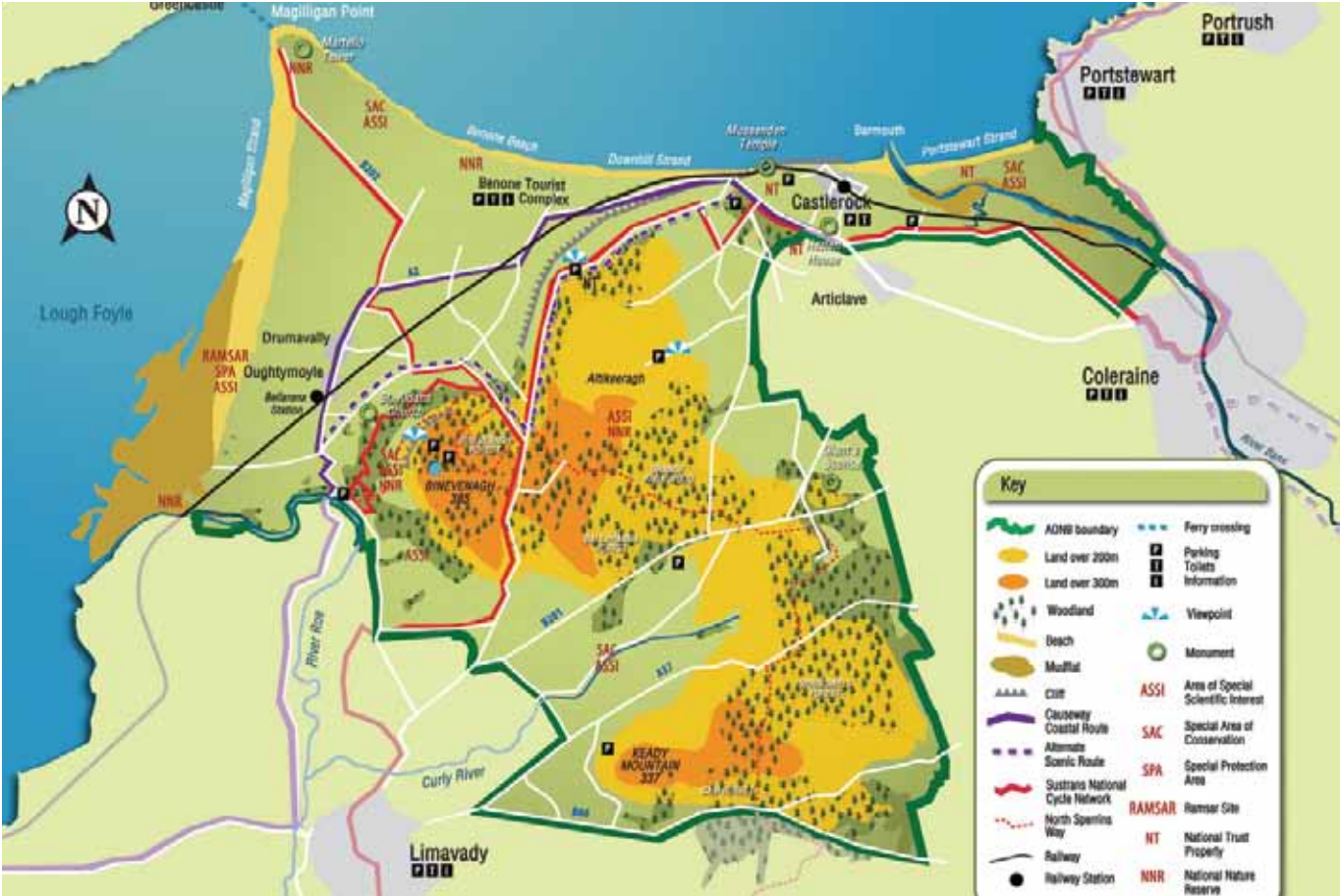
The cliff tops provide a wonderful platform from which to appreciate the physical processes and human influences that have shaped this landscape and offer one of the finest panoramic views in the country. This landscape retains relics of the many layers of human activity, from the Mesolithic settlements of the Bann Estuary, through the ancient clachans and historic sites of the Curly Valley, the heritage gardens at Downhill and Bellarena to sites of military and land surveying history at Magilligan.

Its significance as a home to important wildlife populations is reflected in the number of national and international designations that aim to protect valuable natural habitats.

The landscape results from millennia of management, as witnessed by its long history of settlement, the treasures recovered from its muddy sediments, and the burial sites and old churches left as a built legacy.

Binevenagh AONB's population is about 5,000 people, living mainly in scattered communities, surrounded by key towns that include Limavady to the west and Coleraine to the east. With a population of about 1,300, Castlerock, situated on the coast, is the largest single settlement within the AONB.

Binevenagh is a place of contrasts. For the gregarious, the coastal strip can be a busy seasonal tourist venue with plenty of opportunities for recreation. This distinguishes it from the somewhat desolate and wild feel of the uplands, or the parkland at Downhill. Binevenagh



AONB covers 16,594 hectares of land, however the designation also extends off shore which is an integral part of the AONB and thus offers the opportunity for integrated management of the whole coastal and marine ecosystem with that of the terrestrial habitats.

Above: Photograph by Adam Dallas, Hezlett Primary School  
Opposite: Photograph by Ross Canning, Ballyhackett Primary School





# MANAGEMENT CONTEXT

First designated in 1966 as the North Derry AONB, the Binevenagh AONB was re-designated and extended in 2006, under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands Order (NI) 1985, paving the way towards its present management structure.

The legislation states that the Department of Environment may formulate proposals for an AONB for:

- Conserving or enhancing the natural beauty or amenities of that area;
- Conserving wildlife, historic objects or natural phenomena within it;
- Promoting its enjoyment by the public, and
- Providing or maintaining public access to it

**This Management Plan is non-statutory. Its over-arching aim is to conserve and enhance the landscape quality of the Binevenagh AONB for the benefit of those who live there and those who visit.**

- It reflects the planning policies and guidance for development in the region.
- It provides guidance for organisations and individuals who have an interest in the protection and management of the AONB.
- It presents an evidence base and vision that can help in the formulation of planning policy for the area.

- It also recognises, and is informed by, other relevant plans and strategies that may have an impact on the area, for example for conservation, economic development and tourism provision.

Its success will depend on the willingness of the people and organisations involved to support and help implement its recommendations; without the commitment of such people and organisations; Binevenagh's future as a highly valued and sustainable landscape will be far from certain. To this end the Binevenagh Management Forum was formed in 2008 comprising a large cross-section of interested organisations and individuals.



“  
*This plan expresses our shared concerns and hopes; we are committed to realising its vision, aims and objectives.*  
”

# WHO IS IT FOR?

This is a plan for everyone who lives in, enjoys and uses the area; local people, especially schoolchildren; those people who have businesses within the plan area.

It is also for:

- Those people, who helped put this plan together by responding to the consultation, by expressing their views and by coming to the meetings and workshops.
- Those organisations and groups outside the area who are seeking good examples of the sustainable use of natural resources and the conservation of natural and cultural values
- All public bodies, as they have a statutory duty to have regard to the AONB's purposes in discharging their functions.
- The councillors, ministers and other politicians who make policy for the area, on whose support this plan relies.
- Those bodies who will manage, fund and deliver its action points.

Above: Photograph by Tara Canning, Ballyhackett Primary School  
Opposite: Photograph by Curtis Massey, Hezlett Primary School





# HOW THE PLAN WAS PRODUCED



Many organisations and individuals were contacted and consulted in the production of this plan; a consultation report is available on the Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust (CCGHT) website.

A questionnaire was distributed to many thousands of households in and around the AONB and to other groups and organisations with an interest in the AONB at the end of 2008. Meetings were arranged with local stakeholders and the general public, articles written and discussions held with a wide range of people who have direct and indirect interests in the management of the area.

Alongside the consultation process a State of the AONB Report was produced which is also available on CCGHT's website.

Above:  
Photograph by B.S.Karan, Shutterstock  
Opposite:  
Photograph by Kevin Moran,  
St Anthony's Primary School

This report gives an indication of trends in 2009 in relation to the AONB's landscape and seascape, vernacular and cultural heritage, ecology and geology, environment, local communities and economy. It also provides a set of indicators for monitoring over time.

The outcomes from the consultation process, alongside the State of the AONB report, feed into the Management Plan, which sets the special qualities of the area, a long term vision and a series of objectives over the next ten years, and giving rise to two 5 year Action Plans: 1 – 5 years and 6 – 10years. The first to start in 2010 and the second to be drafted in 2015 and commence in 2016. The purpose of the action plans is to agree a schedule to achieve these objectives and to aim towards the vision.

These three documents, the Binevenagh AONB Management Plan, the State of the AONB Report and the 5 year Binevenagh AONB Action Plan are interlinked strategic documents that shape the management activities of the Binevenagh AONB.

## How will the Management Plan change things?

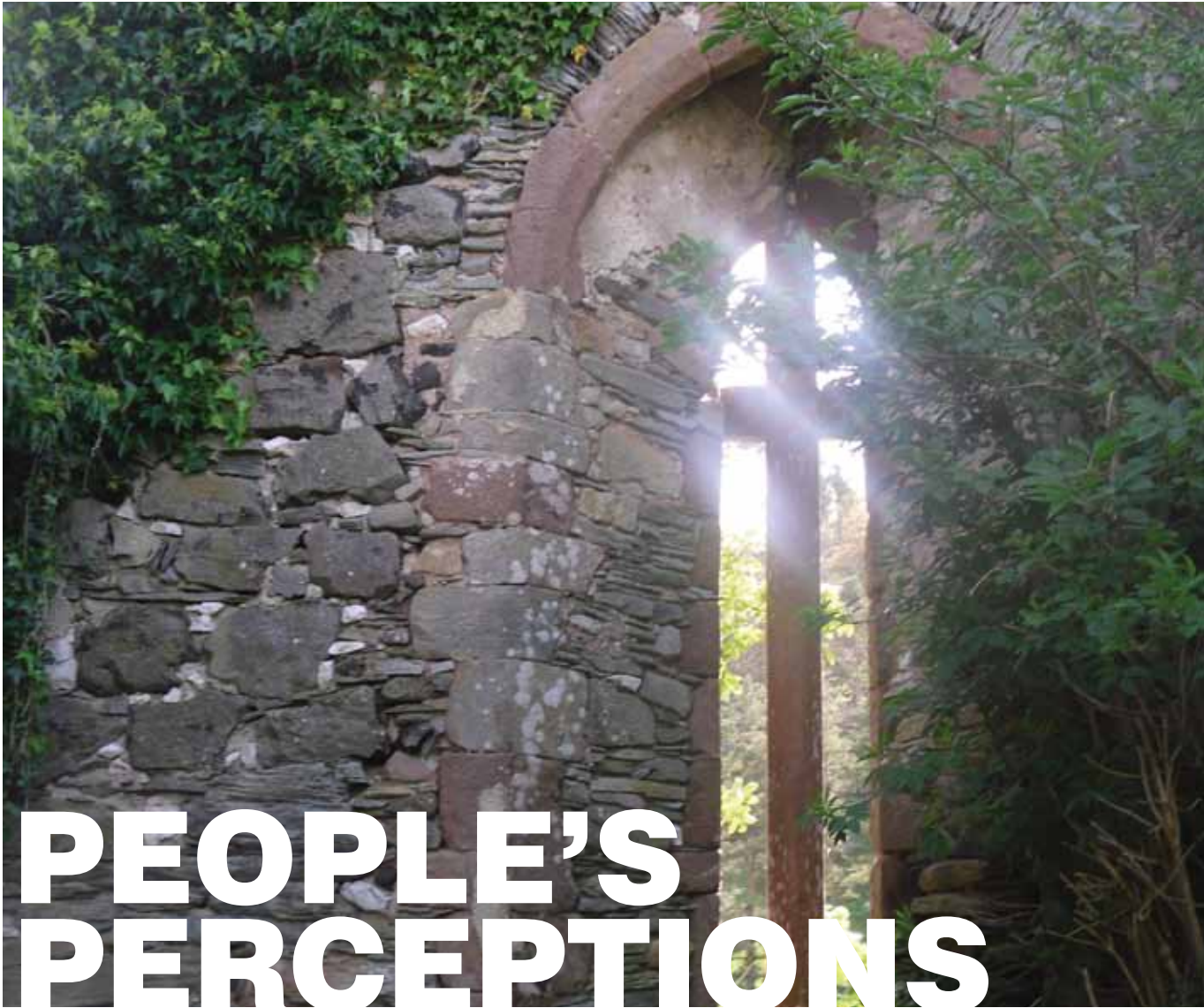
- By providing an integrated and shared approach to the AONB's conservation and its overall management
- By giving clarity about the state of the AONB and the direction that needs to be taken
- By raising awareness of the key issues and challenges that have to be addressed
- By providing a platform to manage and to monitor change
- By specifying the actions that need to be taken to ensure a sustainable future for the AONB based on its special qualities

## How will the Management Plan be used?

- To influence decision makers and users
- To monitor/measure success and highlight needs for actions where there is a risk of failing landscape/seascape high standards
- To create an exemplar for good protected areas management
- To provide information/evidence/baseline
- To bring people together in a shared vision
- To provide mutual benefits/support mutual agendas

- To set a direction and to provide a guide
- To plan for management and enjoyment
- To generate funds
- To raise awareness





# PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS

## 1. What kind of a place is Binevenagh AONB? – “A special place”

The Binevenagh Management Forum created the following statement to try and capture the essence of people’s views express through the consultation process:

“This landscape is of exceptional scenic quality and is remarkably unspoiled. Binevenagh (named after Foibhne, son of a Celtic chief) is the dominant landmark feature, its cliffs rising in abrupt contrast to the expanse of low-lying farmland and shore below. The area exhibits fine coastal landforms of estuary, beach and dunes with the Magilligan foreland forming the largest coastal accumulation feature in Ireland, whilst inland, upland areas provide walking and wildlife spotting opportunities. This land is also rich in nature conservation interest with nationally important habitats and wetlands of considerable ornithological interest.

The cliff tops provide a wonderful platform from which to appreciate the physical processes and human influences that have shaped this landscape and offer one of the finest panoramic views in the country. From the Mesolithic settlements of the Bann Estuary, through the ancient clachans and historic sites of the Curly Valley, the heritage gardens at Downhill and Bellarena to sites of military and land-surveying history at Magilligan, this landscape retains relics of the many layers of human activity.”

Above: Photograph by Liam McElhinney, St Aidan’s Primary School

## 2. What people have said about Binevenagh AONB:

“Tranquil, majestic and picturesque beauty”

“Outstanding natural scenery”

“Unique variety of flora and fauna”

“Internationally important area for migrating birds”

A KEY TASK WAS TO AGREE WHICH ASPECTS OF THE AONB WERE MOST VALUED AND THE ISSUES AND PRIORITIES MOST IMPORTANT RELATING TO THEM

“Stunning views of Foyle Basin”

“Rich in heritage”

“A microcosm of Ireland”

“A unique panorama – visually, geologically, historical and environmental”

## 3. What people value:

- Stunning, inspiring scenery, particularly the views over the coast
- Diversity of its landscape
- Superb beaches
- Historical interest
- Unexplored and unspoilt
- Tranquillity
- Opportunities for recreation and tourism
- Extensive plant and animal biodiversity

- Pressures on farming/changes to farm incomes leads to abandonment, changes in habitat, decay, loss of jobs.
- Lack of investment in small enterprises leads to fewer jobs and lack of local incomes and incentive.
- Landfill site project in the South-East of the AONB is placing pressure on tranquillity, community and landscape.
- Dominance of tourism leads to seasonal poorly paid jobs, erratic income for shops and services, empty houses out of season, breakdown in community fabric.
- House prices are high as a result of second/holiday homes. This means that local young families cannot afford them and must move out.
- Failure to invest in restoration of old buildings leads to poor maintenance, deterioration and demolition, which is a heritage and landscape loss.

- New buildings are often out of character with local landscape.
- Lack of investment in agriculture leads to a loss of key features e.g. stone walls, barns, hedgerows, and also to a loss of habitats and wildlife.
- Litter and pollution is unhealthy and unsightly.
- Habitats are threatened by unmanaged recreation and poorly managed development.
- Wind turbine development in the uplands and offshore may have a visual and environmental impact.
- Coastal erosion is a result of upstream infrastructure, flood controls and overuse in some areas.
- Sewage treatment for the prison, military camp and Benone complex.
- Threats to the uplands from reduced grazing pressure.

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

- Increased pressure from development, and a failure to understand/ recognise the importance of heritage sites, is damaging them.

Above: Photograph by Caleb Ewart, Hezlett Primary School





5. What people would like to see happening in the future

A vibrant local economy based on tourism and sustainable tourism: “...it would be an exciting place to visit with lots of employment for local people.”, “Vibrant and flourishing. Popular with tourists and have a positive feel for livelihoods”... “Buzzing, vibrant and hopefully with lots of eco-friendly tourists”.

A potential role for Castlerock to be used as a hub for the AONB: “Castlerock ... could be a buzzing seaside resort better than any along the west coast.”

The contribution of arts and crafts to the local economy: “Craft courses being held on a regular basis attract visitors and locals and help retain traditional crafts from being forgotten.”

Farming remains a key activity in which farmers are the custodians of the landscape: “Farmers are encouraged and engage with farming sensitively for wildlife.”, “Sustainable farming in a biodiversity rich landscape.”

Some concerns about over-development: “Do not allow hotels, rich housing, to spoil the view...”, “Appropriate small scale development to support tourist and local needs.”

But promoting reasoned developments respectful of built heritage: “I would hope the vernacular architecture remains and new build, where it occurs, isympathetic and appropriate to the locality, reinforcing its local distinctiveness.”

Optimising Binevenagh’s potential as a role model in piloting renewable energy: “...the farms would have the ability to generate their own electric power from gas generated by manure.”

And sustainable transport: “...more walking and cycle paths.”

Rich and diverse natural heritage: “... wildlife habitats managed to protect nature species.”, “Forests largely replaced with native woodlands.”

Which can be accessed and discovered: “Should have plenty of open space to relax and enjoy the countryside...”

The complete analysis of the consultation and engagement process is available with the final AONB Management Plan and can be downloaded from the Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust website.

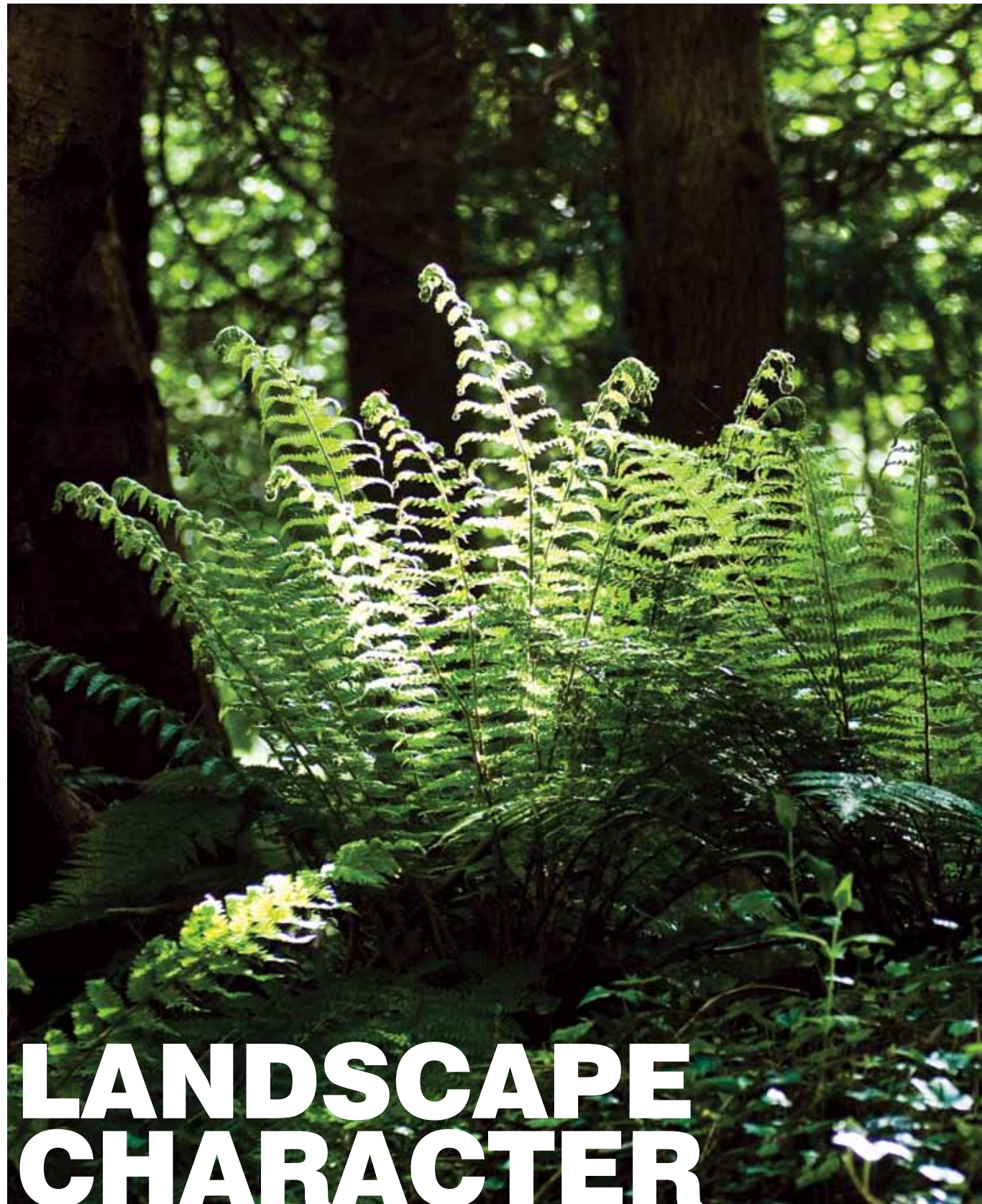


Although the management plan has a ten year horizon the vision is a twenty year one and is based on the following factors:

- Distinctive local landscapes are conserved and enhanced by those who work and manage the land, nurturing a valued and treasured countryside for future generations. Rural land managers protect natural resources and implement climate change adaptation and mitigation measures. The natural environment and settlements are the cornerstones of residents’ quality of life; where diverse wildlife abounds within sustainably managed habitats linked across the landscape, equally celebrated for its historic and cultural features.
- Vibrant local communities enjoy a good quality of life and tangible community spirit. Villages offer key facilities and services that are accessible and responsive to local needs, whilst employment, training and education opportunities are varied. Sustainable development principles are welcomed by communities, who are mutually supportive and have a strong sense of pride in their area. Local traditions and the qualities and characteristics that make it such an attractive place in which to live are highly valued.
- There exists a diverse, thriving and sustainable rural economy in which agriculture, fishing, forestry and tourism are examples of viable sectors enhancing and supporting the distinctive character of the AONB. An appropriately skilled workforce is employed within both traditional and diversified rural enterprises that are exemplars of a lively, prosperous and evolving rural economy.

Above:  
Photograph by Adam Dallas, Hezlett Primary School





# LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

## – KEY CHARACTERISTICS

Photograph by Ciara McCormack, St Anthony's Primary School

The following are the key landscape characteristics of the Binevenagh AONB, extracted from the five Landscape Character Areas that cover the wider area including the AONB. Detailed assessment of the five Landscape Character Areas: Magilligan Lowlands, Binevenagh, Coleraine Farmlands, East Binevenagh and Roe Valley, including management and development recommendations, are available on the Northern Ireland Environment Agency's (NIEA) website ([www.ni-environment.gov.uk](http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk)).

### Magilligan Lowland and Roe Estuary:

- Flat alluvial plain, dominated by the Binevenagh cliffs.
- Rugged sand dune ridges shelter Magilligan Strand and Benone Strand. Presence of species rich sand dune, fertile low lying coastal grassland. Long strands.
- Homogeneous landscape of rectangular fields subdivided by a grid of drainage ditches.
- Isolated farm buildings reached by straight, embanked tracks branching at right angles from the main road.
- Principal settlements form linear development along main road.
- Open, with occasional isolated hedgerows and groups of trees; some small shelterbelts near farm buildings.
- Geometric pattern gives landscape an artificial, engineered character.
- River Roe meanders between open, grassy embankments.
- Fields divided mainly by hedgerows around River Roe.
- Mudflats and saltmarshes of Lough Foyle.

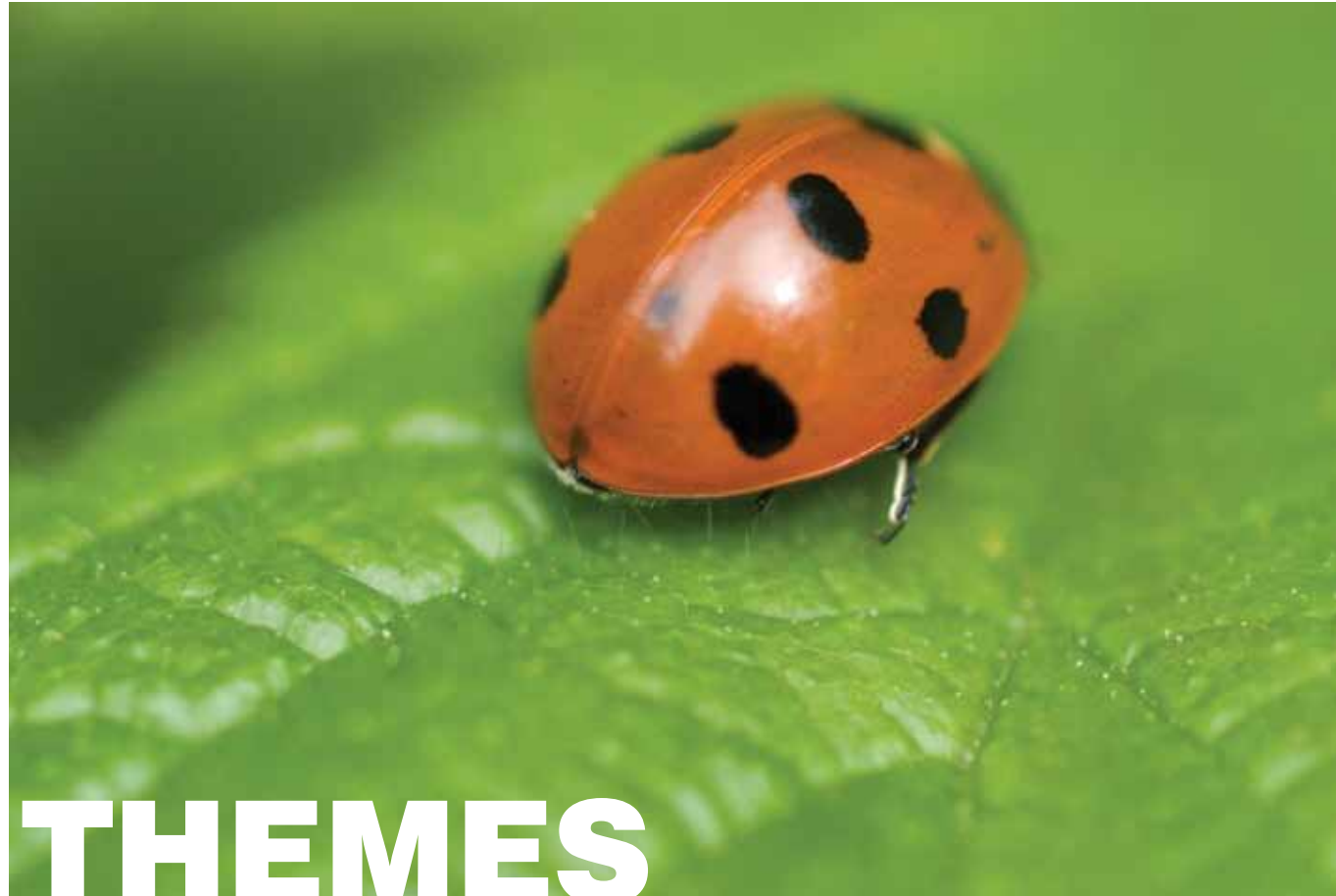
### Binevenagh upland (including Keady, Springwell and Altikeeragh):

- Sloping upland basalt plateau ending at a dramatic, cliff-like escarpment.
- Escarpment summits have a distinctive profile and form a sequence of local landmarks.
- Large-scale mosaic of upland moor, blanket bog and extensive conifer plantations.
- Open, exposed upland moors, with few native trees or field boundaries.
- Rocky outcrops and scree slopes reveal grey basalt rock.
- Slump-block cliffs.
- Patchy, textured pattern of moorland grass, heather, rushes and stunted scrubby bushes.
- Steep rock streams flow from the basalt escarpments.
- Important spawning tributaries for salmon, trout and sea trout.

### Castlerock, Downhill and Bann Estuary:

- Low rolling plateau, falling gradually from basalt uplands eastwards towards the River Bann.
- Fairly steep, narrow glens; gullies on higher land to west.
- Poor quality pastures with patches of gleyed soils, and partially overgrown with scrub and rushes. Gappy hedgerows and broken stone walls.
- Few woodlands; the largest deciduous woodlands are associated with the historic estate of Downhill.
- Dense network of straight, narrow lanes and tracks.
- Dramatic rocky coastline with indented broken cliffs of basalt at Downhill.
- Rugged sand dune ridges create a distinctive wild landscape at the mouth of the Bann.
- Rich saltmarsh and mudflat habitats in the estuary.
- Long coastal views to the Bann Estuary.
- Long strands at Castlerock, Downhill and Portstewart.





This part of the document is organised into three key themes that are critical to sustaining the AONB's distinctive character. **Land and Sea** will address the landscape and natural heritage issues and opportunities; **Historic Environment** will consider issues in relation to the areas historic and cultural heritage, threats to its integrity, and opportunities it presents; **Sustainable Communities** will discuss social and economic issues and opportunities.

These three themes are interdependent

- managing one theme may have an impact on the other two, in a positive or negative way, so it is vital that the plan is overarching. Information and issues listed under each of the themes are not exhaustive and are covered in the State of the AONB report, published alongside the management plan.

In addition there are a number of cross-cutting elements that underpin the vision, aims and objectives within the management plan. These elements will be considered explicitly or implicitly in each of the three themes.

They include:

### 1. Climate Change

Whilst we do not know in detail the implications of climate change for the AONB, we know that it could potentially significantly alter both its special qualities and its economy. Most of the objectives set out in this management plan can be linked to the challenges of climate change and how we can start to mitigate against and adapt to it. For example – the likely impacts on biodiversity, supporting changes to land and sea management, encouraging renewable energy and the sustainable development of the AONB. Preserving the seagrass and saltmarsh communities will also help to buffer against the effects of sea level rise.

### 2. Sustainable development

Sustainable development means different things to different people; for the purpose of this plan we take it to be “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland Commission 1987).

Sustainable development, in the context of this plan, is about looking after the AONB together in such a way that collectively we try to ensure a better quality of life for everyone, now and for the future. There is a need to conserve and enhance the designation of the AONB through valuing it as an

environmental resource for the region and the country as a whole.

By developing sustainable, thriving local communities and a strong economy, we have, at the heart of everything we do our need to conserve and enhance the landscape, seascape, biodiversity, cultural, built and natural heritage.

The close relationship and interdependency between the environment of the AONB, its people and the activities that take place within it, provides the potential to showcase sustainable rural development now and for generations to come. Sustainable management is the way in which we use the land and sea that shapes, conserves and enhances the distinctive character of the natural, built and cultural heritage of the AONB. It is therefore vital that future management of the AONB, through activities such as farming, fishing, forestry and recreational activities, looks at how we achieve this in a sustainable manner.

### 3. Partnerships

More than half the land of Binevenagh AONB is in private ownership. As with generations before us, people have nurtured and shaped this living, working landscape. In order to allow the AONB to evolve in a sustainable manner it is vital that the people who own or manage land and sea recognise the implications of their decisions and actions for the general well being of their fellow citizens and for the environment. No one person or organisation can achieve the objectives of this plan, although the action plan identifies a lead partner for every objective. But to enable an objective to be achieved, it will rely on a wide range of individuals and organisations coming together to act. This management plan therefore tries to bring different people and organisations together, to set out a framework for progress.

Opposite:  
Photograph by Elizabeth Wilson, Ballyhackett Primary School

### 4. Changing people's perception

The way in which people perceive Binevenagh AONB can play a major role in how the AONB is shaped and looked after. It influences everything from the level of public support for farming and conservation work, implementation of innovative projects on sustainable tourism, the number and types of visitors, new businesses and even house prices. We want people to continue to think of the AONB as being somewhere special.

However, it is important that the AONB develops in ways that do not impact on its special qualities. It is critical to identify opportunities to promote appropriate forms of recreation and tourism, innovation and learning, enterprises that use natural resources, in ways that support the AONB's special qualities and not damage them.

### 5. Equality of opportunities

This management plan sets out to be as inclusive as possible. It will seek to ensure that there is equality of opportunity for everyone to appreciate and enjoy the AONB's special qualities. We want everyone to feel welcome and believe that the AONB can offer many engaging and enjoyable experiences for all. The plan contains a number of objectives that look towards removing as many barriers as possible, from the removal of physical barriers to the lack of information and appropriate infrastructure. It also describes how we can open the AONB to support those people who wish to visit, both physically and virtually.

### Other factors

Binevenagh AONB is subject to many external influences which are relevant to its effective management. Examples of these include:

- Physical processes such as river flows and sedimentation and species migration.
- Administrative aspects such as local authority boundaries and planning strategies. The Review of Public Administration and Planning Reform will also have an impact on land use planning and responsibilities.
- Wider economic and social factors such as demographic changes, employment trends, travel to work or home working, changes in holiday patterns, spending patterns and economic depressions and upswings, as well as the influence of main settlements outside the AONB (Coleraine, Limavady and Portstewart).
- Economic pressures such as, economic climate, economic development.
- The Marine Bill will have an effect on the marine and coastal planning processes.





Photograph by Liam McElhinney, St Aidan's Primary School

### 1. Management Aims for Land and Sea:

#### In 2020:

- The unique environment, wildlife, landscape and seascape of the Binevenagh AONB are promoted and cherished by all;
- Natural habitats, wildlife, landscape and seascape features that make the area special are protected and enhanced;
- High standards of landscape and seascape conservation, restoration and enhancement in all land and sea uses, particularly agriculture, forestry, leisure and development are encouraged;
- Environmental conditions are of highest standard for the benefit of local people and visitors;
- The setting and views in and out of the AONB are conserved and enhanced.

The following gives a brief summary of the Land and Sea within the Binevenagh AONB, for more details see the State of the AONB Report.

### 2. Type of natural habitats and their distribution:

#### 2.1. Upland habitats:

Land above the 200m represents approximately half of the AONB. The main habitats include blanket bog/ heathland and woodland.

Most of the blanket bog/heathland habitats are considered by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency as priority habitats. In the past some of this habitat was lost to forestry plantations, however there is a presumption against any further afforestation of blanket bog and other priority habitats.

#### Examples of Issues:

- Forestry activity, peat cutting, over or under grazing can lead to loss of habitats
- Sitka seeding on to under-grazed upland from forestry plantations

#### Examples of Opportunities:

- Carbon sequestration potential, soils particularly peat hold up to 90% of the carbon tied up on land
- Important spawning tributaries for salmon, trout and sea trout

#### 2.2. Woodland:

The woodland comprises mostly of coniferous plantations. However the broadleaf woodlands found in the AONB, even the small pockets, are very important. Aghanloo Wood ASSI is the largest continuous blocks of Ancient Woodland in Northern Ireland. Most of the broadleaf woodlands are found at the bottom of the Binevenagh cliffs, and some along the Curly River. Some of the woodlands recorded as Ancient Woodland (inventory carried out by Woodland Trust and Northern Ireland Environment Agency) are outside the designated areas.

#### Examples of Issues:

- Forestry practices can lead to loss of broadleaf woodland, loss of biodiversity, however there is now a presumption against any further afforestation of priority habitats including broadleaf woodlands
- Forest management, particularly block felling leads to massive releases of nutrients and suspended solids into watercourses
- Lack of general public awareness of the value of Ancient Woodlands

#### Examples of Opportunities:

- Planting of appropriate new native broadleaf woodlands and restoration of ancient woodlands
- Trials of Continuous Cover forestry
- Involvement of the local people

#### 2.3. Cliff habitats:

The cliffs of Binevenagh represent an important habitat as it is a unique habitat in Northern Ireland where arctic-alpine plant species such as the purple saxifrage can be found. It is also a nesting habitat for a range of bird species including the peregrine falcon.

#### Examples of Issues:

- Climate change is a major threat to arctic / alpine plant communities
- Conflict between recreational use of cliffs and disturbing plants and nesting birds

#### Examples of Opportunities:

- There has been a newly selected Northern Ireland Priority Habitat: Inland Cliffs, Rock and Scree. This is an important and unique Habitat

#### 2.4. Lowland habitats:

The lowland area occupies approximately half of the AONB and is mainly agricultural land. This area represents one of the most productive grounds in Northern Ireland. The field boundaries are mostly composed of sheughs (ditches) and some hedges. The expanses of improved Magilligan farmland means that there is generally only a small number of different species that call it home, but it nevertheless supports some of Northern Ireland's priority species, including bird species such as the skylark and linnet. In addition this area is a very important winter feeding ground for swans and geese.

#### Examples of Issues:

- The loss of traditional field boundaries and farming practices leading to the loss of biodiversity

#### Examples of Opportunities:

- Importance of schemes such as the Northern Ireland Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS) or Management of Sensitive Site Scheme (MOSS)





- Important nursery and holding habitat for salmon, trout and sea trout

2.5. Coastal habitats:

The coastline is dominated by its wide, sandy beaches and extensive dune system which provide a natural backdrop to the coastal setting.

The dune systems at Magilligan and Portstewart are some of the finest and most complete dune systems in the whole of Ireland and provide a valuable habitat for a wide range of wildlife. The maritime cliffs at Downhill likewise host a wide range of wildlife. These two key habitats are Northern Ireland priority habitats, for which NIEA has produced specific action plans.

Estuaries also provide important habitats for many species. They are composed of the Roe Estuary and Lough Foyle on the western part of the AONB and the Bann Estuary on the eastern part of the area. These areas include Northern Ireland priority habitats such as coastal saltmarshes, coastal mudflats and sheltered muddy gravels for which NIEA has produced action plans. Lough Foyle is also one of the most important estuaries in Northern Ireland for seagrass beds *Zostera* species, and native oyster beds *Ostrea edulis*, which are both BAP habitats. Estuaries are also important habitats for wildfowl and waders. Many of these habitats and species are protected under various national and international designations.

Examples of Issues:

- Development pressure; this coastline is a dynamic system and new developments along the coastline may have an impact on the ecosystem
- Other development pressures include; visitor pressure on the sensitive ecosystem; and loss of biodiversity
- Sea level change could have a major effect on the dynamic system

- At Magilligan, Tunes Bank is a vital component of this dynamic system, and off shore developments could threaten this

- MoD may decide to dispose of their land holdings Farming practices and pollution adjacent to coastal habitats can also lead to habitat loss Recreational and visitor pressure

Examples of Opportunities:

- Integrated coastal zone management
- MoD may decide to dispose of their land holdings
- Designation of Marine Protected Areas under the proposed Marine Bill

2.6. Inland freshwater:

On the west part of the AONB the main river is the River Roe and its tributaries (including Curly River). It is especially important for its population of salmon but also for the habitats found along the banks of the rivers (including sessile oak woodland).

A system of parallel man-made sheughs (drains) run westward in lowland areas and are important as they all run into Lough Foyle.

The River Bann and its estuary offer a wide range of mudflats and saltmarshes (see above).

Manmade lakes such as the Binevenagh Lake and Downhill Lakes also contribute distinct freshwater habitats.

Examples of Issues:

- Habitat loss caused by: pollution, siltation, rapid fluctuation of flow rates due to accelerated runoff caused by field drainage and urban development, drainage works, dredging and trampling of spawning beds, alteration of profile as well as the vegetation cover of river banks, and establishment of invasive species to the detriment of native flora

- Climate change is predicted to result in drier summers which would have implications for the freshwater and wetlands habitats

Examples of Opportunities:

- Water Framework Directive
- Loughs Agency’s habitat enhancement work and other conservation and protection works related to freshwater and marine fisheries in and around Lough Foyle
- Important spawning tributaries and nursery habitat for salmon, trout and sea trout, bolstering the angling tourism resource of the area

2.7 Marine habitats:

These mostly consist of sand and mud habitats in the estuaries, seagrass, native oyster beds (*Ostrea edulis*) and common mussel beds (*Mytilus edulis*) in Lough Foyle. Lough Foyle and Bann Estuary coastal habitats are extremely important for migrating wildfowl and waders.

The marine habitats of the north coast are important nursery sites for fish.

The Joint Irish Bathymetric Survey was undertaken on North Coast, which provided excellent data on the underwater topography of the North coast with indications of seabed habitats.

There is no comprehensive seabed survey in Lough Foyle. Although work has been carried out by the Loughs Agency for example; mapping shellfish activities.

Some of the habitats are classified as Northern Ireland Priority Habitats.

It must be remembered that marine and terrestrial habitats are intrinsically linked, which is why an ecosystem approach is required.

Examples of Issues:

- Development along the coast and off-shore can lead to habitat fragmentation, habitat loss and pollution



Photograph by Clare Doherty, Ballyhackett Primary School





Photograph by Grainne Cooke, St Aidan's Primary School

- Commercial mussel farming should be managed not to impact on existing seagrass or native oyster *Ostrea edulis* beds

Examples of Opportunities:

- A full seabed survey would highlight marine sites of importance, including nature conservation, sustainable aquaculture and maritime archaeology
- Opportunities exist to work with the local fishermen, Loughs Agency and marine stakeholders to improve the management and conservation of the marine area in Lough Foyle

3. Species (terrestrial and marine):

Many species of interest are present in the Binevenagh AONB, some designated under the Northern Ireland Priority Species. These include:

- The European otter, European eel and Atlantic salmon in rivers and coastal areas;
- Coastal and estuarine species such as the pale-bellied brent goose, redshank, curlew, marsh helleborine and seaside centaury
- Farmland bird species such as skylark, reed bunting, song thrush, linnet, twite and lapwing
- Cliffs species such as the peregrine falcon and the purple saxifrage
- Upland species such as the red grouse, skylark
- A number of terrestrial invertebrate species especially in the coastal habitats of Benone Beach, Ballymaclary Dunes and Portsewart Strand, such as the scarce crimson and gold moth and the mining bee *Colletes floralis*.
- Purple saxifrage is one of Northern Ireland's rarest plants, confined entirely to the high mountain cliffs of Binevenagh, where it grows with two

other rare arctic-alpines; mountain avens and moss campion.

The only species of reptile native to Northern Ireland, the common lizard can be found in the dune systems of Binevenagh AONB.

The native oysters found in the Foyle are amongst the best in Europe. Cetaceans such as harbour porpoise can also be seen along the coastline. The second largest fish in the sea, the basking shark is also a regular summer visitor to these waters. Offshore, Tope (a medium sized shark) are a summer visitor.

Examples of Issues:

Habitat loss and fragmentation, pollution, invasive species, farming practices, development and visitor pressure can lead to loss of species

- Lack of awareness of what is present.

Examples of Opportunities:

- Ecotourism, with WiSe approved boat trips to experience the marine wildlife
- A marine reserve in Lough Foyle would benefit species such as the native oyster. This species already supports an important community of local fishermen

4. Earth Science (Geology) and Natural Heritage Designations

There are seven Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) covering sand dune habitats, estuaries, cliffs, ancient woodland, peatland and rivers.

There are five National Nature Reserves (NNR) covering dune systems, peatland, cliffs and saltmarshes and mudflats. The Binevenagh AONB, relative to its size, features one of the highest and diverse numbers of National Nature Reserves. The Umbra is managed by the Ulster Wildlife Trust as a Nature Reserve and forms the eastern part of the Magilligan sand dune system. Some of the NNR's do not have a management plan in place,

and some of them are not open to the public. Some of the sites are in private ownership.

In addition there are four Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) covering; sand dunes, cliffs, intertidal areas and rivers.

Lough Foyle Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar site is designated for its population of wildfowl and waders of international importance.

Tircreven Burn has Mesozoic and Palaeontological significance, including abundant reworked Jurassic fossils, especially vertebrate ones.

Examples of both Issues and Opportunities:

- Knowledge of condition of designated sites, management of the sites, public access to the sites, awareness of value, and partnership work
- Need for schemes such as Management of Sensitive Site scheme (MOSS) to assist private landowners

5. Water

The Water Framework Directive is implemented through river basin planning, which takes an integrated approach to the protection, improvement and sustainable use of the water environment, from river source to sea. The Binevenagh AONB is situated mainly between two river basins, the North Western River Basin on the western part and Neagh

Bann River Basin east of the upland area. Part of Portstewart Strand lies within the North Eastern River Basin.

River Basin Management Plans have been produced for each of the basins by NIEA. It applies to groundwater (underground water) and to all surface water bodies, including rivers, lakes, transitional and coastal waters out to one nautical mile, as well as wetlands which are directly associated with ground or surface water.





The River Basin Management Plans will be divided into smaller catchment areas called Local Management Areas, for which local delivery plans will be developed and implemented over time.

An interactive map on river basin management is available on NIEA's website: (<http://maps.ehsni.gov.uk/wmuviewer/>).

The Blue Flag has become the definitive international measure of beaches since it began back in 1985. It is a highly effective monitoring system because it measures everything for accessibility for disabled visitors through to the amount of bins provided and litter left on the beach. Portstewart Strand and Benone Beach both have the Blue Flag Beach label. Benone was the first beach in Northern Ireland to achieve this award and has held it since 1990.

Examples of Issues:

- Risk of pollution
- Lack of management of beaches outside Blue Flag criteria

Examples of Opportunities:

- Good coordinated management, and the involvement of various stakeholders

6. Other environmental factors

6.1. Air quality

Air quality is assessed at Borough level with a focus on urban areas. There are monitoring stations in Ballymoney, Londonderry and Letterkenny. Currently all sites are above the relevant minimum standard for air quality.

Example of both Issues and Opportunities:

- No monitoring within the AONB
- Quality is assumed to be good in the AONB
- Potential for tourism-related air quality issues

6.2. Noise

Noise is not monitored in the AONB. Noise is monitored on flight paths for Belfast International Airport and George Best Belfast City Airport but not for the City of Derry Airport.

Examples of Issues:

Impact of flight path over Binevenagh AONB from the City of Derry Airport  
Impact of target practice at military base  
Noise is not monitored in the AONB

Examples of Opportunities:

- Monitoring within the AONB

6.3. Renewable Energy

An important response to climate change is the move towards renewable energy sources. There is a potential conflict between the need for sustainable environmental management and the enhancement of landscape quality.

The Rio Earth Summit in 1992 promoted the conservation of the ecosystem as a public good, independent of their utility as a resource.

Examples of Issues:

- Biomass cultivation could be an issue, however most farms in the AONB are too small to grow a viable area, unless they work co-operatively
- Wind farms are an issue that the AONB is likely to face in the foreseeable future. Currently the issue in relation to turbines is along the AONB boundary and out to sea
- Hydro power schemes often conflict with the demands of conservation of fish
- Any consideration of small-scale site specific options will need to be weighed against the landscape value for which the AONB was designated
- One-off farm / private wind turbines

Examples of Opportunities:

- Any consideration of small-scale site specific options will need to be weighed against the landscape value for which the AONB was designated
- One-off farm / private wind turbines

6.4. Major developments

Major developments may have an impact on landscape quality, scenic views, biodiversity, and tranquillity values.

Examples of Issues:

- Pressure from major developments on AONB's special qualities
- Landfill sites
- Accelerated runoff to streams and rivers due to impervious nature of ground cover – tarmac, metal, concrete – and resultant alteration of the level of the water table, rapid fluctuations of flows in watercourses, increase in water temperature, etc
- Sewage works

Examples of Opportunities:

- Working with the developers from the out-set to ensure minimal impact and to develop mitigation measures and enhancement opportunities
- Encourage Sustainable Drainage Schemes (SuDS) for all but the smallest scale developments, (industrial sites, commercial centres, roads, car parks etc)



Photograph by Kevin Moran, St Anthony's Primary School



7. Management Objectives for Land and Sea

In order to fulfil the aims for Land and Sea a series of objectives and proposed actions have been developed. Please refer to the Action Plan for details on delivering these.

Objective 1:  
Ensure that opportunities are offered to all to learn about the special environment of the AONB:

- 1.1.1 Develop an environmental information point for the AONB
- 1.1.2 Coordinated series of environmental events
- 1.1.3 Carry out an audit of awareness raising materials of the natural heritage
- 1.1.4 Make the links to, and where possible integrate actions into the formal education system
- 1.1.5 Develop a marine awareness programme and guidance materials
- 1.1.6 Implement seabed survey programme of Lough Foyle and link with previous seabed surveys
- 1.1.7 Produce an AONB wide interpretation guide for designated sites of interest
- 1.1.8 Maximise appropriate access opportunities for all to engage with sites of interest

Objective 2:  
Ensure good protection of the natural habitats and species of the AONB especially priority habitats and species:

- 1.2.1 Create and maintain a central GIS database covering all Themes; Land and Sea, Historic Environment, and Sustainable Communities
- 1.2.2 Encourage the development and management of native woodlands through the development of guidelines and financial assistance

- 1.2.3 Encourage farming practices that conserve and enhance the biodiversity within the AONB
- 1.2.4 Promote the importance of land and sea priority species and habitats
- 1.2.5 Establish pilot projects to conserve and enhance the biodiversity of the AONB
- 1.2.6 Create habitat corridors
- 1.2.7 Protect the unique geology and geomorphology of the AONB
- 1.2.8 Develop a volunteering programme for the AONB

Objective 3:  
Ensure that national and international designated sites are in good condition, well managed and protected:

- 1.3.1 Provide information and advice to facilitate appropriate management of Areas of Special Scientific Areas (ASSI) and Natura 2000 sites
- 1.3.2 Identify terrestrial habitats and species which need enhanced protection and designation
- 1.3.3 Promote the creation of a marine reserve (fully closed marine area) in Lough Foyle
- 1.3.4 Implement and review management plans for each NNR
- 1.3.5 Identify buffer zones around designated sites

Objective 4: Ensure that wider environmental conditions are of the highest standard:

- 1.4.1 Support environmental quality monitoring and implementation
- 1.4.2 Investigate opportunities to prepare for the potential effects of climate change

Objective 5: Ensure that the character of the AONB is protected:

- 1.5.1 Develop a single Landscape Character Assessment for Binevenagh AONB
- 1.5.2 Develop a Seascape Character Assessment
- 1.5.3 Raise awareness of the needs of the AONB at a senior government level

Objective 4: Ensure that wider environmental conditions are of the highest standard:

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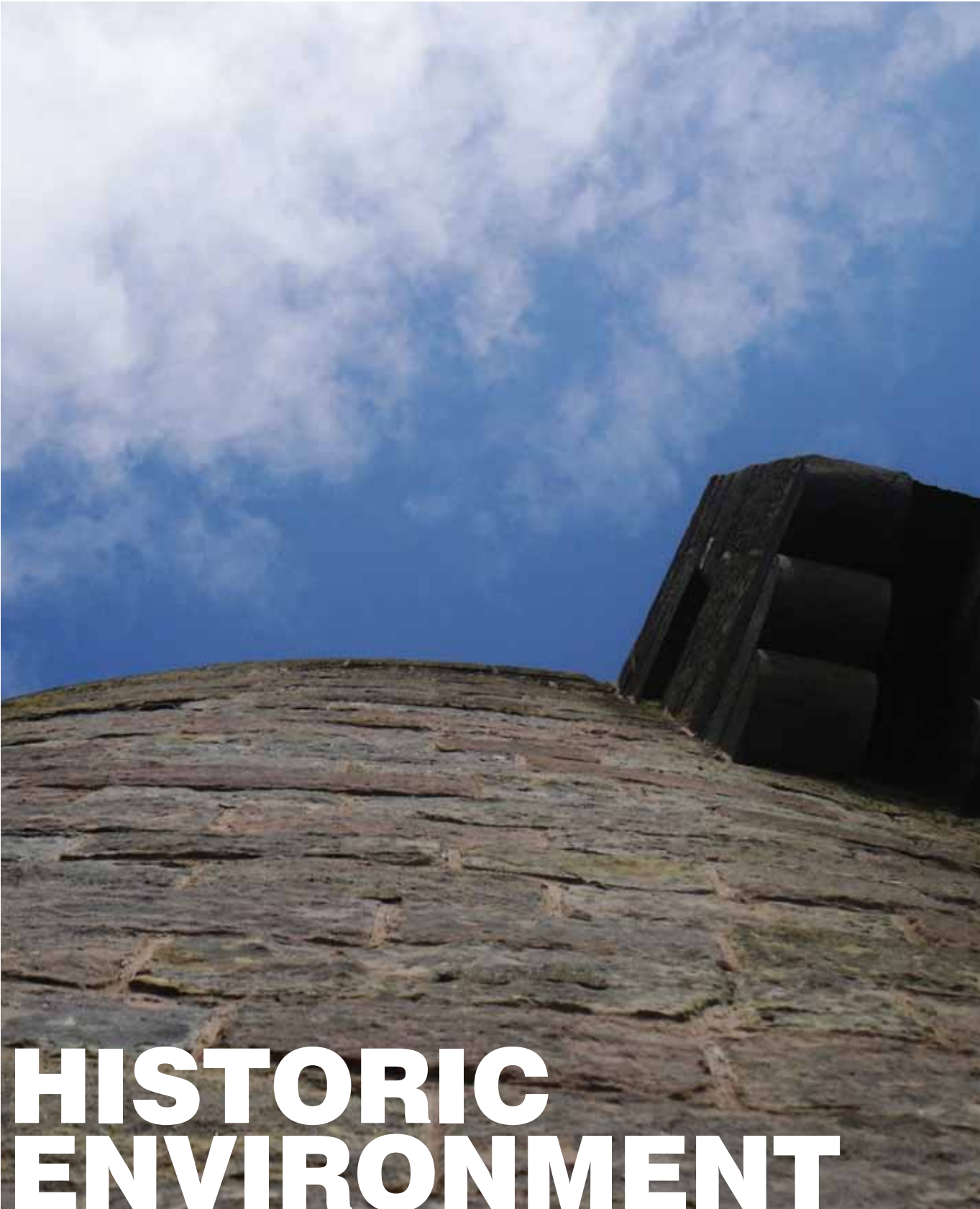
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Photograph by Leah Gilfillan, Bellarena Primary School





# HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

Photograph by James Gaile, St Aidan's Primary School

## 1. Management Aims for the Historic Environment

### In 2020:

- Awareness by local people and visitors of the value of the historic environment, maritime and cultural heritage will be increased;
- The historic fabric of the Binevenagh AONB and the special character of the villages will be preserved and enhanced;
- Historic monuments and sites, will be protected, enhanced and promoted;
- New developments will respect the unique landscape and heritage of the AONB;
- Local people and visitors will share and celebrate their cultural heritage.

The following gives a brief summary of the Historic Environment within the Binevenagh AONB. For more details see the State of the AONB Report.

## 2. History:

The landscape of Binevenagh AONB reflects a long and rich history of human activity from prehistoric occupation sites to settlements and ecclesiastical remains dating from the early Christian period to more recent times with the Plantation Period (17th century) and the rise of estates (Bellarena House, Drenagh House, Fruithill House), the construction of the railway from Coleraine to Londonderry in the 19th century, and World War II defence heritage buildings.

There are many traditional practices unique to the area especially farming in lowlands, as well as in quarrying, peat cutting and forestry.

The Bishop of Derry (1768 – 1803), Frederick Hervey, had a significant impact in this area. He built Mussenden Temple, as a summer library for his young cousin Frideswide Mussenden. Occupying a precarious cliff top site, the Mussenden Temple was modelled on the Temple of Vesta at Tivoli in Italy and an inscription inside reads “Tis pleasant safety to behold from shore the rolling ship and hear the tempest roar”. Other interesting buildings built by Bishop Hervey include both the Bishops and Lions Gates. All of these buildings are now owned by the National Trust. Bishop Hervey also commissioned a number of famine relief projects including the Bishops Road which today provides a spectacular scenic route that runs across Binevenagh plateau, with splendid views of the Scottish coast and Donegal.

The railway line was developed in 1845. Only two of the four original stations within the AONB are still in use, at Castlerock and Bellarena, with Downhill and Magilligan closed. Downhill tunnel, one of the longest in Ireland, was blasted in 1846 (the “Great Blast”).

The first large-scale Ordnance Survey measurements and mapping took place partly within the Binevenagh AONB (two of the base towers and a benchmark are situated in the AONB).

### Examples of Issues:

- Lack of dedicated point of information on the history of the area
- Loss of traditional practices

### Examples of Opportunities:

- Rich and diverse history
- Creation of a dedicated point of information
- Training in traditional skills

## 3. Maritime heritage

The coastline of the Binevenagh AONB has a range of maritime sites, from fishing stations, landing places and shell middens to coastal defence sites such as the Martello tower or World War II pill boxes. Castlerock has been a popular maritime resort since the 19th Century.

The Magilligan sand dune system was once the largest and most profitable commercial rabbit warrens in Ireland producing fur and meat.

Off shore there are a large number of ship wreck sites, with seven wrecks or strandings on Tunes Bank alone. There are at least 25 shipwrecks and strandings recorded as occurring at the Barmouth. New sites are discovered regularly and entered into the Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record. The area has a rich tradition in fishing practises and traditional boat usage.

### Examples of Issues:

- A loss of connection to the rich maritime culture
- The impacts of climate change and sea level rise is putting many maritime sites under threat. Especially at risk are sites in the dune systems

### Examples of Opportunities:

- It is important that the maritime culture of the area is recorded and celebrated
- Provision of interpretation of maritime heritage



There are a number of sites, monuments and features of archaeological interest recorded in the Binevenagh AONB. The Grangemore sand dune system has produced worked prehistoric flint, pottery and burnt stone and is currently dated the earliest such sand dune occupation in Ireland. Other sites of interest include Castlerock and Ballymulholland.

### Examples of Issues:

- Lack of awareness of the historic environment
- Threats from farming Limited awareness of rich archaeological features

### Examples of Opportunities:

- Raise awareness of rich archaeological features
- Agri-environment agreements to protect and manage archaeological monuments
- Provide interpretation of local archaeology

Of the 152 sites noted above, 24 sites are scheduled monuments and, as such, are protected under the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995. One monument, the Martello Tower at Magilligan, is in state care.

Although Martello Towers are found throughout the world, the Tower at Magilligan is the only one located in Northern Ireland. It was built in 1812 and forms part of a chain of towers built between 1804 and 1812 by the British authorities to defend against possible invasion from Napoleonic forces from France. The Magilligan Tower forms one of a pair with the other on the opposite

### Examples of Issues:

- The monument is not normally open to the public. However, the monument proved very popular when opened as part of the NIEA's "Living History" series of free events in August 2008 and 2009
- Climate change in the form of sea level rising poses a threat to the Martello Tower

### Examples of Opportunities:

- NIEA are considering opening the monument on a more regular basis, but provision of lighting within the Tower, health and safety issues and budgetary constraints will have to be addressed first

A total of 24 monuments have been scheduled for protection within the Binevenagh AONB. These monuments and areas range in date from the prehistoric sand dune system at Grangemore to the World War II anti-aircraft battery at Lower Drummans

### Examples of Issues:

- Monitoring, condition Public access
- Threats posed by agricultural activity
- Challenges from developments

### Examples of Opportunities:

- Most of these scheduled monuments are in private ownership and, as such, facilitating public access to them is either problematic or not possible. An opportunity exists to liaise with those sites owned by public bodies or other organisations (e.g. the National Trust, Forest Service, Trustees of St Aidan's Parish Church) to try to increase public awareness of these sites.

The area is rich in small traditional farmsteads. The pattern of land use has given these buildings a distinctive and specific local character. The main farm dwelling is normally grouped with high quality and distinctive smaller vernacular agricultural buildings which are now redundant from their original use. These buildings form an important part of the character of the landscape and cultural heritage of the area.

There are 77 listed buildings, with 4 buildings as category A: Bellarena House, Martello Tower, Mussenden Temple and Hezlett House.

### Examples of Issues:

- Small vernacular agricultural buildings, which do not quite meet the criteria to be listed, are under threat of falling into disuse and disrepair
- There are currently 3 buildings specifically identified by the Built Heritage at Risk Northern Ireland Register of being at risk. There is a risk of loss of character when restored. Awareness and availability of information on each is variable from one building to the other
- Agricultural activities such as ploughing, drainage, livestock have the potential to damage monuments.
- The Second survey may result in de-listings



### Examples of Opportunities:

- Small vernacular agricultural buildings can offer rich opportunities for conversion to tourist use, e.g. holiday cottages, barn accommodation, hostels, or outdoor pursuit centres
- Keeping the listed building stock in a good state of repair with well maintained exteriors. Significant landmark buildings, i.e. those with a high degree of visibility to the public should be singled out for attention
- The listed buildings 2nd survey is currently being undertaken and may lead to additional listings
- European Heritage Open Days offer an opportunity for the public to visit important buildings





6. Cultural heritage

Cultural heritage in the Binevenagh AONB include the followings:

- Influence of sports such as Gaelic games in some parts of the AONB;
- Strong culture of songs and music, from old traditional music to more recent singers including Eddie Butcher (1900-1980);
- Oral traditions including the burial place of the harpist Denis O Hampsey at St Aidans;
- Importance of genealogy (linked to migrations in and out of the area);
- Importance of townlands in understanding landscape and historic environment...

Cultural heritage is strongly linked to the built environment. The “Giant’s Sconce” is associated in early medieval documentation with a royal fortress and a number of warriors mentioned in early Irish literature, including the Irish Cycle. There are several important churches including St Aidans, Dunboe, Aghanloo and Tamlaghtard.

The railway journey through the Binevenagh AONB (from Coleraine towards Londonderry) was featured in Michael Palin’s television series “Great Railway Journey’s of the World”.

Examples of Issues:

- Rich cultural heritage not always accessible
- There is a lack of awareness of the rich cultural history and the traditional crafts which were once very common practice within the
- Loss of traditions

Examples of Opportunities:

- Need for a dedicated point of information for the AONB



Photograph by James Gaile, St Aidan’s Primary School



Photograph by Conor O’Kane, Ballyhackett Primary School





Photograph by Christine McNally, Ballyhackett Primary School

7. Management Objectives for the Historic Environment

In order to fulfil the aims for Historic Environment a series of objectives and proposed actions have been developed. Please refer to the Action Plan for details on delivering these.

Objective 1:  
Improve awareness of, and participation in, the historic environment and encourage its enjoyment by all, enhancing access where appropriate:

- 2.1.1 Establish a coordinated annual programme of events in relation to historic environment and cultural heritage, ensuring that these can be enjoyed by all
- 2.1.2 Produce an audit of relevant information, including leaflets, websites etc, in relation to historic environment and cultural heritage
- 2.1.3 Provide advice and information for historic buildings and monuments
- 2.1.4 Develop participatory projects, including training
- 2.1.5 Enhance public access to historic buildings within and around the AONB
- 2.1.6 Prepare an interpretation plan for the historic environment and cultural heritage in the Binevenagh AONB
- 2.1.7 Develop an historical information point for the AONB
- 2.1.8 Create and maintain a central GIS database covering all Themes, Land and Sea, Historic Environment, and Sustainable Communities

Objective 2:  
Ensure that knowledge of historic environment and cultural heritage available in the AONB is comprehensive:

- 2.2.1 Provide advice to building developers
- 2.2.2 Provide information and advice for owners of historic buildings
- 2.2.3 Establish a coordinated series of seminars and training for the historic environment and cultural heritage
- 2.2.4 Investigate the history of migrations to and from the Binevenagh AONB
- 2.2.5 Investigate Binevenagh AONB's townlands names and patterns

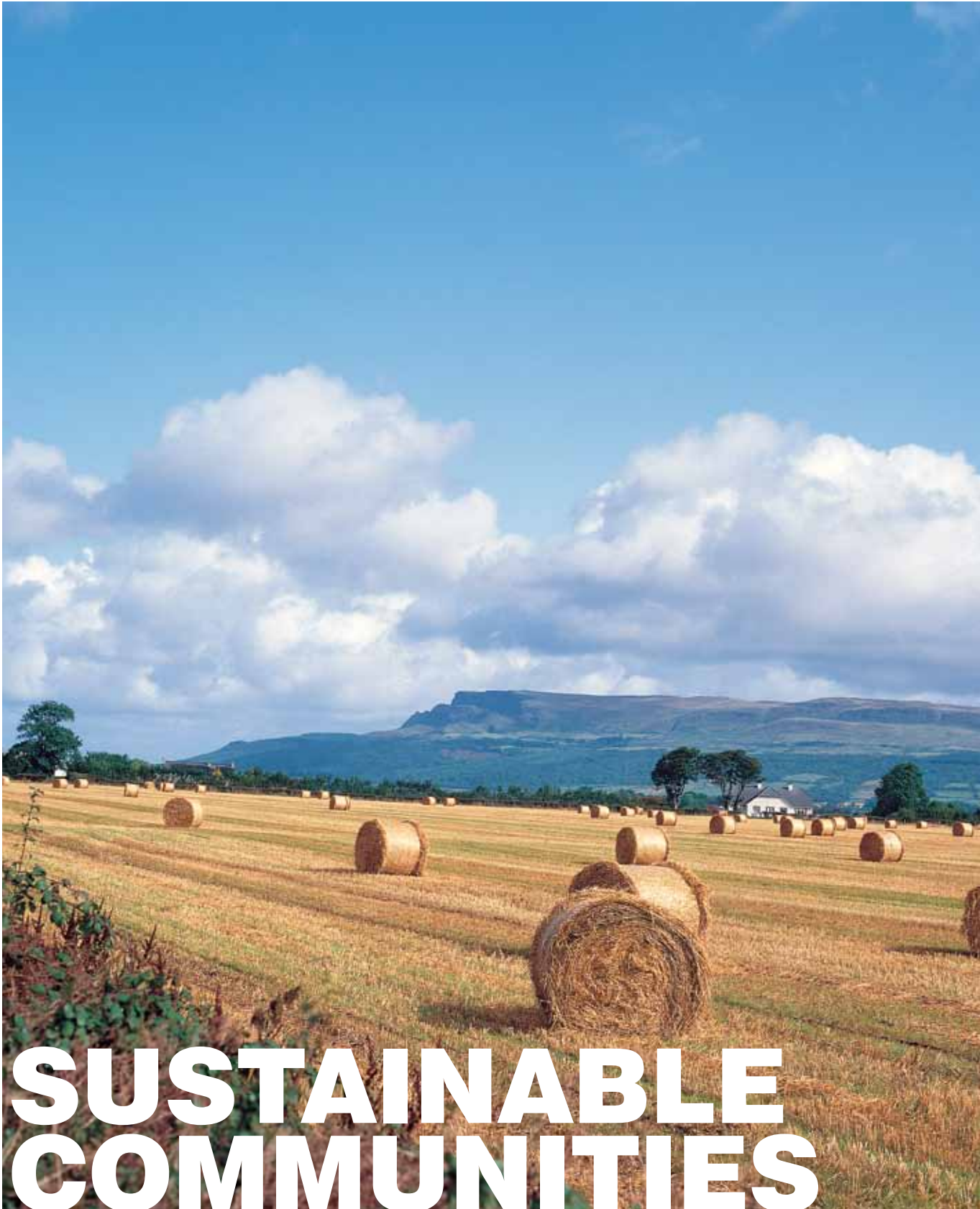
Objective 3:  
Ensure good protection of designated buildings, sites and monuments:

- 2.3.1 Review the Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record (NISMR) and identify and propose further monuments in Binevenagh AONB for scheduling including maritime heritage sites
- 2.3.2 Complete survey of listed buildings in the AONB
- 2.3.3 Ensure that endangered listed buildings and monuments are identified as being at risk
- 2.3.4 Carry out conservation work on the most sensitive buildings and monuments, as identified on NIEAs and BHARNI (Built Heritage At Risk Northern Ireland) prioritised lists
- 2.3.5 Provide management advice and guidance to owners of designated buildings and monuments
- 2.3.6 Ensure the most sensitive and rich archaeological sites in the Binevenagh AONB are protected



Photograph by Ryan McCracken, Bellarena Primary School





Photograph courtesy of Coleraine Borough Council

### 1. Management Aims for Sustainable Communities

#### In 2020:

- The local community and visitors awareness of special quality and value of the Binevenagh AONB is increased
- The AONB is cherished by its local population
- Local communities are vibrant and actively involved in the management of the Binevenagh AONB
- The local economy is thriving based on sustainable development principles
- All business sectors (including farming and forestry) are viable and play an integral part in the management of the AONB
- Well managed outdoor recreation opportunities are increased, increasing the enjoyment of the area

The following gives a brief summary of the Sustainable Communities within the Binevenagh AONB, for more details see the State of the AONB Report.

### 2. Planning

Development proposals are assessed and regulated through the planning system. Land Use Planning, Planning Policy and Guidance Notes are provided within Regional Strategies, Planning Policy Statements, Area Plans and Local Plans. The Draft Northern Area Plan is the key document for land use planning within the AONB. Planning policy is guided by Planning Policy Statements (PPS). 15 PPSs and draft PPSs are relevant to the area, which cover issues such as nature conservation, access, archaeology, transport, outdoor recreation, sustainable development, renewable energy.

In addition there is a policy that directly relates to AONBs; Policy DES4: Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, of “A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland”, the following is taken from this document:

“Designation as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty does not necessarily rule out certain forms of development. However the first principle of practice is that the Department will not be prepared to permit schemes that would be detrimental to environmental quality. It is up to architects and designers to put forward proposals which reflect an appreciation of, and sympathy for, the special character of each AONB.

Planning applications for housing, industrial, and tourist-related development, in AONB towns and villages, will be judged on the basis of the effect of the proposals on the setting of the settlement within the AONB, as well as scale, design and other planning and environmental considerations.

In assessing development proposals within Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, including those parts subject to policy constraint, the Department’s aim will not only be to protect their unique qualities but also to promote the enjoyment and make a positive contribution to their conservation. New buildings should respect, and may have to reflect, the traditional architectural styles and settlement pattern. Applicants and their professional advisers should take particular care over the retention or reconstruction of traditional boundary details, such as hedges, walls, trees and gates, around new developments in AONBs.”

With the proposed Review of Public Administration and Planning Reform, most planning responsibilities will go to local authorities.

It perhaps goes without saying that the planning system has a significant impact on both the natural & historic environment, and that the integrity of the AONB therefore depends on robust planning policies and decisions.

#### Examples of Issues:

- Status of the Northern Area Plan
- Review of Public Administration
- Planning Reform
- No design guide for the AONB

- Some major developments could have a significant impact on the character of the AONB and the designation of Binevenagh as an AONB (e.g. landfill site project at Cam Road)

#### Examples of Opportunities:

- Review of Public Administration
- Planning Reform

### 3. Community vibrancy

There are community groups and associations in the AONB related to economic development and the pursuit of cultural heritage. Some of these groups belong to the Coleraine Rural and Urban Network (Castlerock Community Association) on the eastern part of the AONB and the Roe Valley Community Forum (Magilligan Community Association and Aghanloo Community Association).

The AONB is accessed between Coleraine and Limavady on the B201 or A37 roads. Train service referred to above, between Coleraine and Derry, stops at two stations within the AONB (Castlerock and Bellarena). The 134 bus service between Limavady and Coleraine passes through the AONB. Apart from the ferry at Magilligan, there is no harbour sited within the AONB.

In terms of social and economic dimensions, Castlerock Ward ranked 387th out of 890 according to the Multiple Deprivation Measure 2005, whilst Magilligan Ward scored 225th, 1 being the most deprived ward and 890 least deprived.

#### Examples of Issues:

- Affordable housing
- Threats to ferry and train services
- Development of second homes and caravan parks may have an impact on community vibrancy

#### Examples of Opportunities:

- Develop links between community groups on the east and on the west
- Develop strong links with the sea





4. Economy

Agriculture is the main business / employer in the area with nearly 100 farms between the Castlerock and Magilligan wards and 134 people employed. The sandy soil of the Magilligan lowland is one of the most fertile areas in Northern Ireland, traditionally growing carrots. However there has been a shift in agricultural practices towards amenity turf development.

Forestry is another important industry in the area.

Magilligan prison and its planned expansion, and the military training camp has potential influence on the local economy, in terms of supplying service goods and staff.

Tourism is a growing economic activity and potentially one of the main ones, with over £200 million revenue between Coleraine and Limavady Borough Councils, with the main sector of expenditure being on food and drinks. Tourism activity is increasingly being spread throughout the year and not just confined to the traditionally busy summer months.

There are some local shops, mainly in Castlerock and some along the Seacoast Road.

Examples of Issues :

- Changes in farming practices
- Economic situation of the area within the region's economy

Examples of Opportunities:

- Shift of economy from just agriculture and forestry to additional activities such as tourism

5. Visiting

There are more than 165,000 visitors a year to Portstewart Strand (NT, 2008) and less than 3,000 at Hezlett House (NITB, 2007). Other attractions include Downhill Demesne and Mussenden Temple with 32,000 visitors (NT, 2008) and the Martello Tower. The National Trust has identified Downhill Demesne as a site capable of supporting large events and is currently exploring this potential.

Benone tourist complex is also a popular venue for visitors (approximately 100,000 visitors a year).

Both Benone Beach and Portstewart Strand are Blue flag beaches. These alongside Downhill Beach and Castlerock Strand attract numerous visitors especially during sunny week-ends.

The area also attracts bird watchers, visiting the area on a regular basis either along Lough Foyle or at the Bann Estuary (National Trust's bird hide).

There has been much development especially over recent years of outdoor recreation activities, including the following examples:

- Coastal activities such as kiting, surfing and kite surfing which is increasing in popularity.
- Hover craft, gliding club.
- Walking with a number of short walks at Binevenagh Mountain, Mussenden Temple, Benone Strand or Magilligan Point and the re-development of the Ulster Way going through Cam Forest to Castlerock.
- Horse riding is a popular activity especially along the long strands in the area.
- Cycling: short routes (Binevenagh Forest, Castlerock to Downhill Forest), medium route (Downhill to Magilligan). Sustrans National Route 93 (which is partially hosted by Forest Service) going through the AONB. Currently no dedicated mountain biking opportunities.
- Canoeing: Lower Bann canoe trail, development of coastal sea kayaking.
- Shore angling and fly fishing

There is a range of tourist accommodations, dominated by caravan parks (mainly fixed caravans). There is also small B&Bs and self-catering accommodations and growing numbers of campervans. Bigger hotels are found outside the AONB such as Radisson in Limavady or hotels in Coleraine. However there is a lack of small hotels and guest houses

within the AONB to service the local population and visitors.

The Binevenagh AONB is part of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's Giant's Causeway, Antrim & Causeway Coast Signature Project. A key element of this is the Causeway Coastal Route, linking Belfast to Derry, which runs through the AONB and is a NITB strategic driving trail aimed at improving access to visitor sites and attractions and ensuring that the area will maximise the economic and social opportunities derived from tourism.

Examples of Issues:

- The area is not visited equally, some honey pots
- Under development of forest areas for recreation purposes, leading to unofficial use of forest for outdoor activities
- Car parking on beaches

Examples of Opportunities:

- Development of outdoor recreation opportunities. Development of tourism in the area
- Visiting pattern moving from Easter and summer period towards year-long
- The AONB lies between two NITB Signature Projects, the Giant's Causeway, Antrim & Causeway Coast and the Walled City of Derry, creating opportunities to link the projects and market the AONB with them
- New Forestry Act which will provide opportunities for recreational use of state forests



Photograph by Conor Kelly, St Anthony's Primary School



6. Management  
Objectives for  
Sustainable Communities

In order to fulfil the aims for Sustainable Communities a series of objectives and proposed actions have been developed. Please refer to the Action Plan for details on delivering these.

Objective 1:  
Encourage and enhance  
a sense of ownership,  
awareness and respect for the  
distinctive character of the area  
amongst visitors and  
local people:

- 3.1.1 Develop a sustainable communities information point for the AONB
- 3.1.2 Create and maintain a central GIS database covering all Themes, Land and Sea, Historic Environment and Sustainable Communities
- 3.1.3 Develop engagement programmes
- 3.1.4 Develop “Friends of the AONB” programme aimed at engaging schools, local businesses and individuals

Objective 2:  
Enable vibrant communities  
to grow sustainably in  
the Binevenagh AONB  
by stimulating economic  
prosperity and local culture,  
and maintaining the distinctive  
character of the area:

- 3.2.1 Develop village plan for Castlerock and investigate similar plans for other settlements in the west and create links
- 3.2.2 Promotion of good planning policy and practice for the Binevenagh AONB
- 3.2.3 Develop a food promotion programme and improve local markets
- 3.2.4 Provide guideline advice and information on financial assistance available to farmers looking into diversification
- 3.2.5 Ensure that houses are affordable for those who want to permanently live in the Binevenagh AONB
- 3.2.6 Ensure that workspace opportunities are provided to local businesses including access to the latest communication technology
- 3.2.7 Promote sustainable development principals
- 3.2.8 Improve the balance between people and biodiversity
- 3.2.9 Investigate appropriate opportunities for renewable energy in the AONB respectful of the special qualities of the area
- 3.2.10 Investigate opportunities to set up a funding programme similar to the Sustainable Development Fund managed by other AONBs on mainland UK
- 3.2.11 Ensure that existing public transport opportunities (including train and ferry) are preserved and enhanced

Objective 3:  
Ensure that the Binevenagh  
AONB offers first class  
experience for visitors and  
local people wanting to enjoy  
the area especially in the  
outdoor recreation domain:

- 3.3.1 Develop a sustainable tourism label such as the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in protected areas
- 3.3.2 Develop new and improved outdoor recreation opportunities
- 3.3.3 Further develop Benone as a centre for coastal activities such as surfing, wind-surfing and kiting, offering opportunities for both classes and hiring facilities
- 3.3.4 Develop appropriate, quality visitor accommodation and services
- 3.3.5 Develop a beach management strategy
- 3.3.6 Prepare an integrated sustainable freshwater recreation fishing plan



Photograph by Liam McElhinney, St Aidan’s Primary School





# MAKING IT HAPPEN

## – ARRANGEMENTS

Photograph by Christine McMally, Ballyhackett Primary School

### 1. Management Aims

#### In 2020:

- The achievement of the Management Plan’s 20 year vision will be well underway
- The Management of the Binevenagh AONB will be an example of good practice, the implementation of its Management Plan well underway and all partners will be committed
- The Binevenagh AONB will have a dedicated management unit sufficiently resourced to provide appropriate work to protect the designation for the benefit of local people and visitors
- The unit will provide a strong leadership and direction for the future of Binevenagh AONB whilst being receptive to the views of all people, and at the same time be willing to adapt to changing circumstances

### 2. Status of the Binevenagh AONB

AONBs in Northern Ireland are designated under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands Order (NI) 1985. This Order requires all public bodies to “have regard to the need to conserve the natural beauty and amenity of the countryside”. This Plan should help the public bodies identify how they can act to express this regard”.

### 3. Management of the Binevenagh AONB

The Binevenagh AONB Management Forum, through its member organisations, is the key delivery mechanism for the Management Plan.

The aim of the Binevenagh Management Forum is “to protect, enhance and promote the Binevenagh Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) for the benefit of the people who live there and the visitors who come to enjoy it, for this generation and the future generations.”

Its purposes are:

- To achieve the AONB Management Plan long term Vision
- To protect, conserve and enhance the natural, cultural and built heritage of the Binevenagh AONB.
- To promote the sustainable social and economic development of the AONB, particularly when such activity conserves and enhances the environment.
- To encourage enjoyment of the area where it is consistent with the first two purposes.

AONBs in England and Wales administer a Sustainable Development Fund that helps to fund small scale projects on environmental management and social and economic development.

Binevenagh AONB presently lies within both Coleraine and Limavady borough councils. After 2011 and the proposed Review of Public Administration (RPA) the AONB will be within the Causeway Coast District Council.

#### Examples of Issues:

- No dedicated Binevenagh AONB Management Unit, the coordination is undertaken by the Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust on limited resources.
- The limited resource for AONB management in Northern Ireland, mainly comes from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency
- Weak legislation
- Uncertainty regarding post-RPA’s status of AONB and protected area management

#### Examples of Opportunities:

- Post-RPA’s status of AONB and protected area management
- Development of an AONB Management Unit Wide range of support for the Binevenagh Management Plan & Action Plan

### 4. Management objectives for Making it happen – arrangements

In order to fulfil the aims for “Making it happen – arrangements” a series of objectives and proposed actions have been developed. Please refer to the Action Plan for details on delivering these.

#### Objective 1: Establish a mechanism for the effective implementation of the Binevenagh AONB Management Plan

4.1.1 Appropriate Assessment of the Action Plan

4.1.2 Economic Assessment of the AONB

4.1.3 Publish, disseminate and implement the Binevenagh AONB Management Plan

4.1.4 Develop a Binevenagh AONB Management Unit

4.1.5 Ensure Binevenagh AONB needs are taken into consideration at all policy levels

4.1.6 Develop a budget for the core functions of the AONB Management Unit and for projects







Photograph by Chloe Morrow, Macosquin Primary School





# MANAGEMENT PLAN CONTEXT

## 1. The planning policy framework

The Management Plan is a non-statutory document which presents recommendations for land management and economic development in the AONB. It sits alongside a framework of planning policy for Northern Ireland and reflects many of the policies and guidance for development in the Region.

## 2. Regional Development Strategy

The regional planning framework is the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland (RDS), entitled “shaping the Future”. The Strategy guides the future development of Northern Ireland to 2025 to meet the needs of the region with a population fast approaching 2 million.

The vision of the Strategy is to “... create an outward-looking, dynamic and liveable region and to sustain a high quality of life for all”. The Strategy has a recurring theme of sustainability alongside a strong emphasis on social cohesion and economic progress.

Central to the RDS is the Spatial Development Strategy which aims to promote balanced and integrated growth in urban and rural areas, to enhance equality of opportunity and offer the choice to meet the varied needs of a divided society. The aim of the Strategy is “...to develop an attractive and prosperous rural area, based on a balanced and integrated approach to the development of town, village and countryside, in order to sustain a strong and vibrant rural community and economy, and to conserve and enhance the environment”.

The Strategy sees the key regional challenges as, to:

- accommodate future development growth while protecting and caring for the environment.
- reduce the consumption of resources.
- continue to maintain or, where needed, to improve the quality of air, water and land resources within the region.
- seek to maintain local landscape character and to conserve cultural assets.
- take particular care to sustain and, where required, to enhance the biodiversity of the region, its natural habitats, high quality landscapes and built heritage.

The overall approach, together with the objectives and actions contained within this plan, follow closely the strategic objectives laid out in the “Rural Northern Ireland” section of the Strategy.

## 3. Planning Policy Statements

Planning Policy Statements (PPS) contain policies on land-use and other planning matters for the whole of Northern Ireland. They set out the main planning considerations that the Department of Environment takes into account in assessing proposals for development and preparing development plans. The PPSs, together with other planning policies contained within the documents described below, offer protection from harmful development that might adversely affect the rural character of its setting.

The relevant Planning Policy Statements that help to protect the AONB and its resources include:

- A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland
- PPS 1: General Principles
- PPS 2: Planning and Nature Conservation
- PPS 3: Access, Movement and Parking
- PPS 4: Planning and Economic Development
- PPS 6: Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage
- PPS 7: Quality Residential Environments
- PPS 7: Addendum Residential Extensions and Alterations
- PPS 8: Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation
- PPS 11: Planning and Waste Management
- PPS 12: Housing in Settlements
- PPS 13: Transportation and Land Use
- PPS 15: Planning and Flood Risk
- PPS 17: Control of Outdoor Advertisements
- PPS 18: Renewable Energy
- PPS 21 (Draft): Sustainable Development in the Countryside

## Area Plans

Area Plans are the next tier of planning document below the RDS. Their aim is to guide development in conformity with the RDS. The draft Northern Area Plan (2016), which covers much of the north area of the AONB for the four districts of Ballymoney, Coleraine, Limavady and Moyle was published in May 2005.

The Area Plan seeks to protect rural areas through the designation of Green Belt and Countryside Policy Areas. The AONB is designated as a Countryside Policy Area (CPA) within the draft Northern Area Plan (designated under the North Derry AONB, as the Binevenagh AONB was when the Draft North Area Plan was published). The aim of CPA designation is to protect and enhance the unique landscape character.

## Other guidance

The “Design Guide for Rural Northern Ireland” offers guidance to anyone wanting to build in the countryside. Its purpose is to improve the quality of design and to help ensure that new buildings fit into the landscape.



Above:  
Photograph by Kelsy Farlow,  
Macosquin Primary School

Opposite:  
Photograph by Amber McMullan,  
Bellarena Primary School





Photograph by Jordan Tannahill, Hezlett Primary School



- AONB  
Area of Outstanding Natural  
Beauty

ASSI  
Area of Special Scientific Interest

BHARNI  
Built Heritage At Risk  
Northern Ireland

CCGHT  
Causeway Coast and Glens  
Heritage Trust

CPA  
Countryside Policy Area

NI  
Northern Ireland

NICMS Northern Ireland  
Countryside Management Scheme

NIEA  
Northern Ireland  
Environment Agency

NITB  
Northern Ireland Tourist Board

NISMR Northern Ireland Sites and  
Monuments Record

NNR  
National Nature Reserves
- NT  
National Trust

MoD  
Ministry of Defence

MOSS  
Management of Sensitive  
Sites Scheme

PPS  
Planning Policy Statement

RDS  
Rural Development Strategy  
(for Northern Ireland)

RPA  
Review of Public Administration

SAC  
Special Area of Conservation

SLNCIs  
Sites of Local Nature  
Conservation Importance

SPA  
Special Protection Area

SuDS  
Sustainable Drainage Scheme

UWT  
Ulster Wildlife Trust

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All the images within this document were taken as part of the Picture This! Binevenagh AONB 2009 Primary School Photography Project (unless otherwise stated). All the winning pictures can be viewed at [www.ccght.org](http://www.ccght.org)

The Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust provides secretariat support for the Binevenagh AONB Management Forum.

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Photograph by Chelsea Moore, Macosquin Primary School





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