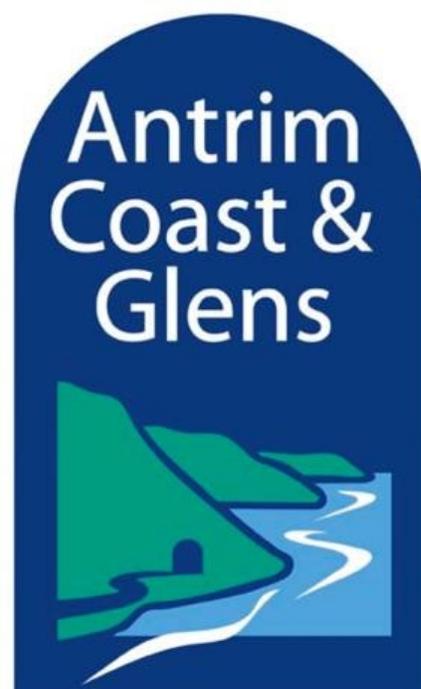


ANTRIM COAST & GLENS
Area of Outstanding Natural
Beauty
MANAGEMENT PLAN
2020-2030



Area of Outstanding
Natural Beauty

FOREWORD

****Foreword to be completed once Plan is at final stage of review**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) designations help to protect, conserve, enhance, promote and facilitate public access to landscapes of national importance. AONBs are designated under the *Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands Order (Northern Ireland) 1985 (NCALO)*.

Antrim Coast and Glens AONB was designated in 1988 and is one of eight AONBs across Northern Ireland.

Why is a Management Plan needed and how should it be used?

Management Plans are a key mechanism for co-ordinating effective management of AONB landscapes. This Management Plan reflects statutory policies and plans; it aims to direct stakeholder actions to protect the unique character of Antrim Coast and Glens AONB and its natural, built and cultural heritage. It presents a vision, aims and objectives for the AONB over the next 10 years.

This Plan should be used to:

- Influence decision makers
- Champion excellent protected area management
- Identify issues and present recommendations
- Bring people together to work towards a shared vision
- Direct actions – as a basis for AONB projects and programming
- Support relevant funding bids
- Provide a useful source of information on Antrim Coast & Glens AONB

Overview of main issues and recommendations raised

Section	Issue	Recommendation
Natural Environment	Lack of accessible, up-to-date data	Cohesive natural environment data collection which is accessible to stakeholders
	Agriculture and land management practices negatively impacting the natural environment	Support landowners to protect our special areas and aid farm resilience and diversification Support heritage skills training and educational/outreach activities
	Limited resources	Continue to seek funding and resources Support citizen science opportunities and community conservation efforts Build on the legacy of HoTG LPS

	Climate change	Support peatland restoration and other climate change mitigation measures eg. afforestation
	Inappropriate behaviour in the countryside	Establish the North Coast Wildfire Group Increase public awareness of wildfire prevention Promote Leave No Trace ethics for the outdoors and nature
	Invasive species and disease	Reduce invasive species
	Inappropriate development	Champion sustainable development within the AONB, protecting landscape character and habitats.
Built heritage and culture	Inappropriate development	Champion sustainable development within the AONB, protecting historic sites, listed buildings and monuments.
	Limited resources	Support landowners/owners to protect historic sites, listed buildings and scheduled monuments Continue to seek funding and resources Support heritage groups and community conservation efforts Build on the legacy of HoTG LPS
	Lack of monitoring, recording and research	Encourage ongoing research, excavation and interpretation of built heritage
	More local stories, histories and traditions shared and celebrated	Deliver quality heritage and cultural events and activities Support heritage skills training and educational/outreach activities
Sustainable communities	Lack of Community Access to Services, Amenities, Transport	Focus efforts on disadvantaged areas and communities and improve access to services Support community groups and community development initiatives
	Sustainable Tourism and Economic Development	Promote sustainable tourism activities and initiatives and help support local businesses Champion sustainable development within the AONB
	Outdoor Recreation and Access to the Countryside	Deliver and expand quality outdoor recreation experiences and activities Support new and existing access to the landscape Promote access for all abilities and backgrounds Build on the legacy of HoTG LPS

Vision, Aims and Objectives

A vision for Antrim Coast & Glens AONB 2030

The outstanding landscape and rich heritage of Antrim Coast & Glens is protected, valued and celebrated, nurturing resilient thriving communities and attracting visitors from near and far.

Stakeholders, landowners and local communities work together to protect the AONB and its unique character, natural environment, built heritage and rich cultural traditions and to derive the full benefits that Antrim Coast & Glens AONB has to offer.

Aims	Objectives
(1) Conserve and protect the landscape character of Antrim Coast & Glens AONB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Monitor landscape character areas to identify changes (b) Promote traditional heritage skills (c) Encourage sustainable and appropriate development within the AONB
(2) Conserve and protect the natural and historic environment of Antrim Coast & Glens AONB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Support landowners to deliver sustainable land management and conservation (b) Support the conservation of priority habitat and species, protected areas, listed buildings and key sites (c) Promote climate change adaptation and mitigation measures (d) Support research and monitoring programmes that inform conservation actions
(3) Encourage sustainable use, access and enjoyment of the AONB, contributing to the resilience and wellbeing of local communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Extend inclusive access and outdoor recreation opportunities within the AONB (b) Promote sustainable tourism initiatives (c) Support local communities in sustainable business initiatives (d) Discourage inappropriate behaviour in the countryside through outreach and education
(4) Foster a sense of pride in the AONB and raise awareness of its landscape, natural environment, heritage and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Raise awareness of AONB designation and its benefits for local communities (b) Support natural, built and cultural heritage based education and events within the AONB
(5) Pursue a collaborative and partnership approach to AONB management and nurture community driven action within Antrim Coast & Glens AONB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Maintain an AONB Management Forum and encourage information sharing amongst key stakeholders for AONB management (b) Promote volunteering, community projects and training opportunities within the AONB (c) Support the work of local community, environmental and heritage groups

Antrim Coast and Glens AONB Action Plan 2021-2025

This Management Plan is accompanied by a five year Action Plan for 2021-2025, which will be followed by a subsequent five year Action Plan for 2026 – 2030.

Action Plans set out specific actions, agreed by key stakeholders and the AONB Management Forum, to work towards the vision, aims and objectives outlined above.

DRAFT

1. INTRODUCTION

What is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty?

An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is an exceptional landscape of special character and national significance. Such landscapes are so outstanding that it is in the nation's interest to take actions to safeguard them via designation.

In Northern Ireland, AONBs are designated under two pieces of legislation:

- *Amenity Lands Act (Northern Ireland) 1965* – implemented planning controls to protect special landscapes.
- *Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands Order (Northern Ireland) 1985 (NCALO)* – basis for the positive management of special landscapes.

Antrim Coast and Glens AONB was designated in 1988 under NCALO and is one of eight AONBs across Northern Ireland. NCALO allows the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) to put forward policies which support the AONB objectives below.

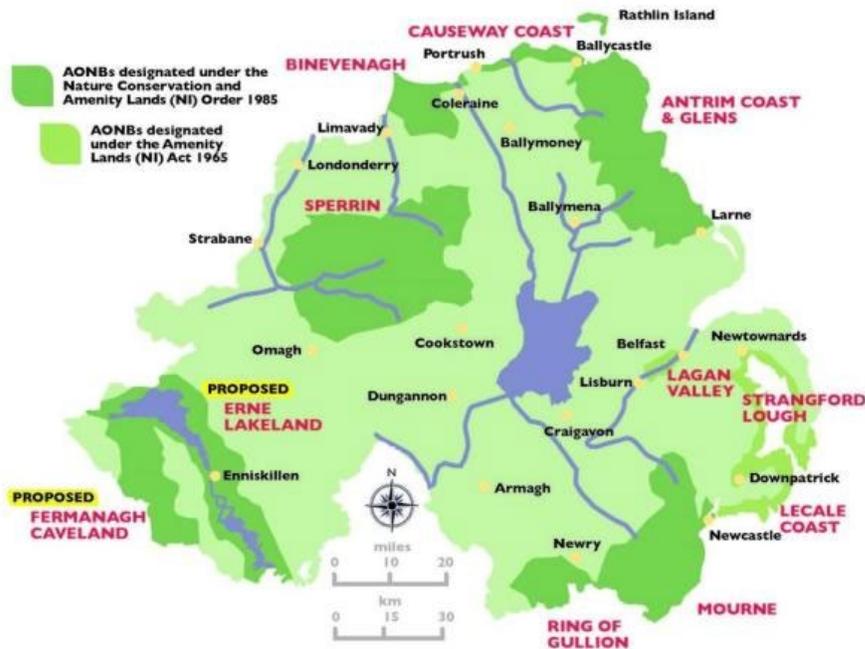
NCALO objectives for AONBs:

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

AONBs also have international standing. They fall within The International Union for the Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Category V of protected areas – 'A protected area where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value: and where safeguarding the integrity of this interaction is vital to protecting and sustaining the area and its associated nature conservation and other values.'

For Category V areas IUCN promote objectives relating to:

- Nature conservation
- The protection of cultural values
- The promotion of public enjoyment
- Fostering social and economic well-being for local communities



**Map of AONB with boundary clearly defined

How is Antrim Coast & Glens AONB managed?

In Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), an agency of DAERA, is responsible for designating AONBs and overseeing their management. However, in practice, public bodies, conservation organisations, communities and landowners work together to protect the landscape, facilitate access and to encourage enjoyment and socio-economic benefits.

Antrim Coast and Glens AONB Management Forum

This Forum is made up of representatives from various organisations, public authorities and communities, helping to co-ordinate the sustainable management of the AONB.

The secretariat service is provided by Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust (CCGHT).¹

AONB Management Forum aims:

1. Promote the value of AONB status and delivery of the NCALO objectives.
2. Secure the resources needed to create and deliver a management and action plan for the AONB.
3. Encourage the development of policies, practices, partnerships and projects within and around the AONB that promote, protect and enhance the AONB status, particularly through development of a 10 year management plan and 5 year action plans.
4. Act to support CCGHT in delivery of a protected area coordination and project delivery service for the AONB.
5. Speak on matters of shared interest, in communications with relevant external organisations and where appropriate with the media.

¹ For an up to date list of Management Forum members see ccght.co.uk.

Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust

CCGHT is a public/private/voluntary sector partnership body and registered charity devoted to promoting, protecting and enhancing the unique heritage of the Causeway Coast and Glens area. Currently CCGHT is majority funded by NIEA, with further support from Causeway Coast & Glens and Mid & East Antrim Borough Councils and from Tourism Northern Ireland (TNI). By agreement with NIEA, CCGHT assists with AONB management and activity in three AONB areas. CCGHT delivers a programme of activities and projects that support AONB objectives as outlined in Management & Action Plans. CCGHT currently develops, monitors and reviews AONB Management Plans and Action Plans, as well as providing secretariat services for Antrim Coast & Glens AONB Management Forum.

Changes to local government

In 2015 local council boundaries were redrawn. Antrim Coast & Glens AONB now sits across two Council areas instead of four:

- Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council (CCGBC)
- Mid & East Antrim Borough Council (MEABC)

Both Councils provide a range of social, environmental and economic development services which contribute to the management of the AONB.

Planning powers have also been devolved to Councils, which now hold an even more prominent position in AONB management. Councils now develop and implement important planning policies and controls which have the potential to significantly impact on landscapes, protected areas and rural development.

Both CCGBC and MEABC are represented on the AONB Management Forum.

What is the purpose and aim of this Management plan?

'A management plan has a vital role in engendering commitment towards action and the deployment of resources in support of common goals. Such plans provide an opportunity for all organisations within an AONB to sign up to policies, proposals and action programmes needed to achieve successful, cohesive and positive management'.²

AONB Management Plans are non-statutory documents with no direct legislative basis, however, they play an important role in reflecting statutory policies and directing stakeholder actions which shape AONB management.

AONB Management Plans articulate what is significant and valued in an area and identify mechanisms to help protect the intrinsic character of the AONB and to realise its full potential for local communities.

Who is the Plan for?

This Management and associated Action Plan is relevant to anyone whose activities or decisions have the potential to affect Antrim Coast & Glens AONB. The recommendations and actions in this document should be taken into account when making decisions that will impact the AONB.

² [Shared Horizons: Statement of Policy on Protected Landscapes in Northern Ireland](#) (NIEA, 2003)

Groups who may find this Plan of particular use and interest:

1. **Government Departments, public bodies and decision makers**, for whom the Plan may act as a guide and help shape future policy or action affecting the AONB.
2. **Local authorities** whose provision of services and governance have direct implications for the AONB.
3. **Landowners and farmers** might use this Plan as a reference and guide to Antrim Coast & Glens AONB.
4. **Local businesses** may use this Plan as a reference and guide to Antrim Coast & Glens AONB and may learn more about the potential benefits the AONB may offer the local economy.
5. **Local community groups, organisations or interested individuals** who care about the future wellbeing of Antrim Coast & Glens AONB. It is hoped that this Plan will bring greater awareness and understanding of the AONB designation and encourage people to get involved in conserving and enhancing this special landscape.

The implementation of this Management & Action Plan is not the sole responsibility of any one organisation or body, but should be achieved through the collaborative input of relevant stakeholders.

How was the Plan developed?

The first ten year Management & Action Plan for Antrim Coast & Glens AONB was produced by Red Kite and ELP consultancies in 2008. In 2015, a second five year Action Plan was produced by CCGHT.

This ten year Management Plan and five year Action Plan was developed by CCGHT, on behalf of NIEA and the AONB Management Forum. This Plan is the product of extensive stakeholder and community consultations, and a thorough literature review.

Stakeholder Consultation

Targeted stakeholder consultation was integral and representatives from key stakeholder organisations were consulted, including 1-2-1 meetings with Management Forum members and over 30 representatives from relevant organisations, bodies and Departments.³

In February 2020, CCGHT hosted *Antrim Coast and Glens AONB: Vision, Aims & Objectives Key Stakeholder Workshop* at Carnfunnock Country Park. The workshop captured stakeholders' insights and feedback which have informed this document.

Community Consultation

Several community and heritage groups were contacted directly as part of the Stakeholder Consultation. However, it was a priority to connect with the wider community within Antrim Coast & Glens AONB.

Online Community Questionnaires were published in February and September 2020 and were incentivised via prize draws. The questionnaires received 117 respondents in total – see [Appendix X](#) for Community Questionnaire findings.

³ See [Appendix X](#) Consultation Findings

Legacy Plan with specific actions and recommendations– the HoTG LPS Legacy Plan has informed the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB Action Plan 2021-2025.

There is no dedicated financial resource currently allocated to HoTG LPS legacy delivery; it is vital that the appropriate funding resources are sought and secured to implement the HoTG Legacy Plan. The Management Forum should also be open to the pursuit of large-scale funding opportunities or ambitious programmes which may enable the continuation or expansion of projects delivered under HoTG LPS.



DRAFT

2. LANDSCAPE

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Landscape Character and Natural Beauty

What makes a landscape? A landscape is more than just a view but is the cumulative result of the reciprocal relationship between people, place and nature, where natural beauty sits alongside the beauty of our agricultural lands, parklands and townscapes.

This Plan acknowledges that our landscapes are the product of dynamic change; the product of ongoing natural processes and human interaction which combine to form the unique landscape character and outstanding natural beauty of Antrim Coast and Glens AONB – a landscape of national significance.

This landscape may be the product of ongoing change, however, NCALO legislation makes clear that the natural beauty and landscape character of the AONB should be preserved where possible and appropriate.

Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment 2000

The Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment (NILCA 2000) outlined key characteristics of sections of the landscape, called Landscape Character Areas (LCAs). This provided a baseline of landscape character for NI upon which landscape condition could be measured.

'We live in a great area with some of the greatest views and coastline in the world'

Community Questionnaire

11 LCAs fall wholly or largely within Antrim Coast & Glens AONB, while 4 LCAs have only small areas within the boundary and thus have been judged to have a negligible impact on the AONBs overall character.⁵

****Insert map of LCAs - include new council boundary line between CCGBC & MEABC**

Summary of AONBs Landscape Character Areas		
LCA	Key features	Condition and sensitivity to change
157 Rathlin Island (and Causeway Coast)	Rugged coast Rural and sheep grazed Coastal settlement Long views across coast	Wires and poles on skyline Walls and old buildings in disrepair Disused quarries
119 Ballycastle Glens	Scenic valleys and rivers Undulating glens Hedgerows and gorse Traditional farmsteads and newer farms Ballycastle settlement Archaeological remains	Long views, wooded areas make LCA vulnerable to change New farm developments prominent Stone walls on upper slopes in poor repair Forestry plantations impacting on character Some slopes damaged by peat cutting

⁵ LCA 56 Dervock Farmlands, LCA 116 Ballymena Farmland, LCA 125 Tardree Upland Pasture and LCA 115 Tardree and Six Mile Water Slopes are judged to have a negligible impact on the AONBs overall landscape character and are therefore omitted from further discussion.

120 Fair Head	Northern slopes of Antrim Plateau Dramatic cliffs and headlands Sheltered bays Rough pastures and rocky moorland Derelict stone walls and houses Archaeological remains Views to Kintyre and Scottish islands	Coastal fringe in natural condition but sensitive to change due to open, exposed character and large number of archaeological remains.
118 Moyle Moorlands and Forests	Open moorlands Rough grazing of unimproved grasslands Heather and blanket bog Conifer plantations Few roads or settlements Archaeological remains on summits	Very sensitive to change due to open exposed character Commercial forestry and peat cutting impacting landscape Open skyline sensitive to change from tall structures eg. wind turbines
121 Moyle Glens	Steep scenic glacial valleys both V-shaped and U-shaped Antrim Plateau Broad-leafed woodlands, hedgerows Ladder farms Settlements in bays Coastal views Moorland	Sensitive to change especially in upper slopes and open moorland Some field boundaries in poor condition Some unsympathetic development
122 Garron Plateau	Open moorland Steep slopes with rocky outcrops Sheep grazed Stone walls and windswept trees Heather and peat bog Derelict stone cottages	Upland habitats and designated areas sensitive to changes in land use Open and elevated landscape with long views, sensitive to tall structures eg. wind turbines, radio masts
117 Central Ballymena Glens	Broad undulating glens Moorland Slemish Mountain Regular field patterns and boundaries, stone walls and hedgerows Traditional farmsteads and villages Archaeological remains	Landscape in good condition but sensitive to change from inappropriate development
123 Larne Glens	Incised glens with smooth ridges Field patterns and boundaries, stone walls and hedgerows Scattered white farmsteads Conifer plantations and some broad-leafed woodland Quarries Long views along valleys to coast	Good condition with field boundaries particularly well maintained Sensitive to change and impacts from visitors Upper glen slopes sensitive to afforestation
124 Larne Basalt Moorland	Exposed broad summits Commercial forestry Windswept gorse Moorland	Moorland in good condition, derelict pastures in poor condition.

	Derelict pastures and stone walls Wind turbines and radio masts Isolated stone dwellings	Sensitive to land use and land cover changes due to open character and long views, popularity and scenic nature.
126 Larne Coast	Rough contoured pasture Rocky shoreline Basalt headlands and cliffs Stone walls Ballygalley settlement Seaward views to The Maidens and Scottish coast	Coastline highly sensitive to change due to popularity as a tourist attraction and increased development around Larne
127 Larne Ridgeland	Undulating landform Lush pastures and scrubby enclosed fields Pylons and roads Occasional settlement Long views bounded by moorland ridges	Some field boundaries degraded Roads and pylons can be visually intrusive Woodland and field patterns on valley slopes sensitive to change

Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment 2016

In 2016, NIEA published the Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment (NIRLCA) which builds on the NILCA 2000 and identifies Regional Landscape Character Areas (RLCAs). The NIRLCA draws together information on nature, culture and perception of landscapes and focuses on the ‘spirit of place’ (the interactions of natural and human processes over time) as the main measure of landscape character.

Antrim Coast and Glens AONB sits across 3 RLCAs.⁶

***Insert map of RLCAs (same style as LCA map)*

RLCA	Key features	Key forces for change
16 North Coast and Rathlin Island	Rugged cliffs Sandy bays Views to the Antrim Plateau Coastal settlement Sites of rich natural and historical interest Popular tourist destination	Climate change – coastal erosion and cliff failures Natural coastal processes Increased visitor numbers Residential and other development Conservation management
17 Maine and Braid River Valley	Gently undulating valley Glacial drumlins Varied field patterns and farmlands Stone walls and hedgerows Wooded areas and wetlands	Climate change - floods and summer droughts Farming practices Residential and other development

⁶ The AONBs southern boundary extends very slightly into a fourth RLCA (South Antrim Hills & Six Mile Water). However, this RLCA has been judged to have a negligible impact on the AONBs overall landscape character and is therefore omitted from further discussion.

	Rural and tranquil Slemish mountain	Ash dieback disease impacting on hedgerows
18 Antrim Plateau and Glens	Rugged coastline Cliffs and bays Antrim Plateau uplands Distinctive geology Scenic and tranquil glens Conifer plantations Upland blanket bogs Popular tourist destination Settlements in bays and lower glens Stone walls and hedgerows	Climate change – floods and summer droughts, wildfires, coastal erosion, cliff failures Natural coastal processes Wind farm development Mining development Farming practices Residential and other development Increased visitor numbers Conservation management

Further landscape character assessments – Local Development Plans

Further landscape character assessments are being undertaken by Councils and will form part of the technical evidence base to inform and support Local Development Plans and planning policy.⁷

The [landscape character assessment for MEABC](#) was completed in 2018. It retains the original LCAs identified in the NILCA 2000 and reflects changes since 2000 and the NIRLCA 2016. It identifies an increase in single dwellings in the countryside and wind energy development as the main changes to landscape character in the Mid & East Antrim area since 2000.

CCGBC is currently undertaking a Landscape Study of the Borough to inform its Local Development Plan (LDP). The Landscape Study includes an updated assessment of landscape character of the Borough, based on the relevant parts of the NILCA 2000, including landscape guidelines for each of the 22 LCAs identified. The Landscape Study also incorporates AONB Policy Guidance for the four AONBs which fall, in whole or in part, within the Council area, and a Settlement Appraisal of 37 settlements within the Borough. The indicative publication date for the draft CCGBC Landscape Study is Spring/Summer 2021.

Northern Ireland Regional Seascape Character Assessment 2014

The [Northern Ireland Regional Seascape Character Assessment](#) was undertaken by NIEA in 2013/14 and applied the familiar subdivision and characterisation approach, resulting in Seascape Character Areas (SCAs). SCAs are described as ‘unique geographic area[s] of land, intertidal and marine area[s] with a recognisable sense of place and identity’.

Five SCAs sit along the AONBs coastline.⁸

⁷ See [Appendix x](#) ‘Statutory Framework and Policy Context’ for more information on Local Development Plans and other Planning policies.

⁸ SCA 22 (Atlantic) and SCA 23 (North Channel) sit adjacent to the AONB but do not extend to its coastline and so are judged of negligible impact on the AONB and are omitted from further discussion - see [NI Regional Seascape Character Assessment Part 5](#) for more information on these SCAs.

See **Appendix x Landscape and Seascape Character Areas in Antrim Coast and Glens AONB** for more on Antrim Coast & Glens AONB landscape and seascape character areas.

Fixed Point Photography

In 2017 NIEA initiated the Fixed Point Photography project (FPP) to monitor landscape character across Northern Ireland's AONBs. In 2019 CCGHT began delivery of FPP within Antrim Coast & Glens AONB.

FPP involves taking a photograph, from the same point, at quarterly intervals over five years. Observations and data are logged and reviewed annually to identify forces for change and any impacts on landscape character. There are 11 fixed points located across 11 of the AONBs LCAs.



Fixed point ACG5 Lary Road, Carnlough in Spring 2019



Fixed point ACG5 Lary Road, Carnlough in Summer 2019 – note changes to built structure and seasonal change.

Starting in 2019, FPP has not recorded any significant changes to landscape character as yet. However, the poor condition of some field boundaries (stone walls, hedgerows) and vernacular buildings was noted and it was suggested that restoration and maintenance would be beneficial. Increased deciduous tree planting would enrich woodland environments across the Antrim Glens, while ongoing bog restoration at sites such as the Garron Plateau (Fixed Point ACG3) would be welcomed.

3. NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Antrim Coast & Glens AONB is a rich landscape, encompassing a diverse and exceptional geodiversity and biodiversity of national and international significance.

Ecosystems Services

An ecosystems services approach to nature conservation emphasises the vital role that our natural environment plays in human activity. Landscapes and habitats provide important services for local communities, including agriculture, carbon capture, water quality, flood management, building materials, renewable energy and recreation.

This Management Plan supports an ecosystems services approach to AONB management, highlighting the AONBs benefits for human activity while also working towards the sustainable conservation and stewardship of our natural assets.

Protections and Designations for Natural Environment

Some plants and animals are protected by law under the *Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order* 1985 and other legislation. Statutory policies governing planning and development provide important protections for the AONBs landscape, wildlife and environment – see [Appendix x](#) Statutory Framework and Policy Context. The *Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland)* 2011 places a statutory duty on every public body to further the conservation of biodiversity and requires DAERA to publish lists of animals, plants and habitats of conservation priority.⁹

The AONB is home to a variety of protected areas which are subject to statutory protections and designated at an international, regional and local level.

Large areas of the AONB are so environmentally important that they are protected by the EU Habitats and Birds Directives.¹⁰ This international legislation provides for a range of designations referred to as Natura 2000 sites, including Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) for important habitats and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for important bird populations and nesting sites. Natura 2000 designations cover around 40% of the AONB.¹¹

⁹ See [NI Priority Species list](#) and [NI Priority Habitats list](#).

¹⁰ Natura 2000 sites are afforded statutory protection in NI under the *Conservation (Natural Habitats etc.) Regulations (NI)* 1995. The *Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) (EU Exit) Regulations* 2019 ensures that the 1995 legislation remains operable after the end of the Brexit transition period on 31st December 2020.

¹¹ ‘References to the Natura 2000 network should be read as references to the UK national site network.’ - see [Terminology interpretation for The Conservation \(Natural Habitats, etc.\) \(Amendment\) \(Northern Ireland\) \(EU Exit\) Regulations 2019](#). This applies to Management Plan in general.

Ramsar sites are wetlands of international importance, such as Garron Plateau, that have been designated under the international Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.¹² At the regional level, Antrim Coast & Glens is also home to various designated sites of national importance including Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) and Nature Reserves which provide statutory protection for important landscapes, wildlife, habitats and geological (earth science) sites.¹³ At a local level, Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance (SLNCIs) are recognised via statutory Planning Policies (Local Development Plans). Councils may also designate local nature reserves (LNRs).

For a full list of natural heritage designations within Antrim Coast & Glens AONB please see [Appendix x](#).

Antrim Coast & Glens AONB designations, marine & terrestrial:

1 Ramsar

5 SACs (2 marine)

2 SPAs

2 MCZs

38 ASSIs

56 SLNCI

13 Nature Reserves

GEODIVERSITY

Every landscape has its foundations in the geology underlying it. Geomorphology, the processes and features which shape geology into the landscapes we recognise, is integral to the natural environment as it creates the surface upon which nature and communities live.

Northern Ireland is one of the most geologically diverse places on Earth for its size and this is reflected in the wealth of geodiversity across the AONB.

Geology – annotated arrow timeline to run at the side of this text noting Period and date so it isn't needed in text.

Pre-Cambrian Period – Cambrian Period - Ordovician Period - Silurian Period

Devonian Period - Around 400 million years ago

Ireland was in desert latitudes south of the equator and sandstones and conglomerates formed in these hot continental desert conditions. These distinctive red sandstones and conglomerates can be seen in Cushendall and Cushendun.

Carboniferous Period

Sea levels rose ushering in tropical marine conditions and an explosion of marine life. As sea levels rose and fell plants periodically flourished in coastal swamps forming thick deposits of plant remains which were later compressed forming coal. Carboniferous coal seams at the coast of Ballycastle were worked and quarried in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

¹² Ramsar sites are generally also designated as ASSIs and so receive statutory protection in Northern Ireland under the *Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands Order (NI) 1985* (NCALO). See [JNCC website](#) for more information.

¹³ ASSIs and Nature Reserves are afforded statutory protection in NI under NCALO, while ASSIs also fall under the *Environment (NI) Order 2002*.

Permian Period

Triassic Period - Approximately 250 million

The land lay at the latitude of the Sahara Desert. Alternating beds of sandstone and mudstone are evidence of a semi-arid environment. These are usually covered by other rock layers. Salt deposits from this Period are mined at Carrickfergus, just south of the AONB.

Jurassic Period 200 million years ago

Mudstone and some limestone beds were deposited. These are rich in marine fossils e.g. bivalves, ammonites and occasional marine reptiles. There are two significant finds dating from this time; first an ichthyosaur discovered at Waterloo Bay in Larne and secondly part of an ichthyosaur skull found just outside Larne in 1991 by a seven-year old girl. This fossil is known as the Minnis Monster. Plesiosaur bones have also been found at Minnis.

Cretaceous Period 144 million years

Sea-levels dramatically rose resulting in thick layers of Ulster White Limestone forming from calcium rich sea life. The striking white limestone which is between 70 and 100 million years old is displayed in exemplar fashion along the coast and easily seen looking across to Rathlin Island.

Paleogene Period

The Antrim Coast & Glens is dominated by the Antrim Plateau, a thick basaltic landform created from many layers of molten lava which poured out from fissures, or rips in the Earth's surface, about 60 million years ago. It is this period of volcanic activity which is responsible for forming the Giant's Causeway, Slemish Mountain and the basalt cliffs around which The Gobbins Cliff Path has been engineered.

Quaternary Period Starting about 2.6 million years ago

This was a time of sculpting and shaping for the AONB as huge ice-sheets spread south from polar latitudes acting like sandpaper on the land, creating the landforms and landscapes we recognise today. This includes the iconic steep sided Glens which were gouged by glaciers and further deepened by rivers. As the ice retreated it deposited huge volumes of material from fine sands and gravels through to huge boulders and relieved tonnes of pressure from the land. Much of the scenery we see dates from approximately 14,000 years ago.

Geodiversity impact on human activity

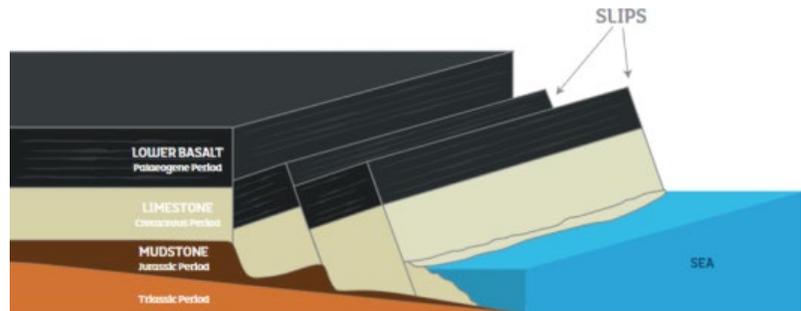
The natural foundations of the AONB shape where and how settlement has grown in the area. The AONBs exposed uplands and steep slopes encouraged settlement in lowland pockets. Resources such as rivers, prominent look-out points such as cliff-tops and mountains, and stone were used by the first settlers. Tools were made from flint and porcellanite at Rathlin and Tievebulliagh while mineral rich soils in the alluvial plains of valleys were used for agriculture.

As society developed, mining and quarrying of coal, bauxite, limestone and iron ore spurred industry. Minerals such as Larnite and Scawtite were first discovered at Scawt Hill.

The AONBs stunning landscapes have encouraged a healthy tourism industry, mostly focused on the Causeway Coastal Route.

The Antrim Coast Road opened up the AONB greatly, as before travel across the AONBs steep valleys and rugged uplands had been difficult and transport via boat was often quicker. However, the Coast Road remains vulnerable to geohazards such as coastal flooding and rock falls.

The bottom layer of the Antrim Coast is Jurassic mudstone which is relatively soft and can flow when saturated with water. Above this Ulster White Limestone sits. It is also soft compared to the heavy top layers of basalt. During the last glaciation in Ireland ice eroded and over-steepened the cliff face creating instability. This instability was exacerbated by the soft Jurassic mudstones and resulted in a geological process called rotational slip. Large blocks of basalt and limestone have moved down the slope and tilted backwards. As a result, it is possible to view blocks of black basalt at the same level as the limestone.



BIODIVERSITY

From open moorlands and upland blanket bogs, to intimate mosaics of grasslands, woodlands and wetlands in the Glens, down to the rugged coastline and sea, the habitats of the AONB support a multitude of important native and priority species of flora and fauna.

This rich diversity of wildlife and habitats constitute a resource of international importance which must be protected. Key examples are highlighted below.

Habitats and Species

Uplands

Uplands represent approximately 80% of the AONB. In upland areas, exposure to strong winds, poor soils and a short growing season creates a harsh environment, resulting in habitats which support a unique variety of plants and animals.¹⁴ Upland habitats also provide important ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration, improving water quality, flood prevention and agriculture.

The AONBs uplands host many land uses and habitat types; agricultural grasslands, woodland, semi-natural vegetation (such as bog) and some residential development.

¹⁴ See [Appendix x](#) Important and Priority Species in Antrim Coast and Glens AONB.

Monitoring by government departments has indicated that seminatural habitats are often lost to agricultural grassland and that peat cutting and heavy grazing have had a detrimental impact on heath and bogland.¹⁵

Upland habitat cover in Antrim Coast & Glens AONB (NI Countryside Survey 2000)	
Semi-natural vegetation	57.8%
Wet bog	13.6%
Dry bog	9.6%
Poor fen	7.3%
Agricultural grassland and crops	24.7%
Woodland	14.9%
Coniferous plantation	12.2%
Broadleaf semi-natural woodland	1.1%
Scattered scrub	1%

*Blanket bog*¹⁶

Blanket bogs are one of the most important habitats found on the island of Ireland and globally. The AONBs bogs are home to priority species such as marsh saxifrage, the viviparous (common) lizard, hen harrier and the argent and sable moth.

Blanket bogs are areas of wet peatland (a waterlogged soil type formed from partially decomposed plant matter) where the peat exceeds 50cm in depth. Ireland's peat bogs formed over the last five to six thousand years, due to a wetter climate and forest clearances by early farmers.

Peatlands, in their natural state, act as carbon sinks by storing and sequestering CO₂ from the atmosphere, while damaged peatlands can contribute to carbon emissions. Healthy peatlands can also decrease run off after rainfall, reducing flooding.

The AONBs uplands supply a significant portion of North Antrim's drinking water and its bogs play a vital role in maintaining and improving water quality. Water from healthy peatlands is naturally high quality, low in pollutants and requires less treatment. Conversely, water from damaged peatlands often has high levels of dissolved nutrients and colour, requiring costly treatment.

Turf cutting (peat extraction) continues within the AONB, with families exercising turbary rights to extract and process peat for fuel and other commercial uses. Turf cutting is not permitted on designated sites and the practice has markedly declined in recent decades.¹⁷ Nevertheless, it remains a clear threat to existing peatlands and blanket bog through the direct destruction and degradation of this habitat type, which only grows at a rate of 1mm per year.

¹⁵ [Habitat Change in the Northern Ireland Countryside: Technical report of the Northern Ireland Countryside Survey 2000](#) . See also the [Northern Ireland Countryside Survey 2007: Broad Habitat Change 1998 – 2007](#) .

¹⁶ See [Rebuilding the Countryside, The Garron Plateau : an example of blanket bog restoration and management in Northern Ireland](#) for more information on the AONBs blanket bogs.

¹⁷ See NIEL's [Peat as Fuel Briefing Note \(2011\)](#) for more information on peat extraction in NI.

Garron Plateau Project: Co-operation Across Borders for Biodiversity (CABB) Project 2017 - 2021

CABB is a €4.9million scheme across three countries supported by the European Union's INTERREG VA Programme. The five-year partnership is led by RSPB NI and involves RSPB Scotland, Birdwatch Ireland, Butterfly Conservation, Moors for the Future and NI Water.

CABB aims to restore 2228 ha of blanket bog across NI, Scotland and Ireland, and improve habitats for the Marsh fritillary butterfly, breeding waders and hen harriers. It will also prepare Conservation Action Plans for eight Natura 2000 sites, including Garron Plateau SAC.

The Garron Plateau is Northern Ireland's largest area of intact blanket bog. The area's environmental significance is recognised by a suite of national and international designations. The Plateau is home to the Dungonnell Reservoir which provides drinking water to over 14,000 homes within and beyond the AONB. Sustainable management of Garron's blanket bog helps to provide high quality water and reduce treatment requirements and costs.

CABB key achievements:

- Extensive drain blocking to help restore blanket bog and improve habitat for breeding waders
- Detailed monitoring, recording of habitats and species and LiDAR mapping
- Supporting farmers and landowners to participate in DAERA's Environmental Farming Scheme (EFS) with a view to effective long-term conservation management of the site.
- Effective engagement with multiple stakeholders and interested parties, including local volunteers, landowners, community groups, statutory agencies and university researchers.

It is hoped that resources will be secured to deliver ongoing conservation management at Garron Plateau following the CABB project.

Upland Heath¹⁸

Upland heath habitats form on mineral soil and thin peat layers (less than 50cm deep). Heath is characterised by the presence of dwarf shrubs such as heather, crowberry and bell heather.

Heaths can be both wet and dry and are often part of an intimate mosaic sitting alongside blanket bog, fens, grassland, scattered scrub, gorse and woodland. Heath is widespread in the Antrim Hills and has a high recreation value for rambling and walking routes and is sometimes used for grazing.

¹⁸ See [NI Priority Habitat Guide for Upland heathland](#) .

CAFRE Hill Farm, Glenwherry

The ongoing Glenwherry Hill Regeneration Partnership (GHRP) Project was established in 2009 to develop, implement and promote sustainable habitat management at the CAFRE Hill Farm and neighbouring privately owned farms. The CAFRE Hill Farm is managed as an educational site for upland farming and part of the 960 ha site is in the Antrim Hills Special Protection Area (SPA).

The GHRP project includes CAFRE, RSPB and the Irish Grouse and Conservation Trust (IGCT) and is supported by Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), the Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group (NIRSG), NIEA and DAERA's Countryside Management Delivery branch. Objectives for the GHRP include habitat management for priority species such as hen harrier, red grouse, curlew, skylark and Irish hare.

Key achievements:

- Conservation management of 550 ha of foraging habitat for hen harriers/merlins.
- Predator control and habitat management achieved a recorded increase in priority species. For example, red grouse numbers rose from 9 pairs in 2009 to over 300 birds recorded in 2020.
- Knowledge transfer and education to landowners, farmers and CAFRE students through training activities and events.

A peatland restoration project, started in 2020, seeks to demonstrate how to restore peatlands after deforestation. Demonstration projects for ecosystem services of carbon sequestration, water quality and flood alleviation provided by uplands are also being developed.

Lowlands

Lowlands account for approximately 22% of Antrim Coast & Glens AONB.¹⁹ Much of the AONBs lowlands are used for pastoral farming and are home to villages, farmsteads, private residences and other amenities. Lowland habitats include improved grasslands, meadows and broadleaved woodlands.

Land use monitoring highlighted the continued loss of seminatural habitats within the AONBs lowlands. An increasing amount of land is being converted to less species rich yet more productive agricultural land, eroding other sensitive habitats rich in biodiversity. Increased building and development also encroaches on lowland habitats.²⁰

Lowland habitat cover in Antrim Coast & Glens AONB (NI Countryside Survey 2000)	
Agricultural grassland and crops	68.6%
Perennial ryegrass habitat	44.4%
Semi-natural vegetation	24.7%
Sea cliff/ledge vegetation	2.9%
Scattered bracken	2.9%

¹⁹ [NI Countryside Survey 2000.](#)

²⁰ [Habitat Change in the Northern Ireland Countryside: Technical report of the Northern Ireland Countryside Survey 2000](#) . See also the [Northern Ireland Countryside Survey 2007: Broad Habitat Change 1998 – 2007](#) .

Woodland	5.8%
Broadleaf semi-natural woodland	1.4%
Broadleaf plantation	1.4%
Scattered scrub	1.2%

Glens Great Grasslands

*HoTG colour coded and logo

11 meadows, covering over 20 acres, were established from 2015 - 2019 regenerating sterile lawns, verges and rank or unused grasslands. Partners propagated and translocated rare wildflowers such as meadow cranes-bill and wood cranes-bill to selected sites. This was an important effort by many organisations, groups and individuals to expand lowland meadows and management agreements are in place to maintain these meadows moving forward.

The Glens Great Grassland Trail links the main villages of the Antrim Glens and is promoted via an [associated booklet](#).



*Lowland meadow*²¹

Lowland meadows are semi-natural unimproved grasslands often found on agricultural grasslands where little or no fertilizer and sensitive grazing practices are used. They can also be found in churchyards, roadside verges and other wildlife corridors such as field boundaries.

They are species rich and home to a variety of wildlife including the skylark, corncrake (Rathlin Island), the Irish hare, and rare wildflowers such as Irish ladies-tresses, meadow cranes-bill (Rathlin Island) and wood cranes-bill (Glenarm).

²¹ See [NI Priority Habitat Guide for Lowland meadow](#).

Woodlands and Forests

In 2000, woodlands and forests accounted for a fifth of the AONBs land area. The majority was coniferous plantations in the AONBs uplands; a quarter was broadleaved seminatural woodland, broadleaf plantation or scattered scrub in the AONBs lowland areas. Since 2000 forest cover in NI has increased and afforestation initiatives have expanded.²²

Most woodlands and forests are owned, managed or maintained by Forest Service.

Semi-natural 'native' woodland

Patches of semi-natural and native woodlands can be found on the AONBs scarps and steep river valleys. These woodlands usually comprise of hazel and ash with varying amounts of hawthorn, blackthorn, birch, rowan and willow. Oak woodlands can also be found in several areas, most notably at Breen Oakwood Nature Reserve and at Glenarm Estate. Some areas of native woodland have been designated as ASSIs (including Breen Wood, Glenariff and Glenarm) and around 6% of forests and woodlands in the Antrim area are included in the Ancient Woodland Inventory, being in continuous existence since at least 1830.²³

Glenarm Demesne and Deer Park

Glenarm Demesne and Deer Park is widely regarded for its special woodland or parkland. The area is designated an ASSI for its unusual veteran trees, and also has archaeological interest.

Many of Glenarm's oaks display an unusual form with boughs growing near to ground level. This is likely a result of intense animal grazing over many years which led to young oaks sprouting numerous stems or may be regrowth from ancient oaks felled long ago.

Glenarm Demesne is privately owned and managed by Glenarm Estate, while Ulster Wildlife manage a Nature Reserve within the site. Forest Service lease an area of the historic Deer Park and manage nearby Glenarm Forest. Public access is available to some parts of the demesne, with additional events and activities throughout the year.

Glenarm Estate implement nature friendly farming practices such as controlled livestock grazing to protect the area's rich biodiversity which includes the extremely rare wildflower wood cranes-bill and the silver-washed fritillary butterfly.

Semi-natural woodlands tend to have a rich ground flora including bluebells, wood anemones, wild garlic, primrose and opposite-leaved golden-saxifrage. NI priority species can be found across the AONBs woodlands, including bullfinch, starling, red squirrels, pine martens and bat species. A red squirrel viewing hide was erected at the privately owned Cregagh Wood, Cushendun, an important native woodland.

²² See [Provisional Woodland Statistics 2019 edition](#) (June 2019)

²³ See Forest Service's [Scoping a new forestry plan for Antrim area forests and woodlands](#).

Some particularly rare species including wood vetch, toothwort, yellow bird's-nest and bird's-nest orchid can be found at sites such as Straidkilly Nature Reserve, while the copse snail is found on the margins of hazel woods along the Antrim Coast. The Pyrenean glass snail and silver-washed fritillary butterfly have both been recorded at Glenarm.

Coniferous plantations

The majority of forests within the AONB are publicly owned conifer plantations managed by Forest Service in the AONBs uplands. These plantations tend to be less species diverse but can act as important wildlife corridors supporting some NI priority species such as red squirrels, pine martens, hen harrier and Irish hare. Conifer plantations also contribute to important ecosystem services such as carbon capture and can also improve water quality and contribute to flood management in catchments that support other NI priority species, including the Atlantic Salmon and otter.

Hedges and hedgerows

Field boundaries, hedgerows, dry stone walls and earth banks criss-cross the AONB landscape and form the distinctive ladder farms characteristic of steep sided Glens. They also constitute semi-natural habitats for wildlife.

Well managed hedgerows of native species such as hawthorn, ash, blackthorn, gorse or hazel, are particularly important; they provide useful wildlife corridors, connecting habitats, and providing food, cover and nesting sites for birds and other animals. Hedgerows can also be home to a rich variety of flora including primrose, wood anemone, lords and ladies and bluebell.

Wetlands and waterways

The term wetlands refers to lakes, fens and flooded grasslands. The AONB hosts a number of lakes and wetlands including the Garron Plateau's blanket bog and upland lakes which is the AONBs only Ramsar site. Vulnerable priority species such as the lesser butterfly-orchid, curlew and other breeding waders, and the rare marsh fritillary butterfly call these wetlands home.

The AONBs waterways (rivers, streams and reservoirs) offer further important habitats and enclaves for biodiversity and contribute to the character and shape of the AONBs distinctive landscape. Priority species in the AONBs riparian environments include European eel, salmon, river lamprey and otters.

Together wetlands and waterways provide important ecosystem services for local communities, including natural flood protections, water supply, recreation opportunities and are important for agriculture and fisheries.

Marine and Coast

Antrim Coast & Glens AONB boasts some of the most impressive coastal and marine habitats in Northern Ireland, some of which are designated for nature conservation. Spectacular cliffs, rocky shores, shingle beaches and muddy estuaries all provide important habitats for a variety of species.

The marine area is not technically within the AONB boundary as it encompasses terrestrial lands only, but the marine area and its habitats directly impact the AONB.

Coastal cliffs are important habitats. Rathlin Island is home to special cliff habitats which are designated as both an SAC and SPA as they provide internationally important nesting sites for seabirds such as guillemot, razorbill and puffin. Further south, The Maidens Islands (a marine SAC) are a breeding site for cormorants, shags and seals. Generally, the cliffs and rocky coastline of the AONB supports a wealth of rare flora such as thrift, red valerian and sea campion.

The shores and waters of the Antrim Coast boast a wide selection of habitats, including kelp beds which are characteristic of Rathlin and calcareous algae maerl beds off Garron Point and Ballygally Head. A variety of marine mammals, such as grey seals, harbour porpoise and bottlenose dolphins are regularly spotted along the Antrim Coast.

See Appendix x Important and Priority Species in Antrim Coast and Glens AONB for more information on the AONBs biodiversity.

AGRICULTURE AND LAND MANAGEMENT

Agriculture

The majority of the AONBs land is managed by farmers. Farming and agricultural practices are a key factor shaping and influencing the character of the AONB landscape and the condition of its natural environment.

Fertile land in the AONB is productive farmland, while poorer quality land on higher elevations is primarily used for sheep farming. Most farming is beef and sheep, with some potatoes and other crops grown on better ground. DAERA monitors and supports the agricultural sector and encourages environmentally friendly farming practices and agri-environment schemes that support the conservation management of sensitive sites and protected areas.

Glens Resilient Farms *HoTG colour coded and logo

Glens Resilient Farms worked closely with farmers in trialling a new approach to sustainable, improved and diversified farm business. The project championed nature friendly farming practices as a means to aid farm business resilience in areas including climate (wind & water), soil, stock, crop changes/protection and diversification opportunities.

Key achievements:

- 13 farm plans created with farmers, covering 965 ha
- Landowner training on green infrastructure, such as hedge and tree planting, to improve stock protection, pest reduction, stock handling and pasture management.
- 413% increase in broadleaf woodland on participating farms. Supported by the Woodland Trust, farmers planted significant areas of hedgerow and small sections of woodland.
- Improvements to countryside access was achieved as some farmers extended access over their land as part of diversification (tourism opportunities).

See [Glens of Antrim Resilient Farms Project Report](#) for more information.

Environmental Farming Scheme (EFS)

This voluntary agri-environment scheme is supported by NI Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. Landowners can apply for up to five agreements under which they receive payment to deliver activities that support conservation management objectives geared towards protecting biodiversity and the natural environment.

There are three levels:

Wider Level Scheme: aimed at delivering benefits across the wider countryside outside of environmentally designated areas.

Higher Level Scheme: aimed at site specific environmental improvements at strategically important sites and for priority habitats and species.

Group Level Scheme: to support co-operative work by farmers in specific areas, such as river catchments, or commonages. Currently in the pilot phase.

Unsurprisingly much of the AONB is eligible for EFS higher thanks to its special natural environment. As of 2020, there are 81 EFS higher agreements in place with landowners within the AONB.

Please see the [DAERA website](#) for more information on EFS and how to apply.

Conservation land management within the AONB

Conservation organisations, such as NIEA, Ulster Wildlife, RSPB and National Trust, own and/or manage certain sites for the protection and conservation of natural heritage.

Management partnerships also exist in some areas, including at Garron Plateau SAC [[link to Project profile](#)] and the Glenwherry Hill Farm Regeneration Project [[link to project profile](#)]. Long running management partnerships are ongoing on Rathlin Island between the National Trust and RSPB.

Under the NI Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, NIEA are developing Conservation Management Plans for Natura 2000 sites to improve their management, while the expansion of the Management of Sensitive Sites (MOSS) scheme will further support favourable management at designated sites.²⁴

AONB total land area in hectares

72,488.65

***Reviewed by Forest Service** Forest Service manages 14% of the AONB (10,240 ha). The *Forestry Act (Northern Ireland)*

2010 places a statutory duty on Forest Service to promote afforestation and sustainable forestry - this commitment is partly realised through Forest Plans. Forest Plans outline how Forest Service forests and woodlands in the Forest Planning Area will be managed to provide the required balance of ecosystem services. The plan is used to communicate to forest managers and stakeholders when and where forest management activities should take place and how individual forests will evolve during the period of the plan. More information on forestry planning in Northern Ireland is available from the [DAERA Forestry Planning Storymap](#).

AONB land under management of conservation organisations		
Organisation	Land Area (Ha)	Sites
NIEA	142	Breen Wood, Glenariffe Glen, Kebble, Slieveanorra *NIEA to confirm
National Trust	1427	Cushendun, Layde Car Park, Murlough Bay, Rathlin Island – Ballyconaghan and Ballycarry. *Cushleake Mountain in NT ownership but not directly managed by NT.
RSPB	80	Rathlin Island
Ulster Wildlife	243	Feystown, Glenarm, Glendun Hill Farm, Straidkilly
Woodland Trust	36	The Drum, Cargan

²⁴ The Management of Sensitive Sites (MOSS) grant scheme was first launched by EHS (now NIEA) in 2002 and offered modest grants for landowners to carry out conservation work on designated ASSIs.

Woodland areas managed by Forest Service in Antrim Coast and Glens AONB 2020		
	Forest Service	Not Forest Service
Conifer	7138.143	576.613
Broadleaf	318.279	941.386
Mixed	61.563	339.229
Open Ground	595.983	268.973
Total (ha)	8113.968	2126.201
% of AONB area	11%	3%

**Open Ground includes unplanted and unknown areas. Data provided by Forest Service.

Councils also own/manage sites and amenities within the AONB including for access and recreational purposes, such as car parks, picnic areas, playing fields and play parks. Councils are also responsible for some sites of natural heritage interest.

Additionally, some sections of the AONBs landscape are managed by large landowners, mainly for agricultural purposes. Blakiston Houston Estate Company manage and lease upland areas in the northern section of the AONB, while Glenarm Estate [\[link to profile\]](#) includes farmland, commercial areas and some public access. Renewable energy companies own and lease land for turbines in several locations across the AONB.

ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Monitoring, research and accessible data

Complete, accessible and accurate data is lacking. Such data is vital to inform appropriate conservation action or to provide an evidence base for future recommendations or strategic policies. Monitoring and research is conducted by an array of agencies and organisations but access to this data across organisations can be difficult.

NIEA carry out monitoring and condition assessments of designated natural heritage sites on 6-year cycles. Data for ASSIs is made available annually but information concerning Natura 2000 sites is not currently readily accessible.

Condition of NI ASSIs			
	2009	2020	
Favourable condition	66%	62%	4% drop
Unfavourable condition	31%	35%	4% increase
Unfavourable - recovering	3%	3%	Stable
Data from NI Environmental Statistics Reports 2009 & 2020			

****Condition data for Natura 2000 designations required from NIEA**

Agriculture and land management

The predominance of livestock farming within the AONB contributes to the loss of semi-natural habitats. Over 90% of NI's agricultural land is used for grazing livestock with only 4% used for growing crops²⁵, resulting in the extension of improved grasslands for grazing and a corresponding decrease in semi-natural grasslands which are better for biodiversity. Fertilisers, pesticides and other land management techniques have also been shown to have detrimental impacts on ecology and water quality, while agriculture is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in NI.

Agri-environment schemes play an important role in mitigating agriculture's impact on the natural environment by resourcing landowners to implement nature friendly farming practices. However, the last five years has seen a 90% drop in NI agricultural land being managed under agri-environment schemes due to the discontinuation of several schemes by DAERA.²⁶ Meanwhile, colloquially it is thought that landowners' perceptions of current or past schemes is impacting on uptake and compliance.

Limited resources

Limited resources present challenges for the delivery of AONB objectives. Government departments, Councils and others have experienced budget cuts in recent years, while the UK's exit from the European Union in 2020 and the Covid-19 pandemic may impact on working practices and funding opportunities.

HoTG LPS resourced and enabled many natural, built and cultural heritage projects within the AONB area but ended in March 2020. It is hoped that there are opportunities to continue some activities via the project's legacy but resources are limited.

Climate Change

The [UK Climate Projections 2018](#) is the latest generation of national climate projections for the UK and presents the most recent scientific evidence on climate change projections. Projected changes include increased chance of warmer, wetter winters and drier summers, with increased risk of heavy summer rainfall events. It is likely that there will be an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events including heat waves, and heavy precipitation. In addition, there are likely to be increases to extreme coastal water levels driven by both sea level rise and storm surges. All of these are likely to be experienced within the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB in the coming decades.

The [UK Climate Change Risk Assessment 2017 \(CCRA\)](#) evidence report identified a number of risks and opportunities as a result of projected climate change that are broadly grouped into four themes: natural environment and natural assets; infrastructure; people and the built environment and; business and industry.

²⁵ [Statistical Review of NI Agriculture 2019](#)

²⁶ [Statistical Review of NI Agriculture 2019](#) – this drop is due to the expiration of previous agri-environment scheme agreements with landowners over the period, such as the Northern Ireland Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS). All NICMS agreements expired on 31st December 2019. Current Environmental Farming Scheme agreements cover only a fraction of the area of previous schemes.

The differences in geography, as well as in the climate change projections, means that some risks and opportunities in Northern Ireland will differ from elsewhere in the UK as outlined in the [UK CCRA 2017 Summary for Northern Ireland](#). Climate change will present a particularly high risk for biodiversity and geodiversity within the AONB. Some of the key risks and association challenges for the AONB include:

- Rising sea level and increased storm surges leading to increased coastal erosion with likely degradation of important geological and earth science sites;
- Increased heavy rainfall events causing higher frequency of geological hazards such as landslides and rock fall leading to damaged infrastructure and loss of income for tourism businesses;
- Decline in priority habitats and species due to inability to respond to changing climatic conditions;
- Increase in pests, pathogens and invasive species may threaten ecosystems due to warmer temperatures;
- Damage to intertidal and coastal habitats and associated heritage due to extreme coastal water levels;
- Estuarine and river ecologies threatened by tidal flooding, higher temperatures and reduced water quality;
- Higher sea temperatures could lead to decline in fish populations like sand eel, with a subsequent impact on seabird populations;
- Detrimental impacts on agriculture due to flooding, change in frequency of extreme weather (land-use suitability, threat to animal health and crop yields).

The [NI Climate Change Adaptation Programme 2019-2024](#) led by DAERA outlines how NI Government Departments are supporting, developing and implementing actions for climate change adaptation that will help to reduce vulnerability to its impacts and increase resilience. One such example is the Geological Survey of Northern Ireland (GSNI) who are working to develop a pilot study to monitor and assess the risk of geological hazards associated with climate change at a number of coastal tourist locations. This will help to better understand these processes and contribute to enhanced risk management.

Local authorities also acknowledge the threat posed by climate change, with actions incorporated into statutory documents such as Community Plans and Local Development Plans and with support shown for various climate change initiatives. Conservation organisations have also incorporated climate change action into policies and plans, including the National Trust and Ulster Wildlife.

Afforestation schemes have gained momentum in recent years, as a means of combatting climate change through carbon sequestration and providing natural flood defences. However, the encroachment of self-seedlings from pre-existing forests and woodlands into vulnerable peatlands has already been noted as an issue within the AONB. Forest Service are trying to reduce cases of this through Forest Plans but existing self-seeders need to be managed or removed.

MEA4Trees initiative

MEABC, in partnership with the Woodland Trust, have committed to planting 58,000 trees across the Borough by 2025, one tree for every resident.

This afforestation project supports climate change mitigation and will be supported by actions within the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB Action Plan 2021 – 2025.



Wildfires and inappropriate behaviour in the countryside

Wildfires continue to be a problem in Antrim Coast and Glens AONB and can lead to catastrophic damage of priority habitats and species. The threat wildfires pose to the vulnerable upland environments of Antrim Coast & Glens AONB is especially concerning as these areas are home to a number of priority species.²⁷

Wildfires threaten valuable habitats, property and are a risk to life. Drier summers and warmer temperatures are likely to exacerbate conditions, making wildfires more common and increasing their spread.

Wildfires in Northern Ireland are caused by human activity either by accident or deliberately, there are no known incidents of wildfires being caused naturally. Many do not fully comprehend the risks posed by wildfires or how their behaviour can contribute to this problem - more outreach is needed to raise awareness of the issue and wildfire prevention. A Wildfire Strategy is currently being drafted for Northern Ireland and will set the direction for how the issue of wildfires will be addressed going forward.

Littering and fly tipping are damaging the AONBs natural environment. Anecdotal accounts from local communities indicate an increase in this issue across the AONB.²⁸ Similarly, surveys by Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful have shown increases in terrestrial and marine litter in recent years.²⁹ Littering and fly

²⁷ [Quantifying the impact of wildfires in Northern Ireland](#) (2016, DAERA) found that recent wildfires in upland areas had a detrimental impact on ecosystem services and species – in 2011 alone 3,801 ha of designated upland habitats within 9 ASSIs (including Slieveanorra and Croaghan) were destroyed. See also [IUCN report](#) on the impacts of controlled burning on peatlands.

²⁸ See [Appendix x Consultation Findings](#) – 9% of respondents to the community questionnaire flagged littering and pollution as a key challenge faced by the AONB.

²⁹ See [NI Environmental Statistics Report 2019](#).

tipping can be dangerous to human health, as well as damaging to wildlife, habitats and livestock. The removal of fly tipping can also be costly and time consuming for farmers and other landowners.

Wildcamping was also identified by stakeholders as an issue. Remote and rural areas of the AONB do not have facilities such as toilets, outdoor bins or picnic areas. Some users do not dispose of their waste properly and do not always mitigate against the impacts of campfires or other activities on the natural environment. Trespass and the disturbance of wildlife and livestock has also been reported.

Invasive species and disease

Invasive species are ‘harmful alien species whose introduction or spread threatens the environment, the economy, or society, including human health’.³⁰ Once established, invasive species are extremely difficult and costly to eradicate or even control³¹ and their environmental impact can be catastrophic and irreversible. Invasives include plant and animal species, fungi and pathogens (diseases).

Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Rhododendron are widespread in the Antrim Glens³² and are causing damage to the AONBs waterways by contributing to flooding, erosion and sedimentation in some areas. Such invasives can become dominant in hotspots to the detriment of native species, encroaching onto agricultural land and damaging fences and other property.

****Insert Survey Map A Summary of Invasives**

Invasive grey squirrels spread squirrel pox which is fatal for native red squirrels and they compete for food and shelter, causing a significant reduction in red squirrel populations.

Efforts of groups such as the Glens Red Squirrel Group help to protect and track red squirrel populations within the AONB.

As part of the overall approach to enhancement of species on Rathlin Island a specific programme of eradication of brown rats and ferrets has been developed by the Rathlin Steering Group. The Rathlin Steering Group is made up of a partnership between RDCA, RSPB, DAERA and CCGHT. The proposed programme aims to enhance sea bird colonies on Rathlin through reducing the threat that invasive rats and ferrets pose to these internationally important bird populations through eradication. Research indicates that the control of these non-native predators is feasible. Concept notes for the first stage of EU LIFE support has been developed by RSPB and supported by partners.

Red Squirrels United

Ulster Wildlife’s Red Squirrels United Project (2016-19) brought together partners to protect red squirrels in key strongholds including in the Antrim Glens. Ulster Wildlife worked with local red squirrel groups to improve habitat management, undertake red squirrel monitoring and support grey squirrel control.

Key achievements:

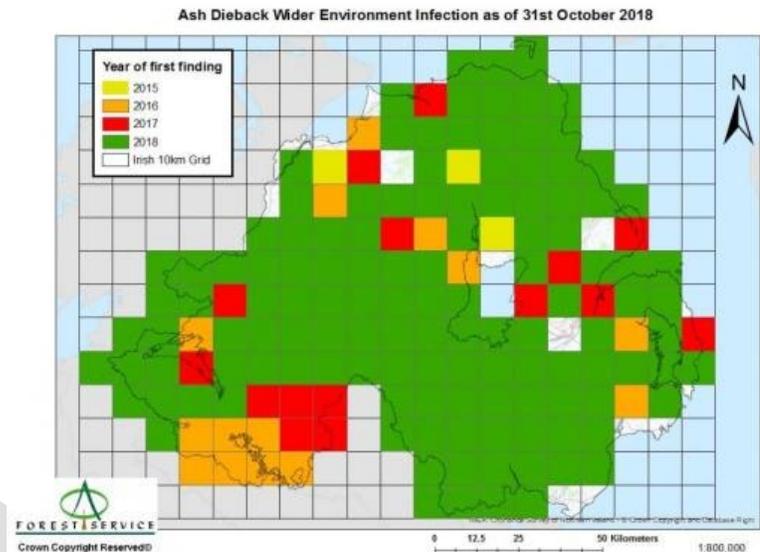
- The Red Squirrels United Ranger undertook best practice Grey Squirrel control in the Broughshane/ Ballygalley area providing vital protection for the Red Squirrel populations to the north.
- The Red Squirrels United Officer engaged with local communities and ran LANTR accredited best practice grey squirrel control training.

³⁰ [An Invasive Alien Species Strategy for Northern Ireland \(2013\)](#)

³¹ [The economic cost of invasive and non-native species in Ireland and Northern Ireland \(2013\)](#) estimated the annual cost of invasive species control in Northern Ireland to be over £46million.

³² [Heart of the Glens Invasive Species Survey 2016 Final Report \(2017\)](#)

Hymenoscyphus fraxineus (Ash Dieback) disease is a significant threat and was first detected in Co. Antrim in 2012 and has since spread across NI. Containment is not feasible, however, its spread may be slowed by removing and burning affected Ash plants and leaves.³³ Ash can be found in most of the AONBs hedgerows and in some woodlands and so Ash dieback could have a significant impact on biodiversity and landscape character in Antrim Coast and Glens.



Inappropriate development

Inappropriate development was a key concern raised during consultation.³⁴ Housing and transport requirements and a growing tourism industry have increased demand for the development of infrastructure, buildings and facilities within the AONB. Over 40% of the AONBs land area is covered by high level nature conservation designations and is sensitive to change; large scale developments may impact on these protected areas and landscape character. The NIRLCA 2016 notes renewable energy development, marine development, housing pressures, tourism infrastructure and mineral extraction as key forces for change within the AONB.

Wind energy developments in particular have sparked debate amongst stakeholders and communities, with several consultees expressing concern over potential impacts on vulnerable habitats, species and landscape character and others noting the importance of renewable energy.

Councils are now responsible for planning and development decisions and for implementing relevant planning legislation and have conducted development pressure studies in recent years.³⁵ Keeping track of developmental pressures in and around protected areas will assist the proper implementation of planning policy which is vital for the protection of the AONBs sensitive landscapes. Planning should seek to balance the needs of communities with the protection and conservation of the natural environment through sustainable development.

³³ See [DAERA website](#) for more information.

³⁴ See [Appendix x](#) – findings from the community questionnaire indicate that inappropriate development (negatively impacting the natural environment and landscape character) was a key concern for respondents with 18% raising this as a challenge faced by the AONB – 4 respondents identified wind farm development specifically as an area for concern. The need for sustainable development was the most popular concern raised by 19% of respondents. Such themes were also raised over the course of consultation meetings with local biodiversity groups.

³⁵ See [Appendix B: Development Pressure Analysis](#) (2019) of the Mid and East Antrim Local Development Plan 2030 (Draft Plan Strategy) - and [Discussion Paper 13: Countryside Pressure Analysis](#) (2018) of the Causeway Coast and Glens Local Development Plan 2030 (Preferred Options Paper).

Recommendations for Natural Environment

Cohesive natural environment data collection which is accessible to stakeholders

Support landowners to protect our special areas and aid farm resilience

Support citizen science opportunities and community conservation efforts

Support heritage skills training and educational/outreach activities

Conserve and protect priority species and habitats

Increase hedgerows and tree planting

Reduce invasive species

Support peatland restoration and other climate change mitigation measures

Establish the North Coast Wildfire Group

Increase public awareness of wildfire prevention

Promote Leave No Trace ethics for the outdoors and nature

Champion sustainable development within the AONB, protecting landscape character and habitats.

DRAFT

4. BUILT HERITAGE & CULTURE

Antrim Coast & Glens AONB has been inhabited by people for thousands of years. Historic features, stories, culture and traditions reveal a long, fascinating and living heritage.

The Department for Communities' Historic Environment Division (HED) records, protects, conserves and promotes Northern Ireland's historic environment.

The value of built heritage and culture

The built heritage of the AONB is an important resource. It holds economic potential³⁶ as a driver for tourism but also provides important additional resources for local communities. It constitutes an educational resource and may help to foster pride of place and a sense of identity for communities, by evidencing long established histories and traditions. The protection and maintenance of our built heritage also contributes to environmental sustainability. The reuse and repair of old buildings reduces waste and produces less carbon emissions than the construction of new buildings.³⁷

Culture too has an intrinsic value in its potential to enrich lives, shape experiences, sense of place and identity; evidence shows it can also contribute greatly to the health, wellbeing, education and economic prospects of communities.³⁸

BUILT HERITAGE

Protections and Designations

Built heritage is an intrinsic feature of the AONBs landscape character and history. Protections and designations help to conserve the AONBs built heritage assets.

The majority of statutory protections afforded to the AONBs built heritage are derived from planning policy and legislation which aims to prevent inappropriate development in and around sites of conservation interest.³⁹

Listed buildings of special architectural or historic interest are protected under the *Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011*; they are recorded on the List of Buildings register. Guidance for listed building owners can be found on the [DfC website](#).

Listed buildings	431
Scheduled sites and monuments	141
State care sites and monuments	5
Registered parks, gardens, demesnes	9

³⁶ [Study of the Economic Value of Northern Ireland's Historic Environment](#) (2012) found that the historic environment generates c.£532 million of output per annum and sustains c.10,000 full time equivalent jobs in NI.

³⁷ [Lose or Reuse: Managing Heritage Sustainably](#) (2007), published by Ulster Architectural Heritage Society.

³⁸ See [The Value of Arts and Culture to People and Society: an evidence review](#) by Arts Council England.

³⁹ See [Appendix x](#) Statutory Framework and Policy Context for more information on planning and development.

Scheduled monuments are sites of regional importance, designated under the *Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995*. Any activity on a scheduled site must be consented by HED, who may work with the owner of a scheduled monument to undertake repairs, manage grazing or facilitate public access. Field monument wardens monitor monument condition on a risk-based cycle and offer advice to owners.⁴⁰

State care sites and monuments are built heritage sites in the ownership or guardianship of DfC. They represent some of the best examples of monument types in the region. There are 190 State care sites and monuments in Northern Ireland, 5 of these are in Antrim Coast and Glens AONB.

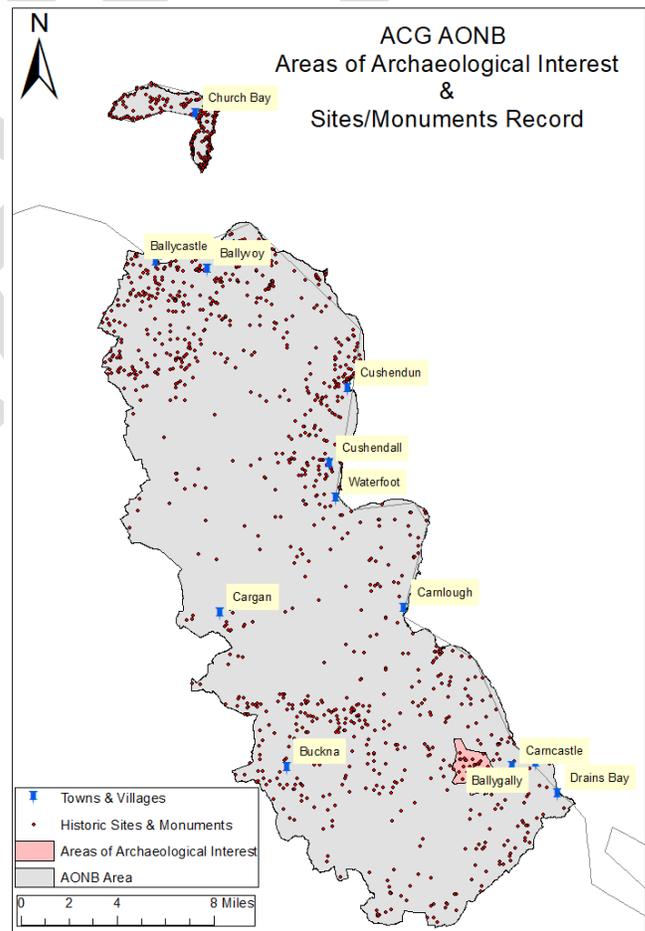
Although the AONB does not cover the marine area it is important to recognise the significant marine heritage in nearby waters. The HMS Drake wreck lies off Rathlin Island and was designated a scheduled monument in 2017.

The Register of parks, gardens and demesnes of historic interest identifies gardens or parks of exceptional importance. There are 9 within Antrim Coast and Glens AONB. The Strategic Planning Policy Statement for NI (SPPS) states that developments should not be approved where they would lead to the loss or damage of Historic Parks, Gardens and Demesnes.

Conservation Areas, such as Ballycastle or Cushendun, are areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. The designation aims to preserve the character of such areas, introducing controls on the demolition of unlisted buildings, protecting trees, features and prohibiting inappropriate development. There are 5 Conservation Areas in Antrim Coast & Glens AONB.⁴¹

Areas of Significant Archaeological Interest (ASAs) are non-statutory designations, which are attributed to archaeological sites of national importance via local planning policy. The AONBs only ASA is the promontory fort at Knock Dhu, Cairncastle.

The [Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record](#) (NISMR) features numerous built heritage sites of historical/archaeological significance from across the AONB, including designated and undesignated sites. Further information can also be found at the [NI Buildings Database](#) (listed buildings), [Historic Environment Map viewer](#) and [Historic Environment Register of Northern Ireland](#) (HERoNI).



⁴⁰ Advice for owners of scheduled monuments can also be found on the [DfC website](#).

⁴¹ Guidance for those living within a Conservation Area can be accessed at [NI Direct website](#).

See **Appendix x** for more information on designated built heritage sites within Antrim Coast & Glens AONB.

Archaeology

All periods of human occupation on the island of Ireland are represented by sites and artefacts within Antrim Coast & Glens AONB.

Mesolithic era (8000 BC – 4000 BC)

Many Mesolithic flint tools, sites and settlements have been discovered along the Antrim Coast, evidence of some of Ireland's earliest settlers. Mesolithic peoples were hunter gatherers who utilised flint and wooden implements to build their homes, to prepare food, make clothes and more. Mesolithic sites include Bay Farm, Carnlough (scheduled) and a site near Castle Carra, Cushendun.

Community excavation at Cushendun – HoTG LPS

In 2014, a community excavation at Cushendun conducted by the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork (Queens University Belfast) focused on two sites in the vicinity of Glenmona House. It built on previous excavations around Cushendun in the 1930s and from 1995 to 2004, which uncovered Mesolithic artefacts near the River Dun and a Mesolithic settlement site close to Castle Carra.

Some 19th and 20th century pottery fragments and prehistoric flint tools were uncovered and a high level of community participation helped better connect people with their built heritage.



Neolithic era (4000 – 2500 BC)

During the Neolithic era people migrated from mainland Europe, bringing pottery skills and farming practices. This impacted the landscape greatly as woods and forests were cleared to make room for crops and livestock. Good quality axes were needed to fell trees leading to the earliest known industry in the area.

Axe heads were made from a rare stone called porcellanite, found only on Rathlin Island and at Tievebulliagh, near Cushendall. These were exported to mainland Britain, the Scottish Isles and some have been discovered in mainland Europe.

Neolithic settlement sites have been unearthed across the AONB – such as at Ballyvennaght (scheduled), Mad Man’s Window near Glenarm and a site at Ballygalley.⁴² Archaeological evidence indicates that Rathlin Island was first inhabited during the Neolithic period.

Neolithic megalithic tomb structures are also common.⁴³ All four known megalithic tomb types characteristic to Northern Ireland can be found within Antrim Coast & Glens AONB:

- Court tomb – Ossian’s Grave (a state care monument at Lubitavish), a rare double court tomb at Ballypatrick (scheduled) and Tervillin Court Tomb at Culfeightrin (scheduled).
- Portal tomb – Ticloy outside of Carnlough (scheduled). Three portal tombs were discovered buried in a bog at Ballyvennaght (scheduled).
- Passage tomb – Several at Torr Head, including at Cross (scheduled), Greenanmore and Carnanmore. An unexcavated example is situated on top of Knocklayd (scheduled).
- Wedge tomb – Tervillin, Culfeightrin (scheduled) and at Dunteige, near Ballygalley, known as the ‘Giant’s Grave’.

Bronze Age (2500 – 500 BC)

In the Bronze Age, migrants from Eastern Europe brought metalworking, distinctive pottery styles and other cultural changes. There was a departure from multiple burials inside megalithic tombs to individual burials or cremations in pits, urns or stone lined cists. Bronze Age burial sites have been found, including the multi period Bay Farm settlement near Carnlough (scheduled), at Drumnakeel and Glenmakeeran (Culfeightrin) and at Church Bay, Rathlin Island (scheduled). Pottery, gold, bronze and flint artefacts from the Bronze Age have been discovered at numerous sites across the AONB.

Standing stones, common from this period, dot the landscape. Some are associated with burials such as on Rathlin (scheduled) and at Drumnakeel (destroyed). Earthworks may also have been part of rituals or burials; the Linford Barrows near Cairncastle and the Twin Towers earthen circles near Cushendall (state care monument) are believed to date to the Bronze Age.

Some of the most impressive Bronze Age remains within the AONB take the form of fortifications. Excavations at Knock Dhu ASAI (Cairncastle) revealed the remains of a later Bronze Age settlement on top of the headland and within a promontory fort (also scheduled).⁴⁴

⁴² See *The Archaeology of Ulster: From Colonization to Plantation*, by J.P Mallory and T.E McNeill (1991) on Neolithic settlement.

⁴³ See *Forgotten Places of the North Coast* by J.D.C. Marshall (1991 revised) for a list of key stone age sites.

⁴⁴ Until recent years Knock Dhu was thought to date to the Iron Age but after radiocarbon dating of the site following excavations in 2008 (as part of Channel 4’s Time Team) it is now believed to be late Bronze Age. See ‘Excavations at Knock Dhu, Ballyhackett, Co. Antrim 2008’ by Philip Macdonald, *Emania* 23 (2016),pp.33-52 (academia.edu).

Iron Age (500 BC – 400 AD)

The Iron Age in Ireland is characterised by the influence of the Celts of North West Europe, evidenced in Irish Iron Age (La Tene) decorative art styles. Intricate Iron Age sword scabbards found at Lisnacrogher are considered some of the finest discovered in Ireland.

Metalworking improved with the smelting of iron and more sophisticated farming practices were adopted. Society was made up of an aristocracy of local chieftains and regional kings, with clashes between clans being commonplace. Cattle farming was increasingly important. As a result, fortifications were common. Lurigethan inland promontory fort and settlement (scheduled), near Cushendall, is thought to date to the Iron Age, as is the remains of a fortified rock outcrop at Craiganalbanagh and a crannog (a small man-made island) located in Lough na Cranagh on Fair Head (scheduled).

Links between the AONB area and Scotland grew in this period. The North Antrim clan of Dál Riata (Dalriada) gained power in Scotland, taking lands in Argyll from the Picts by the 5th century AD.⁴⁵

Early Christian Era and the Viking Age (c.400 – 1100 AD)

Fortifications, such as raths/ringforts (farmsteads surrounded by a circular earthen fortification) and cashels (stone raths), continued to be commonplace in the early Christian period. Key examples include Altagore, a spectacular cashel near Cushendun (scheduled), and the raised rath and souterrains at Deer Park Farms, Glenarm. Souterrains (stone lined tunnels for hiding livestock, people or goods) were very common in North Antrim at this time and dot the landscape.

As Ireland turned to Christianity from the 5th century AD, churches and ecclesiastical structures were built, including early Christian churches and cemeteries on Rathlin Island, an ancient church site at Drumnakill (scheduled) and The Broughanlea Cross at Culfeightrin (scheduled).

From the late 8th to mid-9th centuries, Norse (Viking) raiders plundered ecclesiastical sites in Ireland before settling on the island. The Annals of Ulster record a raid on Rathlin Island in 795AD, making it the first place in Ireland to be raided by Vikings. A Viking grave was reportedly discovered in Church Bay in the 18th century and a Viking hoard was discovered in the early 20th century.⁴⁶ Around 1840 workmen constructing the railway along the coast near Larne also discovered a Viking burial.

The Anglo-Norman era and Plantation (c.1100 – 1700 AD)⁴⁷

Henry II sent John de Courcy to Ulster in 1177 to help bring the region under Britain's political control. De Courcy and others constructed fortifications in their actions against local chiefs and rulers. It is thought Bruce's Castle on Rathlin Island was constructed by John de Courcy. Doonmore Motte and Bailey near Fair Head (scheduled) as well as other mottes including Red Bay (scheduled) and Cloghanmurry (scheduled) date from this time. Castle Carra at Cushendun (scheduled) is a 13th or 14th century stone fortification.

⁴⁵ See [The Glens of Antrim in Medieval Times](#) (published in 2018 as part of the Heart of the Glens Landscape Partnership Scheme) for more information on the Glens' Scottish connections.

⁴⁶ See 'The Archaeology of Rathlin Island' by Brian Williams, *Archaeology Ireland*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1990, pp. 47–51.

⁴⁷ See [The Glens of Antrim in Medieval Times](#) for more information.

Ecclesiastical architecture continued in this period such as the 13th century Layd Church (state care monument) and 12th century Ardclinis Church (scheduled). Bonamargy Friary (state care monument) at Ballycastle is a later example of a Franciscan Friary, thought to have been founded in 1500 by the McQuillan family.

The turbulent 16th to 17th centuries saw the Flight of the Earls and the Plantation of Ulster. At this time Rathlin Island was attacked numerous times and suffered massacres. Throughout the landscape fortifications were constructed, torn down and destroyed.

Architecture, Industrial and Defence heritage

Architecture

The towns and villages of the Antrim Glens are home to many buildings of architectural and historic interest. For example, Cushendun Conservation Area has a unique architectural heritage linked to the eminent architect Clough William Ellis. Ellis designed several surviving buildings in the village, including a square of mansard-roofed cottages from 1912. Nearby, Cushendall Conservation Area is home to Curfew Tower built by landowner Francis Turnly, as part of his early 19th century scheme to regenerate the village.

Insert image of Curfew Tower

The picturesque Conservation Areas of Glenarm, Carnlough and Ballycastle also contain buildings of architectural merit, including 18th and 19th century structures and shop fronts. Examples of local vernacular architecture, such as rural cottages and clachans, are dotted across the landscape.

Glenarm Castle, residence of the Earl of Antrim, remains a functioning estate with a historic demesne. Garron Tower, built by the Marchionness of Londonderry in 1850, is another architecturally impressive building with associated gardens.

Industrial Heritage⁴⁸

Insert map of heritage sites from HoTG LPS Industrial Heritage audit

Industrial heritage describes the remains of buildings, structures, sites, landscapes and artefacts linked to industry (c.1750 – 1900). Over 400 sites of industrial heritage interest have been identified within Antrim Coast and Glens AONB as the area was home to a range of industrial activities including mineral extraction, manufacturing, agriculture, processing and infrastructural works.

Cushendun Building Preservation Trust (CBPT)

In 2006, CBPT was established to restore the former Church of Ireland Church in the village into a community space.

CBPT's campaign was successful and funding was secured from National Lottery Heritage Fund, CCGBC, HED, Ulster Garden Villages Ltd, The Pilgrim Trust and All Churches Trust to restore the church. In 2018 this historic building was opened as the Old Church Centre, an arts, heritage and community space for local communities and visitors to the Glens of Antrim.

This project is a fantastic example of connecting built heritage to community needs.

⁴⁸ See report Heart of the Glens Landscape Partnership Industrial Heritage Audit (March 2013) for detailed information on industrial heritage across the AONB [INSERT LINK](#). See CCGHT publication Quarries, Mines and Life Underground for more information on mineral extraction and connections to geodiversity within the AONB [INSERT LINK](#).

Mining in the AONB first began in the Stone Age when porcellanite was mined at Cushendall and Rathlin.

Later, Hugh Boyd transformed Ballycastle into a centre of early Irish industry. Boyd built a glass and salt works powered by coal from his nearby mines at Carrickmore and constructed Ireland's first documented tramway c.1740. Mine entrances and evidence of collapsed mines can still be seen today.

William Bald constructed the Antrim Coast Road in the 1830s, a feat of engineering that connected the Glens and has become a popular visitor driving route.

In the later 19th century, railway networks expanded into the Glens. A narrow gauge railway from Ballymena to Parkmore transported iron ore and bauxite from mines around Glenravel and led to the development of Glenariff as a visitor attraction for railway passengers. A second narrow gauge railway from Ballymoney to Ballycastle also increased access to the Antrim Glens.

Lime kilns, used to produce lime for farming and construction, remain noticeable in the landscape.

Defence Heritage

In addition to the fortifications of the AONBs archaeological record, there are sites of relevance to modern defence heritage and 20th century conflicts such as World Wars I & II. The HMS Drake and HMS Brisk were sunk in Rathlin Sound on 2nd October 1917 by a German submarine during WWI. The wreck site of HMS Drake was designated as a scheduled monument (marine). Three WWII pillboxes can be found at Waterfoot, alongside decommissioned radar stations and observation posts at various points along the Antrim Coast. A refugee camp near Broughshane housed evacuees from Gibraltar 1944-45.

Shaped by Industry, Shared with Pride

This NLHF funded project delivered in 2018 - 19 was led by MEABC's museum and heritage service, in partnership with Big Telly Theatre Company and Carrickfergus Enterprise. The project looked to celebrate Mid and East Antrim's coastal industrial heritage and to utilise it as a driver for cultural tourism activities within the borough.

The project focused on four sites:

- Whitehead Railway Museum
- Glenarm Village
- Flame Gasworks Museum, Carrickfergus
- The Heritage Hub, Carnlough

40 participatory theatre performances were staged to animate and connect these industrial heritage sites, which were promoted in alignment with local tourism businesses. A toolkit was created to highlight learnings from the project and to offer a legacy for future heritage-tourism initiatives and can be found [here](#).

Volunteers involved in this project were highly commended by The British Museum/Marsh Award Scheme 2020 in the Museum Volunteers for Learning category.

This long history of settlement and human activity has shaped and changed the AONB landscape over millennia and is a key aspect of its character. The legacy and stories of the area are also represented in the objects and artefacts of the AONB found in local, national and international museum collections.

CULTURE

Antrim Coast & Glens AONB is steeped in a cultural heritage which includes myths, legends, stories, traditions, as well as languages, music and other cultural connections.

Although much of this is intangible it is no less significant and can be seen in vibrant experiences and events. This cultural richness is a key facet of the AONBs unique heritage, important for sense of place and identity for local communities, and part of its appeal for visitors.

Myths and folklore

Antrim Coast & Glens AONB is home to many stories and storytellers. Many myths and legends centre on heroic tales of ancient warriors, tragic romances, epic adventures, giants and fairy folk.⁴⁹

The AONBs folklore is grounded in Irish and Scottish culture. The Fionn tradition is particularly influential, with many stories focusing on Fionn Mac Cumhaill, his Fianna (hunting bands), and his son Oisín (said to be buried in Glenann). Many other stories are based in Gaelic literature and folklore, such as the Children of Lir who are said to have lived in the Sea of Moyle along the AONBs coastline.

Folklore is intimately connected to the landscape. Fairies (the *Sídhe* or *The Gentry*) feature time and again in the oral traditions of Antrim Coast & Glens.⁵⁰ They are believed to live in a variety of locations across the landscape, in magical mounds, hills and trees – such places are well known locally and are often treated with great reverence and respect.

Folklore and stories, poems and songs helped make sense of the unexplainable or unknown, taught morality, shared history and encouraged pride of place and identity through the centuries.

Music, language and sport

Antrim Coast & Glens AONB was one of the last Irish-speaking areas in Ireland. Before the construction of the Antrim Coast road, the communities of the Glens were largely isolated, as was the island community of Rathlin. Gaelic remained as the day to day

Glens of Antrim Historical Society

Established in 1965, this Society is recognised as one of the foremost historical societies on the island of Ireland. The society has approximately 300 members (both local and international) and works to further the study and enjoyment of the history, traditions, landscape and folklore of the Antrim Glens. The society delivers a rich programme of lectures annually and publishes a popular Journal *The Glynn's* exploring the area's rich built and cultural heritage. For more information click [here](#).

Insert map of Cultural institutions
Museums/Arts & Heritage hub
locations and key

⁴⁹ See [A Door into the Mythological Landscape of the Glens of Antrim](#) (2018, Heart of the Glens Landscape Partnership Scheme) for more information on the myths and legends of the AONB.

⁵⁰ See [Lore of the Land: Exploring Folklore and the Supernatural across the Causeway Coast & Glens](#) (2019, CCGBC Museum Service). This publication was developed as part of the Lore of the Land project (funded by SEUPB Peace IV programme) and includes valuable accounts of fairy lore from across the AONB and Co. Antrim.

language of many until the early 20th century. Scots language and culture has long influenced the AONB area.

Music has been a longstanding pastime in the Antrim Glens and Rathlin with many songs sung in Irish. In the early 20th century, attempts were made to revive traditional language and culture and the first Feis na nGleann was held in Glenariffe in 1904. The Feis included competitions in Irish language, traditional music and dancing, alongside local sports like hurling and athletics.

Traditional music, language and sport remain important; many villages have Gaelic sports teams and pitches. Comhaltas groups play and promote traditional music, singing, dancing and storytelling and local venues support live performances enjoyed by locals and visitors alike.

Experiences and Events

Fairs and festivals are important events which enrich and celebrate the cultural life of Antrim Coast & Glens AONB and support the economy of rural communities. Many villages hold annual festivals in the summer months, such as the Heart of the Glens Festival in Cushendall which has been running each August for thirty years.

Ballycastle's Ould Lammas Fair is the oldest fair in Ireland and takes place on the last Monday and Tuesday of August. It is thought to have started as early as the 16th century but it is likely older. The word lammas may come from 'loaf mass', bread baked from the first grains of harvest and placed on church altars, or from the pagan festival of Lughnasa.

Feis na nGleann is held annually at changing locations across the Glens. The Rathlin Sound Maritime Festival is held annually on Rathlin and at Ballycastle, celebrating the strong link between the two areas and the rich maritime culture of both. Similarly, the Dalriada Festival at Glenarm celebrates Scottish connections.

The AONB is home to a myriad of traditional and creative industries which add to the area's cultural offering and provide additional cultural experiences for visitors and locals.

Issues and Recommendations

Inappropriate development

Inappropriate development is a threat to the AONBs historic environment. A balance between conserving heritage and supporting its use and role in everyday life is key to responsible and practical heritage management.

Ulster Architectural Heritage monitor planning applications and encourage Councils to uphold protections for built heritage. HED has a statutory role to be consulted by the planning authority for its view on the impact of proposals on protected heritage assets. The AONB Management Forum and stakeholders have a role in providing a platform for issues to be raised and translating government policy and funding opportunities to local communities.

Heritage at Risk Project

Started in 1993 by HED and Ulster Architectural Heritage (UAH), this ongoing project aims to protect vulnerable historic buildings and monuments across Northern Ireland.

The Heritage at Risk Register for Northern Ireland (HARNI) is maintained through the project and highlights over 500 buildings and monuments deemed at risk due to lack of use, disrepair, crime or inappropriate development. Advice for owners of sites deemed at risk is available from UAH and HED.

There are approximately 22 HARNI sites listed as being 'currently at risk' within Antrim Coast & Glens AONB; such sites should be focused on as restoration priorities and may offer heritage skills training opportunities.

Limited resources

There is no statutory obligation on owners to keep listed buildings and scheduled monuments in good condition but grant aid is made available by DfC's Historic Environment Fund to encourage conservation and repairs. In recent years available funding has fallen by 90%, reducing grants allocated and increasing competition. DfC/HED has, however, been exploring how partnership working can bring more support to the sector. In recent years they have entered partnerships with the Architectural Heritage Fund, the National Churches Trust and DAERA. Support has also been provided for heritage businesses and individuals affected by Covid-19. Nevertheless, limited resources are likely to remain a challenge for built heritage conservation within the AONB.

Furthermore, limited resourcing impacts on the cultural sector. Traditionally many activities were supported by European Union funding. It is uncertain how the government will support the Arts following the UK's withdrawal from the EU and the Covid-19 pandemic.

HoTG LPS facilitated many natural, built and cultural heritage projects but ended in March 2020. There are aspirations to continue activities via the project's legacy but resources are limited. CCGHT drive AONB activity via partnership working but resources are limited.

Monitoring, recording and research (climate change)

Monitoring and data collation is vital to inform appropriate conservation action or to provide an evidence base for future recommendations or strategic policies for built heritage and culture.

Improved monitoring might help identify the impacts of climate change on the AONBs historic environment. Changing weather conditions and extreme weather events over the next century will

detrimentally impact stone and other structures. Detailed and consistent research using technologies such as laser scanning, digital modelling and mapping have been recommended.⁵¹

Currently, scheduled monuments are monitored at least once every five years, with those most at risk being inspected more frequently. UAH recommends the implementation of systematic, cyclical surveys of all listed buildings, Conservation Areas and scheduled monuments in NI.⁵²

Many archaeological sites within the AONB have not been excavated or closely researched and some entries within the NISMR are not up to date.

More local stories, histories and traditions shared and celebrated

In recent decades cultural traditions have declined due to societal and lifestyle changes. Celebrating and promoting the distinct culture, heritage and stories of the AONB is, therefore, more important than ever before. The culture and history of the AONB area offers an important resource for local communities which can be shared with visitors. Community consultation revealed an appetite for more local stories, histories and traditions to be celebrated through a variety of events, experiences and activities.

Of 117 respondents to the community consultation questionnaire, 18% want to see more culture-based events and activities within the AONB such as music, dance, festivals, storytelling and food experiences. 19% of respondents wanted to see more history/heritage-based activities such as guided tours, talks and walks and heritage skills training opportunities.⁵³

Recommendations for Built Heritage and Culture

Cohesive monitoring and data collection which is accessible to stakeholders

Encourage ongoing research, excavation and interpretation of built heritage

Support landowners/owners to protect historic sites, listed buildings and scheduled monuments

Support heritage groups and community conservation efforts

Support heritage skills training and educational/outreach activities

Deliver quality heritage and cultural events and activities

Champion sustainable development within the AONB, protecting historic sites, listed buildings and monuments.

Build on the legacy of HoTG LPS

⁵¹ See 'Mapping, Monitoring and Visualising Built Heritage' by John Meneely (QUB) in [A Future for Northern Ireland's Built Heritage](#) (Northern Ireland Environment Link, 2009).

⁵² See [Heritage at Risk in Northern Ireland: Review and Recommendations](#) (Ulster Architectural Heritage, 2019)

⁵³ See [Appendix x](#) Consultation Findings.

5. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

The Antrim Coast & Glens area is home to distinctive communities which have been shaped by the landscape and have in turn shaped the landscape for millennia.

It is important that the AONB designation benefits local communities. This Management Plan aims to help realise the full social and economic benefits offered by Antrim Coast & Glens AONB.

Communities of the AONB

The communities of the AONB are varied, consisting of a myriad of small farms and clachans, coastal villages and towns, as well as a small but growing community on Rathlin, NI's only inhabited offshore island.

When asked what do you value most about the Antrim Coast & Glens AONB? 24% of respondents to the community questionnaire said local communities and villages.

The communities of the AONB are well connected within certain pockets and areas, influenced by geography, council administration, transport links and sporting and cultural connections.

Population and demographics

*Insert AONB Map with settlements marked

Rathlin Island
Ballycastle
Ballyvoy
Cushendun
Cushendall
Glenariffe Bay
Waterfoot
Cargan
Broughshane
Glenarm
Carnlough
Ballygalley
Cairncastle
Drains Bay
Knocknacarry
Larne
Ballymena

The AONB is home to approximately 21,000 people.⁵⁴ The AONBs population has declined since 2001⁵⁵, while declining numbers of young people has been noted in both CCGBC and MEABC areas.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ 2011 Census Data for Antrim Coast & Glens AONB provided by NISRA.

⁵⁵ 2001 Census data estimated the AONBs population to be c. 22,475 – see 2008 Management Plan.

⁵⁶ See [Putting People First: The Mid & East Antrim Community Plan](#) (2017) and [A Better Future Together: A Community Plan for Causeway Coast and Glens 2017 – 2030](#).

Residents of the AONB are more likely to have limited access to services, to have access to a car, own their own houses and to work in agriculture and forestry than the average for NI. They are less likely to be long term unemployed, to live in rented accommodation and to have a black or ethnic minority background.⁵⁷

Community Amenities and Services

Super Output Area (SOA)	Overall Multiple Deprivation Rank	Access to Services	Income	Employment	Education, Skills & Training	Health Deprivation and Disability
Glentaisie & Kinbane	124	222	25	231	347	350
Bonamargy, Rathlin & Glenshesk	460	124	344	459	696	666
Dalriada	584	386	542	390	608	515
Knocklayde	221	385	143	201	310	266
Armoy, Mosside & Moyarget	169	55	72	281	423	348
Glemaan & Glendun	499	85	371	565	682	653
Ballyhoe and Corkey	387	13	358	506	525	542
Glenariffe	543	134	386	542	743	613
Carnlough	369	115	469	319	440	412
Glenravel	679	92	626	670	718	795
Slemish	484	34	276	742	811	794
Glenarm	281	3	288	623	554	682
Glenwhirry	642	71	555	805	776	805
Carncastle	729	265	660	683	751	783
Kilwaughter (2)	568	99	488	669	663	773

Key for Community Amenities and Services table	
Green	Top 15% of NI SOAs
Amber	Bottom 50% of NI SOAs
Red	Bottom 15% of NI SOAs

⁵⁷ See ACG AONB Management Plan 2008-2018 [\[Insert link\]](#) and [2011 Census](#).

NI Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017 ranks 890 Super Output Areas (SOAs) across NI from 1 (most deprived) to 890 (least deprived) across a number of indicators. **Table x** shows results for SOAs within (or partly within) Antrim Coast & Glens AONB.

Access to services (eg. hospitals, medical practitioners, Post Offices, supermarkets, schools, libraries and access to good broadband connections) is an issue across the AONB, with 11 of 15 SOAs being ranked in the bottom 15% for NI.⁵⁸ 9 of 15 SOAs ranked in the bottom 50% for household income.

Antrim Coast and Glens AONB scored well in areas including employment, education and health.

See [NISRA website](#) for more information on NI Multiple Deprivation Measure and for information on how SOAs are ranked.

Public transport

Public transport operates across the AONB. There is no railway network so bus services provide important links. Typically residents experience a reduced service in winter, with increased provision in the summer months to cater for visitors.

Community transport providers operate within the AONB and are a key source of additional public transport for local people.

On Rathlin Island two private companies run minibuses providing transport during the tourist season. The Rathlin Island Ferry Company Ltd operates between Ballycastle and Rathlin Island, a vital public transport link connecting the island and its community to the mainland.

13% of respondents to the Community Questionnaire highlighted a lack of services and amenities for communities and visitors as a key challenge faced by the AONB. 9% highlighted access issues and poor transport networks as being of particular concern. Lack of broadband access was also raised during community consultation.

Bus services within Antrim Coast & Glens AONB	
162/162a	Services villages along Antrim Coast from Larne to Ballycastle
128	Services Carnlough, Glenarm to Ballymena
150	Services Glenariff/Waterfoot, Cushendall, Cushendun to Ballymena

⁵⁸ The [NI Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017 Description of Indicators](#) outlines how SOAs were ranked according to various factors under each indicator or theme.

Community development

There are many community groups and associations within the AONB engaged in culture, heritage and economic development. Both MEABC and CCGBC support local community groups through community development initiatives.

Northern Area Community Network (NACN) provides additional community development support within the AONB area and helps to build strong community connections and provides networking opportunities.

Due to the unique character of Rathlin Island, DfI deliver the Rathlin Island Policy and Action Plan, aimed to address the particular challenges faced by islanders. The [Rathlin Island Action Plan 2016-2020](#) aims to improve service provision and community development on the island, while also striving for sustainability and the conservation of the island's heritage. The AONB Management Plan aims to support the delivery of the Rathlin Island Action Plan.

North Coast Community Transport

North Coast Community Transport provides affordable and accessible transport within CCGBC and MEABC. It assists local communities with travel supporting them to access basic services including daily or weekly shopping, school activities, work, medical appointments, leisure activities and more.

Key achievements:

1,351 members

Employs 49 volunteers

50,870 trips provided 2019/20

Rathlin East Lighthouse Project

In 2016, Rathlin Development & Community Association (RDCA) were offered an opportunity by the Commissioners for Irish Lights, to take forward a community led project at the island's East Lighthouse. DfI, on behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive, working through the Rathlin Island Policy and Action Plan, have been working with the community and other key stakeholders to develop a high level vision for the development of the site. The project team are currently progressing a concept masterplan for the development and are exploring potential funding opportunities with a view to commencing work on site in 2021.



Community Plans

Community Plans are a statutory requirement for local authorities, both MEABC and CCGBC have Community Plans in place. Community Plans are developed in partnership, bringing together the public, private and voluntary sectors (alongside community representatives) to develop and implement Plans which aim to improve the lives of local people. Community Plans highlight priority themes and issues and lay out actions to address them.

Community Plans can help drive AONB activity as their priorities often overlap with AONB objectives. This AONB Management Plan aims to support the delivery of relevant Community Plans where possible.

See [Appendix x](#) Statutory Framework and Policy Context for more information on Community Plans.

Rural Development Programme 2014-2020

The Rural Development Programme (RDP), funded by the EU and DAERA, supports rural development across Northern Ireland. Local Action Groups, facilitated by councils, govern the allocation of RDP funds under the LEADER Priority 6 element of the Programme. This includes promoting economic growth through supporting rural business and tourism, and reducing poverty, social isolation and improving access to services through targeted projects.

Key RDP projects within the AONB:

Rural Basic Services Scheme – Provides capital investment to improve access to basic services or to reduce social isolation/poverty.

Village Renewal Scheme – Village Plans developed to identify small-scale capital investment projects which may be supported through RDP or other avenues. Also included capital investment on priorities within Village Plans where possible.

Coastal regeneration – Improvements to Carnlough boathouse.

Cooperation Scheme – amongst other projects, this scheme will support the expansion of the International Appalachian Trail into the Antrim Glens in 2020/2021, including improvements to pre-existing trails and the installation of waymarkers, improved signage and interpretation.

A new Rural Development Programme is in development and will be a key delivery mechanism for some AONB objectives and recommendations.

Economy of the AONB

The local economy directly and indirectly impacts on the AONB landscape. Livelihoods and valuable resources are derived from the land and coast.

Agriculture is a particularly important sector for the AONB. Agriculture accounts for approximately a third of registered businesses in CCGBC and MEABC areas⁵⁹, providing employment and influencing landscape character and environment. Aquaculture and fishing provide further income and employment opportunities along the coast.

The AONBs agri-food industry is also noteworthy, with a variety of food producers selling products locally, nationally and internationally. These include Glens of Antrim Potatoes, Glenarm Salmon and North Coast Smokehouse. The Glens also supports a healthy community of craft producers and other vendors.

Nevertheless, average income for the AONBs council areas remains below the NI average.

Median weekly earnings 2018⁶⁰

CCGBC	£368
MEABC	£383
NI average	£423

TOURISM

Tourism is vital for the economy of Antrim Coast & Glens AONB, providing revenue, business opportunities and employment across the AONB area.

Tourism NI is responsible for the development of tourism in Northern Ireland, supporting and sometimes leading various tourism development initiatives. TNI is represented on the Antrim Coast & Glens AONB Management Forum.

Tourism and the local economy

Tourism accounts for approximately 4.9% of NI's economy and sustains over 60,000 jobs as of 2017.

Recent years have seen steady growth in NI's tourism industry overall. The estimated total number of overnight trips to Northern Ireland (domestic and external visitors) has increased from c.4 million in 2013 to 5 million in 2018, while the overall expenditure by visitors has increased from £715 million to £968 million in the same period.⁶¹

After Belfast, the CCGBC area is the second most visited area in NI accounting for 20% of all tourism visits to the region.

Trips, overnight stays and expenditure by visitors support local tourism businesses and accommodation providers within the AONB area and its periphery.

****Insert map showing locations of key tourist attractions and VICs Data gap: list of AONB top attractions**

⁵⁹ See CCGBC Community Planning Data Analysis, Baseline Report update (Oct 2019) and [Amplify: The Integrated Economic Development Strategy for Mid and East Antrim 2018-2030](#)

⁶⁰ CCGBC Community Planning Data Analysis, Baseline Report update (Oct 2019).

⁶¹ See [Northern Ireland Annual Tourism Statistics 2018](#)

Mid & East Antrim Borough Council

Tourism is a key economic activity and a major prosperity driver for the area. Visitors contributed £50.7 million to the Borough's economy in 2018 and accounts for 4,395 related jobs, or over 10% of local employment.

Key challenges include market recognition, seasonality and lack of accommodation along the coast.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

Tourism contributed £172.3 million to the Borough's economy in 2018 and accounts for 4,751 related jobs, or over 12% of local employment. The number of trips to CCGBC area in 2018 was 1,011,485.

Key challenges include a high dependence on the domestic market and the fact that half the visits and value from tourism are mostly experienced in the summer months, creating issues of seasonality and capacity.

Tourism initiatives in Antrim Coast & Glens

Councils undertake tourism marketing and development roles across the AONB area, underpinned by the relevant economic and tourism development strategies.⁶² CCGBC operates under [Visit Causeway Coast and Glens](#), while MEABC launched its [Shaped by Sea and Stone](#) brand in early 2019.

In 2019, TNI launched a new brand toolkit [Embrace a Giant Spirit](#) which seeks to market Northern Ireland internationally as a key destination for experiential tourism. This brand focuses on celebrating heritage, culture and people and so lends itself well to highlighting the key features of the AONB. Local experience providers can register to be part of the brand by contacting TNI.



Causeway Coastal Route

The Causeway Coastal Route is an internationally renowned driving route stretching over 120 miles from Belfast to Derry/Londonderry, along the A2 Coast Road. It takes in many visitor attractions and is the main tourist route into the Antrim Glens. TNI and Councils market the route and visitor experiences

⁶² See [Appendix x](#) Statutory Framework & Policy Context for relevant tourism strategies and policies.

along its path, including Carnfunnock Country Park, Glenariffe Forest Park, Cushendun and Rathlin Island. Distinct branding for the Causeway Coastal Route has also been developed.

Tourism Clusters

Tourism clusters, supported by TNI and Councils, provide a platform for private tourism businesses to network, collaborate and identify training needs and skills gaps.

Tailored business support is offered to Cluster members to encourage the development or expansion of new and creative tourism experiences and to improve business resilience.

There are currently three clusters in the vicinity of Antrim Coast & Glens AONB:

- The Glens
- The Gobbins
- Causeway & Binevenagh

Économusée

Économusée Artisans at Work is a Québec inspired tourism initiative that encourages visitors to watch the artisan at work whilst offering them the opportunity to discover the beautiful and indigenous crafts that are all produced onsite, learning about the history of the craft and the cultural heritage behind the skill.

Each Économusée artisan has their own story to share; this is illustrated with storyboards, carefully mapped throughout the workshops to capture the journey, the history, craft, and skill of the artist.

The Économusée project has supported five businesses in the vicinity of Antrim Coast & Glens AONB:

- Ursa Minor Bakehouse, Ballycastle
- North Coast Smokehouse, Ballycastle
- Steensons Jewellers, Glenarm
- Hot Milk Forge, Martinstown
- Scullion Hurls, Loughguile

ACCESS, OUTDOOR RECREATION & WELLBEING

Providing access and offering opportunities for the enjoyment of the landscape is an important objective of AONB designation.

Outdoor recreation not only benefits the local economy and tourism offering but also supports physical health and mental wellbeing. Outdoor recreation activities provide vital opportunities for exercise, volunteering and skills development and can reduce stress levels and help connect people through collective participation and enjoyment.

This Management Plan supports access and outdoor recreation across Antrim Coast & Glens AONB and encourages the sustainable expansion of such activities where appropriate.

Co-ordinating Outdoor Recreation

ORNI develops, manages and promotes outdoor recreation across Northern Ireland, advocating for better quality recreation for all. This is achieved through working in partnership with a wide range of relevant stakeholders.

The National Outdoor Recreation Forum was established by Sport NI and brings together key stakeholders outside of government, seeking to provide a co-ordinated approach to dealing with issues regarding outdoor recreation. CCGHT are represented on this Forum.

Councils support the provision of outdoor recreation within their operational areas, by protecting and expanding access and managing/maintaining public spaces and facilities (such as parks, walking trails, beaches and harbours). MEABC and CCGBC have also entered into agreements and memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with Forest Service to allow for the provision of access and outdoor recreation within several Forest Service owned forests and woodlands in the AONB area.

Popularity of Recreational Activities in the AONB

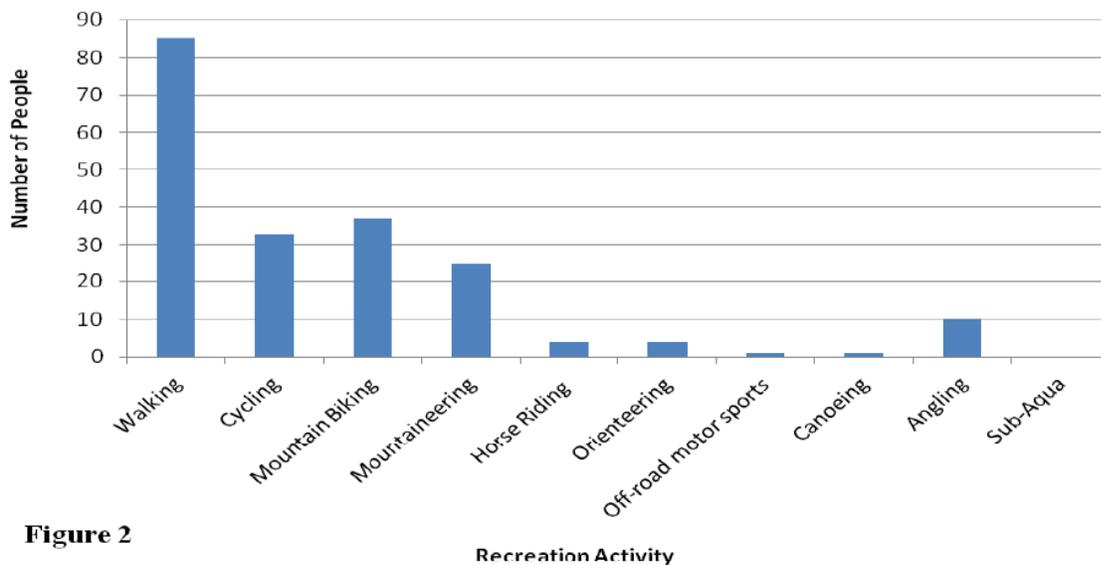


Figure 2 'Assessing Outdoor Recreation demand in the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB' (2012)

*

Reason for Participating in Outdoor Recreation

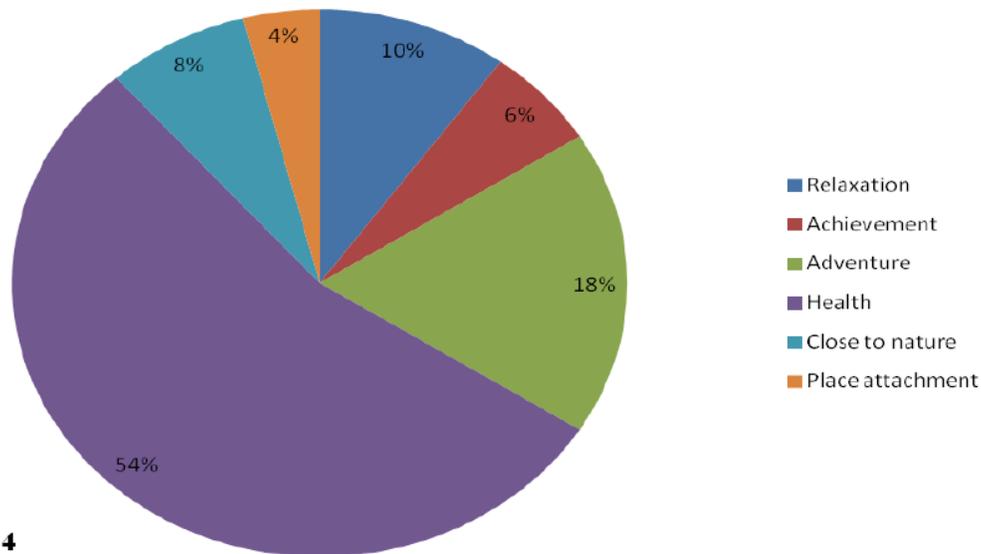


Figure 4

*'Assessing Outdoor Recreation demand in the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB' (2012)

*These graphs will be redesigned to fit with rest of the document, remove figure numbers, edit titles etc

Accessibility

Access can be defined in various terms, constituting physical access to the landscape and open spaces of the AONB or intellectual access to its themes, stories, histories and heritage.

Physical access may include walks and paths, facilities or activities which provide people with the opportunity to spend time outdoors. Intellectual access may be interpretation, signage, materials, an event or experience which allows people to learn more about the AONB landscape, natural environment, communities, culture or history.

Through a network of legislative, statutory and non-statutory commitments, stakeholders have a responsibility to encourage accessibility within the AONB. See [Appendix x](#) Statutory Framework and Policy Context for relevant documents on accessibility.

Public rights of way / Permissive Paths⁶³

In Northern Ireland public access to the countryside is restricted to areas of land which are in public ownership and to which the public are invited to use, public rights of way, or where the public have the landowner's permission to visit.

⁶³ See [ORNI resources](#) for guidance literature on Access. In particular, see [Access to the Countryside: The Legal Position in Northern Ireland](#) overview produced by NIEA for more information.

Under the *Access to the Countryside (Northern Ireland) Order 1983* public rights of way are asserted and maintained by Councils, who must follow detailed procedures for any new public right of way claim or to alter existing routes.

Permissive paths are routes where the landowner has given permission for the public to access their land – they are NOT public rights of way. Permissive paths are covered by separate legislation and landowners can withdraw their permission for access. Permissive paths offer greater flexibility with respect to trail development than public rights of way, as they can facilitate quality access where it is needed rather than only where it can be asserted by right.

In some areas there is de facto access to open land, where access is tolerated by landowners due to long held convention, but there is no legal basis for this in Northern Ireland (no ‘Right to Roam’).

Issues and Recommendations

Lack of Community Access to Services, Amenities, Transport

Limited access to services was raised by the community during consultation for this Plan⁶⁴ and the issue is reflected in government statistics outlined in [section x.x](#). Access to services is inconsistent across the AONB, with some areas more badly impacted than others due to their remote and rural nature.

Sustainable Tourism and Economic Development

A reliance on small scale agricultural enterprise and a still developing tourism market indicates vulnerabilities in the AONBs economy but also potential for growth.

At present, evidence suggests that Antrim Coast & Glens AONB is missing out on tourism revenue enjoyed in nearby areas, such as the Causeway Coast. Attracting more visitors to the AONB, and encouraging them to stay longer and spend more, is key to increasing the AONBs economic benefits for local communities. But economic development must be balanced with sustainability.

Sustainable tourism strives to retain the economic and social advantages of tourism development while reducing and/or mitigating undesirable impacts on the natural, historic, cultural or social environment. Over-tourism describes the scenario where tourism leads to undesirable impacts.

There is some evidence that certain tourist hotspots within the AONB are beginning to suffer from over-tourism. For example, in recent years Cushendun Caves have been receiving high volumes of visitors and coach tours to a small and sensitive site. Increased traffic and footfall impacts on village life with little economic return.

19% of respondents to the Community Questionnaire identified sustainable development as a key challenge facing the AONB, while 11% felt that over-tourism was a key concern for the AONB landscape and local communities.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ See [Appendix x](#) Consultation Findings.

⁶⁵ See [Appendix x](#) Consultation Findings.

Outdoor Recreation and Access to the Countryside

21% of respondents to the Community Questionnaire wanted to see additional outdoor recreation provision and activities within the AONB, while 11% wanted to see improvements to access infrastructure such as waymarking, signage and the extension of existing cycleways, paths and trail networks.

Lack of access to the landscape is a key barrier to recreation within Antrim Coast & Glens AONB.⁶⁶

Much of the AONB landscape is in private ownership and so landowners' approval is needed for access (via permissive paths or other access agreements). Certain issues and perceptions have made some private landowners hesitant to permit public access to their land.⁶⁷ This presents a significant barrier to the future expansion or development of access routes and recreation within the AONB. Current legislation surrounding occupiers' liability is complex and further guidance and reassurance is needed for landowners.

Improved signage, interpretation and waymarking within the AONB is required to encourage more confident and safe use of existing trails. Improved interpretation supports educational benefits and improved intellectual access to the area's rich natural, built and cultural heritage.

Disjointed access and connections are also a concern, including a lack of public transport networks. This is an issue across the AONB, particularly in the inland area, and buses do not routinely service areas which connect to walking routes. This encourages a reliance on private transport via car for both access and recreation, increasing the importance of associated amenities such as car parks and creating difficulties for those who do not have access to private transport.

Reliable, regular monitoring of recreation and access is required to build up a comprehensive picture of issues and opportunities relating to access within the AONB.

'...more should be done to enable everybody to gain the physical, mental and emotional well-being benefits that come from visiting our local AONB'

Community Questionnaire

⁶⁶ See conclusions from ['Assessing Outdoor Recreation demand in the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB'](#) (2012), on behalf of CCGHT.

⁶⁷ A lack of clarity regarding the legal liability of landowners when permitting access has been found to discourage landowners from entering into access agreements. Landowners also raise concerns regarding damage to property, bio-security, animal-welfare and the degradation of property rights. See [Access to the countryside in Northern Ireland – occupiers' liability', NI Assembly Briefing Paper](#) and [Access to the Countryside – The Legal Position in Northern Ireland](#).

Recommendations for Sustainable Communities

Promote sustainable tourism activities and initiatives and help support local businesses

Focus efforts on disadvantaged areas and communities and improve access to services

Support community groups and community development initiatives

Deliver and expand quality outdoor recreation experiences and activities

Support new and existing access to the landscape

Promote access for all abilities and backgrounds

Champion sustainable development within the AONB

Build on the legacy of HoTG LPS

DRAFT

6. LOOKING AHEAD

A vision for Antrim Coast & Glens AONB 2030

The outstanding landscape and rich heritage of Antrim Coast & Glens is protected, valued and celebrated, nurturing resilient thriving communities and attracting visitors from near and far.

Stakeholders, landowners and local communities work together to protect the AONB and its unique character, natural environment, built heritage and rich cultural traditions and to derive the full benefits that Antrim Coast & Glens AONB has to offer.

Aims & Objectives

The aims and objectives integrate the Vision and are informed by NCALO objectives and the issues highlighted in this Plan. Actions designed to deliver on these aims and objectives are within the Antrim Coast & Glens AONB Action Plan 2021-2025.

Aims	Objectives
(1) Conserve and protect the landscape character of Antrim Coast & Glens AONB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Monitor landscape character areas to identify changes (b) Promote traditional heritage skills (c) Encourage sustainable and appropriate development within the AONB
(2) Conserve and protect the natural and historic environment of Antrim Coast & Glens AONB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Support landowners to deliver sustainable land management and conservation (b) Support the conservation of priority habitat and species, protected areas, listed buildings and key sites (c) Promote climate change adaptation and mitigation measures (d) Support research and monitoring programmes that inform conservation actions
(3) Encourage sustainable use, access and enjoyment of the AONB, contributing to the resilience and wellbeing of local communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Extend inclusive access and outdoor recreation opportunities within the AONB (b) Promote sustainable tourism initiatives (c) Support local communities in sustainable business initiatives (d) Discourage inappropriate behaviour in the countryside through outreach and education
(4) Foster a sense of pride in the AONB and raise awareness of its landscape, natural environment, heritage and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Raise awareness of AONB designation and its benefits for local communities (b) Support natural, built and cultural heritage based education and events within the AONB

<p>(5) Pursue a collaborative and partnership approach to AONB management and nurture community driven action within Antrim Coast & Glens AONB</p>	<p>(a) Maintain an AONB Management Forum and encourage information sharing amongst key stakeholders for AONB management</p> <p>(b) Promote volunteering, community projects and training opportunities within the AONB</p> <p>(c) Support the work of local community, environmental and heritage groups</p>
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Implementation

AONB Management Forum and other stakeholders

The Antrim Coast & Glens AONB Management Forum and secretariat (CCGHT) are the key delivery mechanisms for both the Management & Action Plan.

The Forum brings together a range of key stakeholders to work collaboratively and strategically, utilising Management and Action Plans as the basis for coordinated actions to achieve AONB objectives and to react to emerging issues and changing needs.

Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust

At present, CCGHT are supported by NIEA to fulfil a secretariat service to the AONB Management Forum and to undertake projects which deliver on AONB aims and objectives. CCGHT is also responsible for monitoring delivery of both the Management and Action Plans.

Antrim Coast & Glens AONB Action Plans

This Management Plan is accompanied by a five year Action Plan for 2021-2025, which will be followed by a subsequent five year Action Plan for 2026 – 2030.

The Action Plan sets out specific actions, agreed by key stakeholders and the AONB Management Forum, to work towards the AONB vision. Delivery of the Action Plan is vital for the successful implementation of this Management Plan's aims and objectives.

Actions are targeted and measurable, progress on the delivery of the Action Plan will be monitored by CCGHT.

Resources

Currently, CCGHT draw down funding from various funders to support AONB activities but this resource is often modest and not ring fenced. From 2014 to 2020, HoTG LPS offered large scale funding for a programme which supported AONB objectives but this scheme has now concluded.

To deliver fully on AONB objectives and to support HoTG LPS legacy it is vital that relevant funding opportunities continue to be sought and pursued.

Partnership approaches and collaborative working is also vital to make the most of available resources and to ensure successful and lasting outcomes.