

Landscape Character Assessment of County Donegal

**Planning and Policy Unit
Community, Enterprise and Planning Services
Donegal County Council
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**Comhairle Contae
Dhún na nGall
Donegal County Council**

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT	2
1.2 LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT	2
1.2.1 European Landscape Convention (ETS No. 176) 2000.....	2
1.2.2 National	3
1.2.3 Regional	4
1.2.4 Local	5
Figure 1.1 LCA Legislative Context Flowchart	7
2. METHODOLOGY	8
2.1 COMPONENTS OF A LANDSCAPE	9
Figure 1.2 Components of a Landscape Illustration	9
2.2 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT PROCESS.....	10
Figure 1.3 Landscape Character Assessment Process Flowchart.....	11
2.3 LCAP STEP 1	12
2.3.1 Scope and Objectives	12
2.4 LCAP STEP 2	14
2.4.1 Desk Study	14
2.4.2 Landscape Character Types	14
Figure 1.4 Landscape Character Type Map of County Donegal.....	15
Figure 1.5 Landscape Character Types Table	16
Figure 1.6 Percentage Breakdown of Landscape Character Types	28
Figure 1.7 Draft Landscape Character Areas of Donegal	29
2.4.3 Public Consultation and Participation	29
Figure 1.8 Stages of Public Participation/Consultation with Elements of each Stage	29
Figure 1.9 'Have Your Say About Your Landscape' Information Leaflet.....	31
Figure 1.10 Screen Shot from the Interactive Map based Consultation Method	31

2.4.4 Stakeholder Consultation	31
2.5 LCAP STEP 3	32
2.5.1 Field Study.....	32
2.6 LCAP STEP 4	33
2.6.1 Classification and Description	33
3. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT.....	34
3.1 DESCRIPTION OF ENVIRONMENT.....	35
3.2 GEOLOGY	35
Figure 1.11 Map of Geology of Donegal	37
Figure 1.12 Bedrock Geology of Ireland.....	38
3.3 HYDROLOGY	39
3.3.1 North West International River Basin District	39
3.4 LANDCOVER	39
3.5 ECOLOGY.....	40
Figure 1.13 Site of Ecological Importance	40
3.6 BUILT HERITAGE	41
3.7 ARCHAEOLOGY.....	41
3.8 HUMAN HISTORY	41
3.8.1 Mesolithic.....	41
3.8.2 Neolithic	42
3.8.3 Bronze Age	42
3.8.4 Pre-Christian Iron Age	42
3.8.5 16 th and 17 th Century Donegal	43
3.8.6 18 th and 19 th Century Donegal	43
3.8.7 20 th and 21 st Century Donegal	44
3.9 Historic Landscape Characterisation	45
Figure 1.14 Historic Landscape Characterisation Map	45
4. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS	46
LCA 1 – MALIN COAST	47

LCA 2 - DUNAFF COAST	51
LCA 3 - NORTH INISHOWEN FARMLAND AND COAST	55
LCA 4 - URRIS	58
LCA 5 - SLIEVE SNEACHT	61
LCA 6 - EAST INISHOWEN MOUNTAINS AND VALLEYS.....	63
LCA 7 - LOUGH FOYLE COAST	66
LCA 8 - BUNCRANA COAST	70
LCA 9 - SCALP MOUNTAIN	74
LCA 10 - SOUTH INISHOWEN FARMLAND	77
LCA 11 - GRIANAN SLOPES AND LOWLANDS	81
LCA 12 - LAGGAN VALLEY	86
LCA 13 - FOYLE VALLEY.....	90
LCA 14 - FINN VALLEY.....	93
LCA 15 - LETTERKENNY ESTUARY & FARMLAND.....	97
LCA 16 - CARK MOUNTAIN AND UPLAND	100
LCA 17 - CHURCH HILL.....	102
LCA 18 - LOUGH FERN.....	105
LCA 19 - RAMELTON SWILLY COAST	109
LCA 20 - SOUTH FANAD UPLANDS, COAST AND GAELTACHT	112
LCA 21 - FANAD COAST, LAKES AND GAELTACHT	116
LCA 22 - ROSGUILL GAELTACHT.....	120
LCA 23 - ARDS COAST	125
LCA 24 - GLEN LOUGH AND UPLANDS GAELTACHT	129

LCA 25 – DERRYVEAGH MOUNTAINS GAELTACHT.....	132
LCA 26 – TORY SOUND GAELTACHT	136
LCA 27 – BLOODY FORELAND UPLANDS, COAST & GAELTACHT.....	140
LCA 28 – THE ROSSES, KNOCK & LOCHAN, ISLANDS & COAST (AN GAELTACHT).....	145
LCA 29 – FINTOWN VALLEY (AN GAELTACHT)	149
LCA 30 – ARDARA BAYS & COAST (AN GAELTACHT)	152
LCA 31 - SLIEVETOOEY COAST (AN GAELTACHT)	156
LCA 32 – GLENCOLMCILLE MOUNTAINS, BOGS, VALLEYS AND GAELTACHT	158
LCA 33 – SLIABH LIAG COAST	162
LCA 34 – TAWNEY BAY FARMLAND AND COAST (AN GAELTACHT)	166
LCA 35 – ARDARA BOGLAND (AN GAELTACHT)	170
LCA 36 – SOUTH DONEGAL LOWLANDS	172
LCA 37 – DONEGAL BAY DRUMLINS.....	176
LCA 38 – BLUESTACK (AN GAELTACHT)	181
LCA 39 – LOUGH ESKE	184
LCA 40 – CASHELNAVERN BORDER & UPLANDS	186
LCA 41 – CROAGHNAMEAL BORDER & UPLANDS	188
LCA 42 – LOUGH DERG UPLANDS AND LAKELANDS	190
LCA 43 – PETTIGO AND DRUMLINS	193
LCA 44 – RIVER ERNE LOWLANDS.....	196
BIBLIOGRAPHY	
5. APPENDICES	200
5.1 SITE SURVEY SHEETS	201

1.0 Introduction

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT OF COUNTY DONEGAL

This Landscape Character Assessment of County Donegal was actioned as a result of the following objective, NH-O-7, of the County Donegal Development Plan 2012-2018:

"To prepare a Landscape Character Assessment that shall provide a framework for the identification, assessment, protection, management and planning of the landscape (and including seascape) of County Donegal in accordance with current legislation and ministerial guidelines, and having regard to the European Landscape Convention 2000."

1.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

- Carry out a Landscape Character Assessment for County Donegal in accordance with National and Regional legislation and Guidelines, the European Landscape Convention 2000 and having regard to existing best practice.
- Incorporate the findings of the Seascape Character Assessment of County Donegal, the Settlement Assessment of County Donegal and the Historic Landscape Characterisation of County Donegal into the Landscape Character Assessment.
- Collaborate with adjoining planning authorities to ensure cross boundary (and cross-border) continuity of landscape designations.

1.2 LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

1.2.1 EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION (ETS NO.176) 2000

Ireland signed and ratified the Council of Europe's European Landscape Convention (2000) that requires actions to be taken on the landscape and European wide co-operation on landscape issues.

It marks a departure from traditional landscape value assessment and introduces a concept centering on the quality of landscape protection, management and planning, and describes landscapes as:

"Landscape' means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors"

covering:

"... the entire territory of the Parties and covers natural, rural, urban and peri-urban areas. It includes land, inland water and marine areas. It concerns landscapes that might be considered outstanding as well as everyday or degraded landscapes."

Article 6 of this convention requires signatories to identify their landscapes and analyse their characteristics and values including the forces and pressures transforming them.

Guidelines for the Implementation of the European Landscape Convention 2008 set out a series of theoretical, methodological and practical guidelines for the implementation of the above mentioned European Landscape Convention at a national level.

1.2.2. NATIONAL

The Planning and Development Act 2011 requires that a development plan include objectives for landscape that provide "a framework for identification, assessment, protection, management and planning of landscapes and development having regard to the European Landscape Convention".

Planning Policy Statement, 2015 published by Department of Environment, Community and Local Government sets out key principles that should be used as a strategic guide in implementing planning legislation in Ireland in particular Key Principles numbered 7 and 8 as detailed below are pertinent to this LCA process.

- 7. Planning will enhance a sense of place within and between cities, towns and villages and rural areas by recognising their intrinsic character and individual qualities and implement actions to protect and enhance that character and those qualities.*
- 8. Planning will conserve and enhance the rich qualities of natural and cultural heritage of Ireland in a manner appropriate to their significance, from statutorily designated sites to sites of local importance, and including the conservation and management of landscape quality to the maximum extent possible, so that these intrinsic qualities of our country can be enjoyed for their collective contribution to the quality of life of this and future generations.*

'**A National Landscape Strategy for Ireland 2015-2025**' published by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in May 2015 that aims to "Implement the European Landscape Convention in Ireland by providing for specific measures to promote the protection, management and planning of the landscape". There are six core objectives and 19 associated key actions, the objectives of the draft NLS align with those of the European Landscape Convention and are listed below:

National Landscape Strategy Objectives	European Landscape Strategy Objectives
1. Recognise landscapes in law	Articles 5 (a) and 6E
2. Develop a National Landscape Character Assessment	Articles 6C and D
3. Develop Landscape Policies	Articles 5(b) and (d); Article 9
4. Increase Landscape Awareness	Article 6A
5. Identify Education, Research and Training Needs	Article 6B
6. Strengthen Public Participation	Article 5(c)

The 19 Actions flow from the 6 Landscape Strategy Objectives and detail how the objectives of the National Landscape Strategy will be realised. The actions proposed are summarised below:

1. Examine complementary legislation and codes for gaps that may need to be addressed.
2. National GIS landscape data platform.

3. National Landscape Character Map ensuring evidence based consistency across areas and functions and incorporating an outline Historic Landscape Characterisation.
4. Formulation of statutory guidelines on local Landscape Character Assessments, incorporating Historic Landscape Characterisation and other appropriate assessment methodologies.
5. Preparation of Landscape Character Assessments at regional, local and intra-local authority level that will inform and guide landscape policy, action plans and local authority development plans.
6. Interdepartmental consistency with the National Landscape Strategy across policies, strategies and legislation.
7. Periodic 'state of the landscape' reports by local authorities.
8. Definitions, analytical tools and descriptions to describe the nature of landscape and that the processes forming it are dynamic and evolving.
9. Develop public awareness programmes to promote an understanding of the nature and value of landscape.
10. Provision of support for public participation initiatives.
11. Develop national landscape awards and encourage participation to the European Landscape Awards and encourage the inclusion of landscape awards in existing awards schemes.
12. Complete and publish the Historic Gardens and Designed Landscapes Survey of the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage.
13. Audit gaps in landscape education, research and training and develop programmes and training across professions and academic disciplines to address them.
14. Identify the best landscape management and landscape policy in Ireland and Europe.
15. Organise multi-disciplinary conferences on landscape management/conservation via a working committee of relevant experts.
16. Facilitate the introduction of landscape education into the primary and secondary school system.
17. Develop methods of participation to achieve delivery of actions to encourage citizens, and the state in the sustainable management of the landscape.
18. Raise awareness and encourage direct involvement by civil society, voluntary organisations and the commercial sector in augmenting and analysing the information in local Landscape Character Assessments.
19. Encourage greater participation in the European Landscape Convention organisations of RECEP-ENELC, UNISCAPE AND CIVILSPACE.
20. Set in place an implementation programme to assist in the delivery of actions set out in the NLS.

1.2.3 REGIONAL

The Regional Planning Guidelines (2010-2022) of the Border Regional Authorities, section 6.4 sets out landscape policies and objectives detailed below:

Landscape Policy

ENVP7 Protect Conserve and manage the quality, character and distinctiveness of our landscape.

ENVP8 Local Authorities shall collaborate with adjoining Planning Authorities so that all development plan policies are consistent in the protection and management of landscape.

Landscape Strategic Objectives

ENVO6 Adopt policies and measures in County Donegal Plans to protect, manage and plan landscapes through the provision of Landscape Classification and Assessments, in accordance with adopted European (and contemporary National) Landscape Guidance documents such as 'Guidelines for the implementation of the European Landscape Convention, February 2008.

ENVO7 Inclusion of policies in Development Plans to protect important views and prospects and special amenity areas, to facilitate passive enjoyment of the heritage of the landscape.

In addition, section 6.9 (Development Plan Implications) of the Guidelines sets out the following, of relevance here as this LCA has been actioned on foot of a development plan objective:

Landscape

Development Plans should incorporate policies and objectives which protect and manage the landscape of the Region, both within, and outside their jurisdiction. Planning Authorities shall collaborate with adjoining authorities in this regard.

A common approach to landscape management should be adopted throughout the Region. This approach should-

- Ensure that the quality and character of landscape areas are identified;*
- Ensure a common designation and description for areas that require protection;*
- Ensure that common policies are applied to areas that require protection.*

This approach should also identify the nature and scale of development that would be permitted within areas of different designations.

1.2.4 LOCAL

County Donegal Development Plan 2012-2018

Chapter 6, The Natural and Built Heritage, of the County Donegal Development Plan sets out the following 'Aim' of the Council:

"To conserve, protect and enhance the County's built, natural and cultural heritage for future generations and encourage appreciation, access and enjoyment of these resources".

The plan contains areas within the County designated as 'Especially High Scenic Amenity' (EHSA), areas of the highest landscape quality, characterised by wilderness and few, if any man-made structures. The Environmental Report (SEA) accompanying the plan highlighted a potential impact on the 'landscape' by implementing some of the policies and objectives and resultantly recommended that a Landscape Character Assessment of the County be prepared, accordingly objective NH-O-7 (below) was included in the plan.

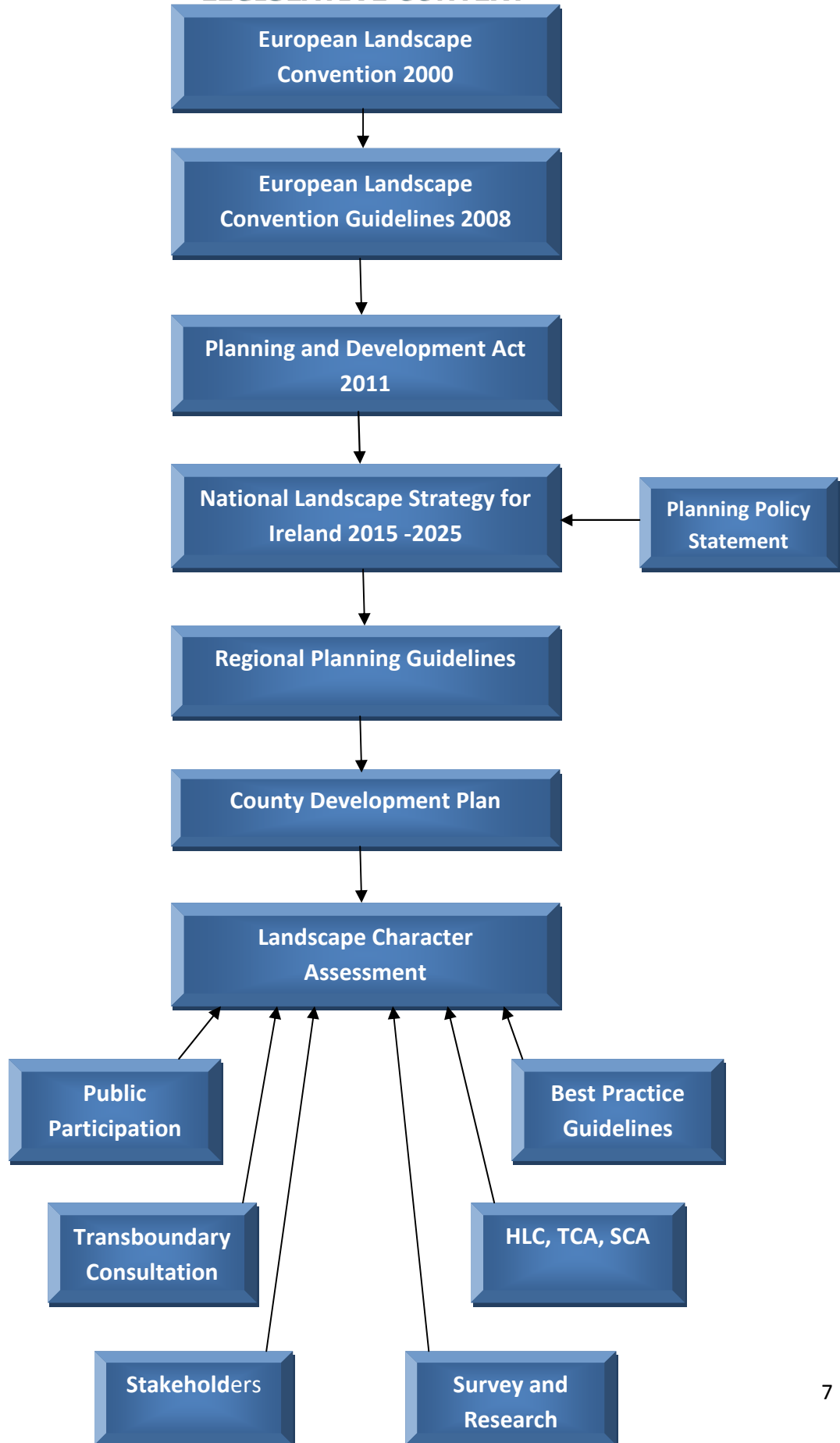
“To prepare a Landscape Character Assessment that shall provide a framework for the identification, assessment, protection, management and planning of the landscape (and including seascape) of County Donegal in accordance with current legislation and ministerial guidelines, and having regard to the European Landscape Convention 2000.”

A flow chart of the legislative context for the preparation of the LCA illustrates how the legislated cascedes from European to Local level thereby informing the nature and content of the LCA.

Figure 1.1 LCA Legislative Context Flowchart

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT



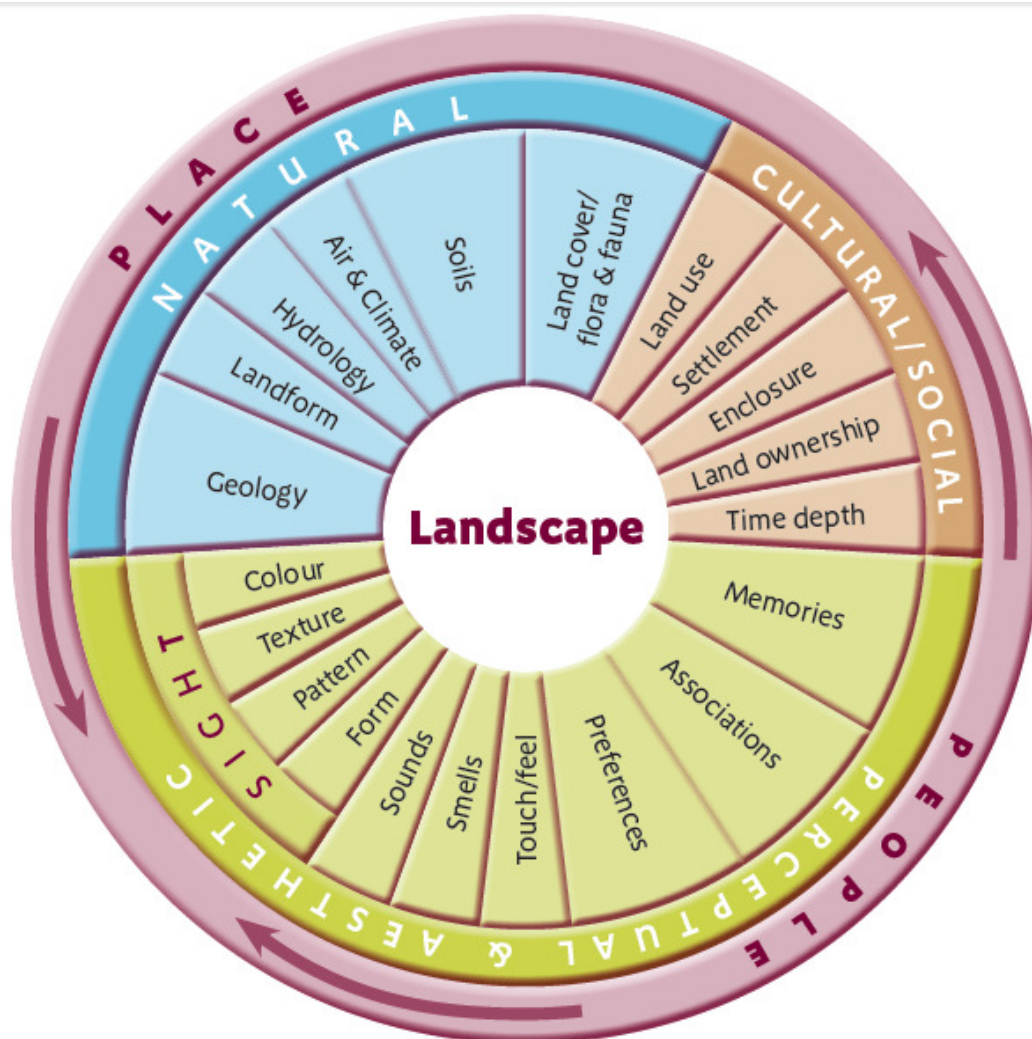
2.0 Methodology

The National Landscape Strategy for Ireland 2015 – 2025 aligns closely with the EU Landscape Convention and EU Landscape Guidelines 2008. In addition to the National Landscape Strategy for Ireland 2015-2025 best practice examples have been used that are also linked to the EU Landscape convention including 'An Approach to landscape Character assessment by Natural England, published October 2014 and best practice LCA examples in Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales.

2.1 COMPONENTS OF A LANDSCAPE

Below illustrates the universally accepted components of 'landscape' and the LCA process has considered all of these as a fundamental part of a process that together culminate in the identification of Landscape Character Areas.

Figure 1.2: Components of a Landscape.



Source: An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment, October 2014, Natural England.

Donegal is a large coastal landscape of diametric types and terrain that has been changed by natural and man-made forces over time resulting in the landscape of the county today. In order to identify Landscape Character types and delineate areas with definitive similarities unique from adjacent areas as Landscape Character Areas, a project brief and methodology for carrying out the landscape Character Assessment was developed as set out in **Figure 1.3** on page 15.

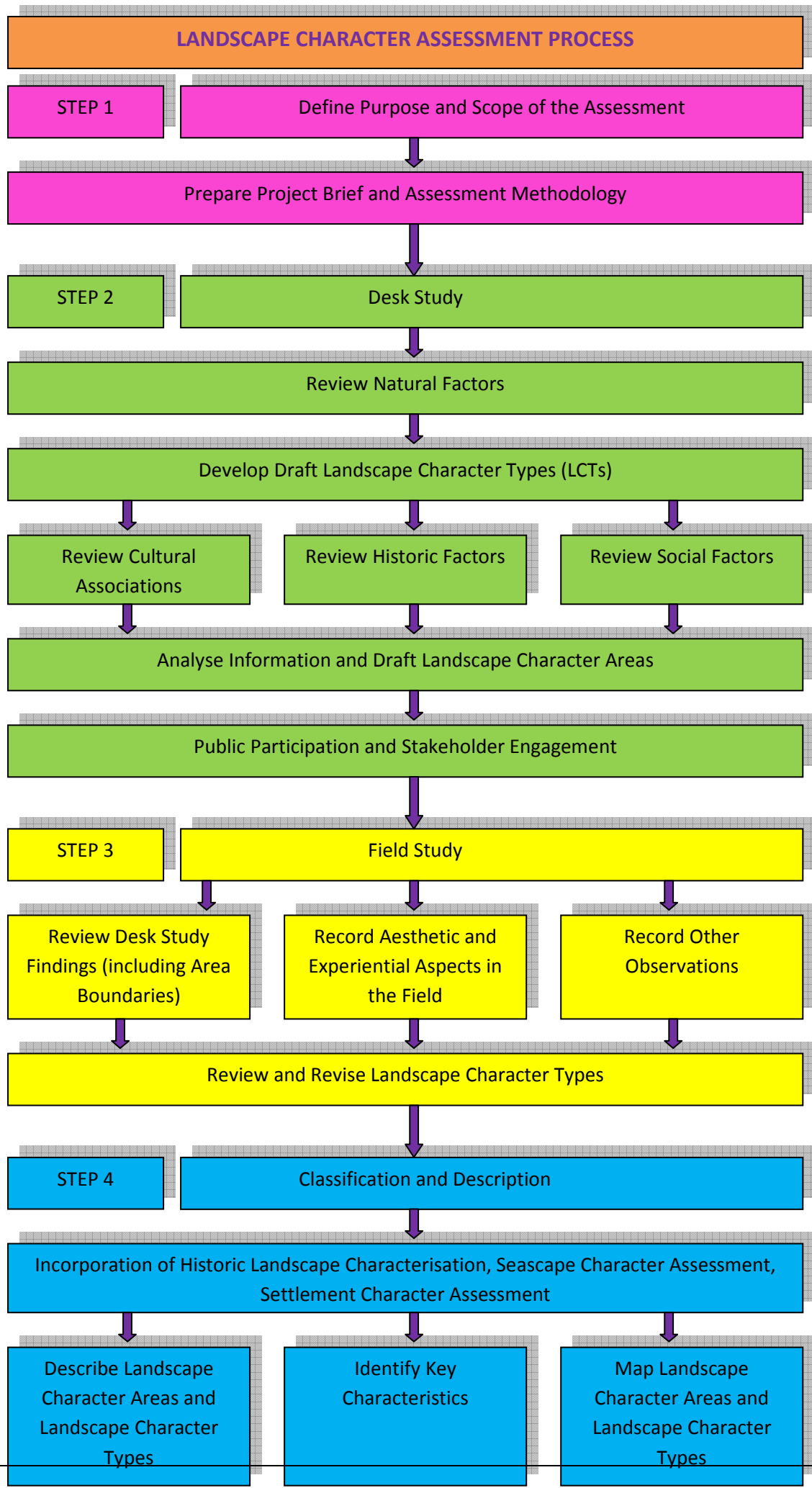
The landscape Character Assessment, in the defining of Landscape Character Areas, incorporated the research and findings of the following 3, separate but overlapping bodies of work. The 3 individual assessments commenced at the same time as the Landscape Character Assessment and have been carried out together as parallel and reiterative processes.

- Seascape Character Assessment (SA)
- Settlement Character Assessment (SCA)
- Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC)

The Landscape, Seascape and Settlement Character Assessments were carried out by an in-house team within the Central Planning Unit of Donegal County Council. The Historic Landscape Characterisation was carried out by a team of consultants 'MOLA-Museum of London Archaeologists', fulfilling an action of the Donegal Heritage Plan and funded by the Heritage Council.

2.2 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Figure 1.3 Landscape Character Assessment Process Flowchart is illustrated overleaf on page 15.



2.3 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT PROCESS (LCAP) STEP 1

2.3.1 SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

As illustrated in step 1 of figure 1.3, a scoping document was prepared in August 2013 that set out the content and procedure, scale and level of detail, the process and the resources and staff to be allocated to the project. The extract from the scope and terms of reference document copied below; sets out the parameters of the LCA for the County.

"It is the aim of the Council to prepare a Landscape Character assessment of the entire County at an appropriate level of scale and detail in accordance with national and international guidance and best practice. It is envisaged that the LCA shall inform numerous plans and projects including (inter alia) land use development plans, renewable energy strategies, integrated coastal zone management strategies, tourism product development and projects (including funding applications), infrastructural projects, mineral extraction projects and Strategic Environmental assessments of plans and projects.

Content and Procedure

It is Donegal County Council's intention to produce a comprehensive and robust Landscape Character Assessment. The Landscape character assessment (hereafter referred to as the LCA) shall include historic landscape assessment and seascape assessment for the entire County at a macro scale and shall incorporate a level of Settlement assessment. The process shall involve an objective assessment of landscape character types by layering spatial data using GIS in a technique already established on a smaller scale for assessing the environmental vulnerabilities of the County during the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the County Donegal Development Plan 2012-2018. This spatial data shall then be used to paint an objective picture of the landscape character types within the County. This work will include field work and stakeholder involvement.

The Council shall produce 4 separate parallel but interlinked assessments as listed below; the main findings of the historic landscape assessment, seascape assessment and settlement assessment shall inform and be integrated within the Landscape character assessment.

Landscape Character Assessment (incorporating the following)

- *Seascape Character Assessment*
- *Historical Landscape Characterisation*
- *Settlement Character Assessment.*

Scale level of detail

The LCA shall be carried out for the entire County at a strategic Countywide level, and shall be of a Regional scale and level of detail similar to that in both Northern Ireland (in their recently published Draft Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment) and County Leitrim (1:50,000 or 1:25000). This assessment will therefore provide a broad context of the overall landscape character of Donegal and more detailed character assessments could be carried out in individual town development plans and through the local area plan programme where more intimate assessment of a finer grain would be more appropriate.

The LCA identifies the individual components of the County's natural, cultural and built heritage and classifies the landscape into areas with succinct commonalities as individual landscape character areas.

Stages in the process

In accordance with the National Landscape Strategy for Ireland 2015-2025 an approach to 'Landscape Character Assessment Guidance by Natural England published in October 2014. The steps and indicative timescale correlated with the stages and timescale for both the Seascape Character Assessment and Settlement Character Assessment and allowed for ease of data transfer throughout all steps of the three projects.

Appropriate Assessment

Pursuant to Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive a report was prepared entitled "Report on the requirement to carry out an Appropriate Assessment". The report recommended that "The Landscape Character Assessment, Seascape Character Assessment and Settlement Character Assessment of County Donegal are narrative descriptions of the individual elements that combine to inform the uniqueness and particular qualities of different areas within County Donegal and as such will have no direct effect on the environment.

These are not likely to be significant effects on the network of Natura 2000 sites as a result of the publication of the Landscape Character Assessment, Seascape Character Assessment and Settlement Character Assessment and therefore an Appropriate Assessment is not required.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

Pursuant to the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (S.I.435 of 2004), a report was prepared entitled "Report on the requirement to carry out a Strategic Environmental Report".

The report concluded that "The Assessments (Landscape Character Assessment, Seascape Character Assessment, Settlement Character Assessment) are narrative descriptions of the individual elements that combine to inform the uniqueness and particular qualities of different areas within County Donegal and as such will have no direct effect on the environment.

2.4 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT PROCESS (LCAP) STEP 2

2.4.1 DESK STUDY

This first step in step 2 of the process was to identify and classify the Landscape Character Types in County Donegal.

The Landscape Character Types are the physical attributes that make up a landscape; they are generic in nature and not specific to an area so are present throughout the County, for example 'Atlantic Blanket Bog' occurs in Inishowen to the north of the County and also within west Donegal, although they occur in different landscape character areas.

Landscape Character types were identified following a desk based examination of various layers of spatial data on the physical attributes of the County, in combination with historical mapping, photography surveys, 3D photography and aerial photography. A total of 23 different Landscape Character Types have been identified and these are shown as **Figure 1.4** Landscape Character Type Map of County Donegal below (page 20). Landscape Character Types are the **physical attributes** of the land.

GIS was used extensively in the initial stages of this element of the assessment, 'gsi' bedrock data was combined with 'Corine' soil, sub-soil and surface cover data to identify commonalities and predominant types within the landscape. This initial assessment was then proofed using a series of aerial and satellite photography to arrive at draft landscape character types that were subsequently verified during site survey work across the entire county.

2.4.2 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES

The varying landscape character types are detailed in Figure 1.4 Landscape Character Types Map of Donegal (page 20) and Figure 1.5 Landscape Character Type Table (pages 21 – 31) below.

There are 23 different LCTs throughout the County; (6 types of agriculture) agricultural arable and pasture, agricultural riverine, agricultural coastal, agricultural drumlin and agricultural estuarine. Natural grassland, forestry/woodland, 3 types of bog, Atlantic, mountainous and highland blanket bog, urban fabric, golf courses, dunes and beach, inter-tidal flats, inland marsh, salt marsh, mountain peaks, bare rock, sparsely vegetated, heath, upland heath and moorland and water bodies.

Figure 1.4 Landscape Character Type Map of County Donegal

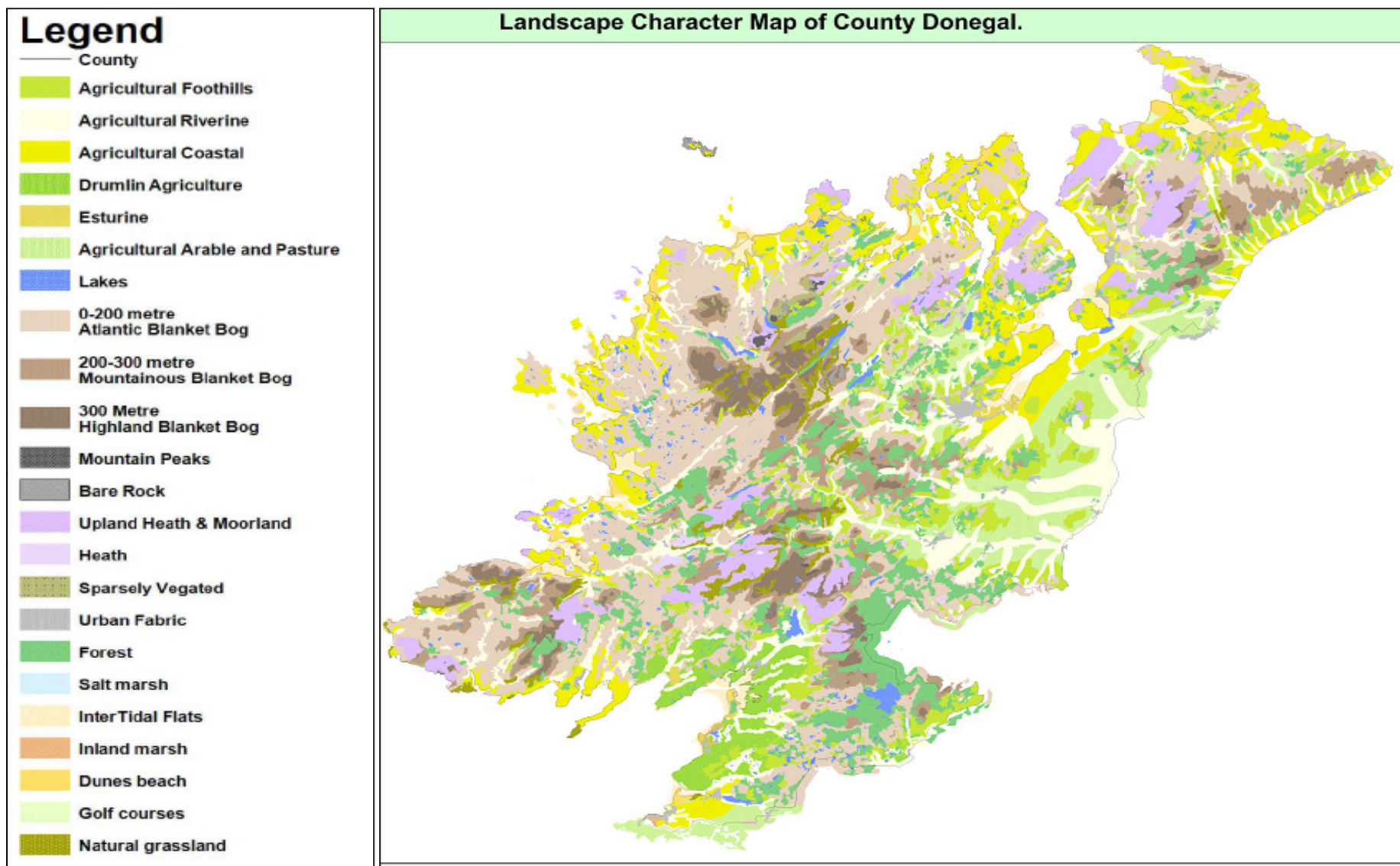






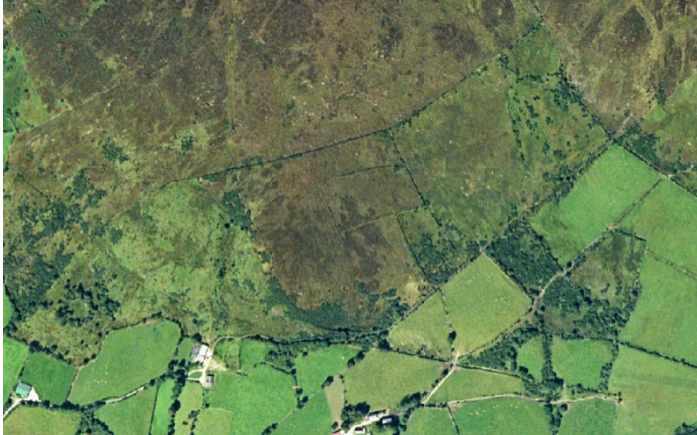








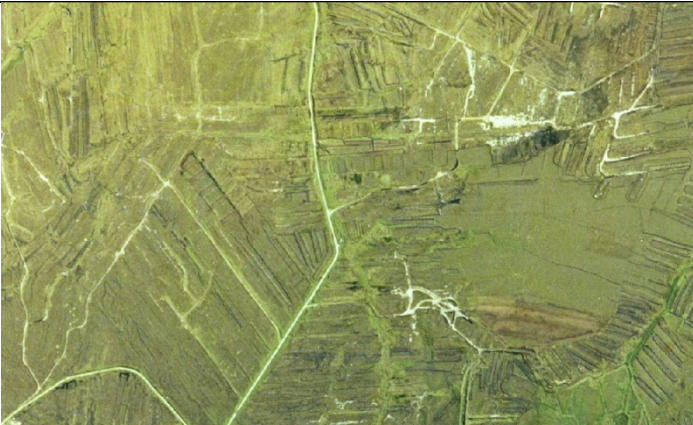


Figure 1.5 Landscape Character Type Table

LCT code (Colour shown as per LCT map in figure 1.4)	Example	Brief description	County coverage (Ha)
A1 (Agricultural arable and pasture) 		Agricultural arable and pasture Areas of high quality arable land generally located to the east of the county around the Finn Valley and Foyle valley within an area colloquially known as the Laggan. Inland agricultural areas prevalent in the Lough Fern LCA (18) and in mid-Inishowen.	32,150 ha
A2 (Agricultural Riverine) 		Agricultural Riverine Farmland occurring within the arable plains within the many river valleys and glens.	62,240 ha

<p>A3 (Agricultural Coastal)</p> 		<p>Agricultural Coastal Farmland occurring at coastal locations such as Donegal Bay and north east Inishowen.</p>	<p>52,130 ha</p>
<p>A4 (Agricultural Foothills)</p> 		<p>Agricultural Foothills Farmland at the bottom of mountainous areas, generally occurring below the 100m contour line.</p>	<p>38,770 ha</p>





<p>A5D (Agricultural Drumlin)</p> 		<p>Agricultural Drumlin Distinctive and characteristic drumlin agricultural landscape formed by retracting glaciers evident in the lands within the south west of the county inland of Donegal Bay.</p>	<p>12,830 ha</p>
<p>A6ES (Agricultural Estuarine)</p> 		<p>Agricultural Estuarine Coastal low lying agricultural areas inland from sea estuaries at various locations along the coast including Trawbreaga Bay in Inishowen and The Big Isle in Letterkenny.</p>	<p>2,795 ha</p>

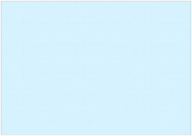

<p>NG (Natural Grassland)</p> 		<p>Natural Grassland Natural and wild grasslands including areas of 'Machair' prevalent in the west of the county.</p>	<p>10,300 ha</p>
<p>FW (Forest/ Woodland)</p> 		<p>Forest/ Woodland This type includes both coniferous and deciduous forests.</p>	<p>56,760 ha</p>


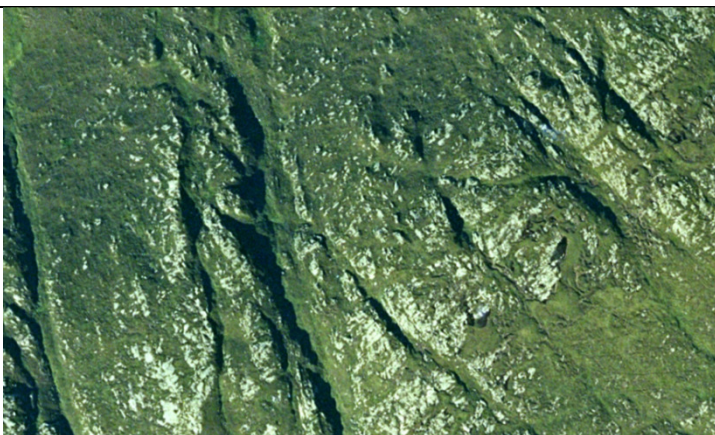


<p>BG1 (0-200 metre Atlantic Blanket Bog)</p> 		<p>0-200 metre Atlantic Blanket Bog Atlantic bogs are within low-lying coastal plains and the lower slopes of mountainous valleys.</p>	<p>125,000 ha</p>
<p>BG2 (200-300 metre Mountainous Blanket Bog)</p> 		<p>200-300 metre Mountainous Blanket Bog Mountain blanket bogs are in relatively flat terrain in the mountain ranges occurring between 200-300m.</p>	<p>37,310 ha</p>


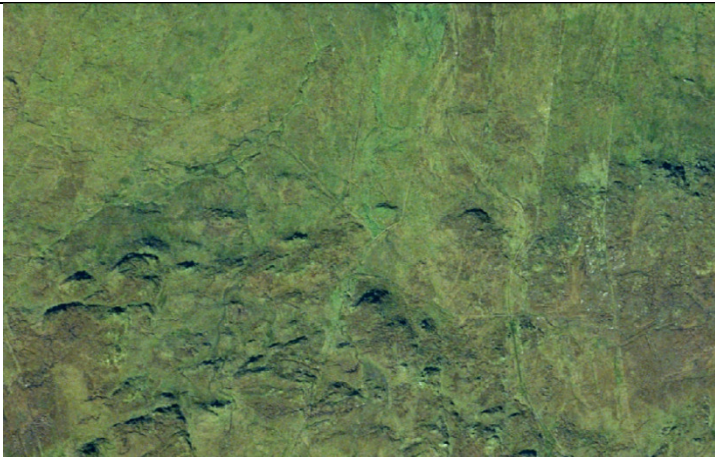


<p>BG3 (300 metre Highland Blanket Bog)</p> 		<p>300 metre Highland Blanket Bog Highland blanket bog is blanket bog occurring above 300m.</p>	<p>16,010 ha</p>
<p>UF (Urban Fabric)</p> 		<p>Urban Fabric Towns, villages and other man-made features including leisure facilities and Carrickfinn Airport</p>	<p>5,701 ha</p>

<p>GC (Golf Courses)</p> 		<p>Golf Courses There are # Golf Courses in the county and an identifiable landscape type.</p>	<p>604 ha</p>
<p>DB (Dunes and Beach)</p> 		<p>Dunes and Beach There are numerous beaches and dune systems necklaced around the coast of the county.</p>	<p>5,147 ha</p>

<p>ITF (Inter-tidal Flats)</p> 		<p>Inter-tidal Flats Intertidal flats are areas of sea bed exposed at low tide prevalent in various inland estuaries along the coast alongside estuarine farmland.</p>	<p>11,950 ha</p>
<p>IM (Inland Marsh)</p> 		<p>Inland Marsh Inland marshes are ecologically important wetland areas covered in fresh water from rivers, lakes or springs</p>	<p>534 ha</p>

<p>SM (Salt Marsh)</p> 		<p>Salt Marsh Salt marshes are coastal wetlands flooded by (often tidal) seawater.</p>	<p>70 ha</p>
<p>MP (Mountain Peaks)</p> 		<p>Mountain Peaks These areas are contained to the extreme points of the Derryveagh and Blue Stack Mountain ranges.</p>	<p>438 ha</p>

<p>BR (Bare Rock)</p> 		<p>Bare Rock Areas of exposed bare rock which occur in very high elevations of the Derryveagh mountain ranges and also an area at Slieve League.</p>	<p>816 ha</p>
<p>SV (Sparsely Vegetated)</p> 		<p>Sparsely Vegetated Distinct sloped areas mainly within the high elevations of the Derryveagh mountains characterised by rock debris and limited vegetation.</p>	<p>1412 ha</p>

<p>H1 (Heath)</p> 		<p>Heath These are small pockets of low-lying uncultivated land that are characterised by vegetation such as heather, gorse and coarse grass.</p>	<p>2,261 ha</p>
<p>H2 (Upland Heath Moorland)</p> 		<p>Upland Heath Moorland Larger areas of uncultivated upland typically covered with heather.</p>	<p>28,610 ha</p>

WB (Water Bodies)



Water Bodies
A mixture of fresh and salt water lakes and reservoirs.

8,076 ha