Ramelton Swilly Coast LCA is characterised by undulating agricultural lands crisscrossed by valleys formed by streams and rivers rising in higher inland areas, flowing over rolling more fertile agricultural lands towards the silty coastal edge of Lough Swilly. The urban focus in this area is the heritage town of Ramelton; an historic strategically located port town of archaeological and historical importance that has been the hub of society and commerce within this area for centuries. The rural landscape within this LCA is lush and fertile with miles of hedgerow interspersed with deciduous trees lining roads, laneways, rivers, streams, the coastal edge and framing fields. Native and ancient woodland are evident throughout this landscape including substantial wooded areas outside Ramelton and at Ray, whilst isolated conifer plantations are sparingly located on higher less fertile lands within this area. Owing to the topography and vegetation cover, the scatter of farmhouses and farm buildings, one off residential dwellings tend to integrate well into the landscape. There is a strong visual association with adjoining LCAs, most of the views out are framed by higher mountainous lands in other areas including views out over Lough Swilly towards Inishowen and beyond.

Landscape Character types
Seascape Character Units

Map/list Seascape units

Seascape Unit 6 is within the Swilly Coast LCA.

Key characteristics uses: Ramelton town is located in a natural estuary off Lough Swilly; the landscape has a range of uses including agriculture, tourism, forestry, multiple maritime uses including fishing, aquaculture.

Coastal edge: Predominantly low-lying silty edges with areas of salt marsh and salt meadows.

Visibility: Pockets of visibility over the coast throughout this undulating coastline area.

Special features significant buildings, landmarks, biodiversity and cultural features: Ramelton town and a number of demense landscapes and historic buildings.

Landscape Characteristics

Land Form and Land Cover

- Much of this LCA is hard quartzite rolling rural landscape in a ‘U’ shape around the estuary and coast, whilst schist underlies better quality agricultural land in the south of this area
- A large tidal shallow estuary indents the east of this area, and all the surrounding lands slope towards it; the River Leannan flows out through Ramelton, a natural port, through the deep Ramelton channel out to the Lough Swilly.
- 6 freshwater lakes punctuate the undulating upland area within the north west of this LCA, part of a wider landscape of agricultural river valleys carved out by numerous streams and rivers.
- Fertile agricultural lands swathe southern lower lying lands and the low sloping shore towards Lough Swilly display a pattern of farms with a 2 storey farmhouse and associated outbuildings surrounded by large rectilinear shaped hedgerow bound fields, whilst lands on ‘rougher’ higher ground in the north of this area tend to have a tighter pattern of smaller more irregular shaped fields, also hedgerow trimmed.
- There is a heavy dispersal of deciduous and ancient woodland throughout the area, most notable along the shore and river valleys, the hillside to the north of Ramelton and at Ray wood on the northern shores of the LCA.

Settlements

- Ramelton: Ramelton is a historic town of immense heritage, architectural and archaeological value and was designated a ‘Heritage Town’ by Donegal County Council in September 2000. Ramelton was founded as a town in the early 1600s on the site of the ‘O’Donnell Castle’ and was an important port located at a point where the River Lennon flows into Lough Swilly. Ramelton was a prosperous town during the 18th and early 19th century during which most of its distinctive Georgian architecture was built, and continued to be the centre of governance for County Donegal until the late 19th Century. Ramelton is a vibrant town serving a wider rural hinterland and has a wide range of services, functions and facilities as well as a high quality built environment and natural setting.
History, Culture and Heritage

- There are a number of Recorded Monuments within this LCA.
- Ruins of 15th Century Killydonnel friary on the western shore of Lough Swilly stand on the site of an earlier 10th Century church.
- Important vernacular and imposed built heritage including 40 RPS structures.
- Demesne landscape at Fortstewart on the eastern coast and at Ballyarr House to the west of Ramelton.
- The Historic Landscape Characterisation explains that Ramelton is surrounded by productive land farmed since the Neolithic period, and this combined with Lough Swilly’s strategic role encouraged the medieval development of the O’Donnell Stronghold including the Franciscan Friary built by the O’Donnel at Killydonnel in the 16th century. The area is covered in straight-sided surveyed and rectilinear fields (south), a patchwork of sinuous-bounded and irregular fields and semi-open rough ground to the north (Generic HLC-types), speculatively, this may partly reflect former Ulster Plantation lands (more likely to be reorganised in the 18th and 19th centuries) and more traditionally farmed areas on poorer land.

Access and Recreation

- Regional and county roads radiate from Ramelton in all directions providing excellent permeability throughout the area and linkage to the rest of the county.
- Wild Atlantic Way follows the R245 from the south, through Ramelton and along the coast northwards through this LCA.
- Strong tourism and leisure industry focused on the landscape, seascape and their use.
- River Leannan is a popular fishing river for Brown Trout and Salmon.
- Formerly one of the most important ports in Donegal, Ramelton remains navigable by boast from Lough Swilly.

Biodiversity

- Ecologically important landscape containing 160.6ha of Natura 2000 sites (SAC & SPA) and 128.9ha of pNHA sites.
- Stretch of the Leannan River is designated as a Freshwater Pearl Mussel Catchment area.
- Lough Swilly is designated as SPA (004075) and lush fertile valleys carved out by various tributaries and streams flow towards the Lough creating important biodiversity corridors.
- Hedge and deciduous tree bound fields are a predominant feature in this landscape providing biodiversity corridors throughout.
- Dispersed areas of deciduous woodland, demesne woodland and important historic woodlands in this LCA.
- Regional and county road network extensively lined in native hedgerow and deciduous trees.

Forces for change

- Degree of pressure for urban generated housing development from Letterkenny.
- Linear development along the rural road network
- Holiday home development
- Renewable energy development (windfarms).
- Telecommunications and infrastructural development
- Coastal erosion (former agricultural lands as identified in the historic maps are now intertidal mudflats)
- Flooding
- The high quality built environment and natural setting of Ramelton as well as its historical and archaeological heritage give it strong potential to grow within the tourism sector.