Dear Alana

The Planning Committee of Derry City and Strabane District Council notes the contents of the draft consultation report on the Landscape Character Assessment of County Donegal, including the Seascape and Settlement Character Assessment.

From our review, the Committee considers there is much to commend in the landscape, seascape and settlement assessments you have undertaken. Planning is a significant force for change both on land and in the marine environment and your finalised assessments will be extremely useful in this regard both as a baseline as well as monitoring the degree of impact across your internationally renowned landscape.
Similarly the Derry City and Strabane District contains a great diversity of contrasting landscape and seascape character; from the sensitive and AONB-designated scenic uplands of the Sperrins and their foothills, through our shared border along the broad wooded valleys of the Foyle Valley and out to the coastal flats fronting Lough Foyle. Such landscapes have given rise to a great wealth of natural biodiversity and contain a legacy of archaeological heritage. Their value to our Council economy, particularly tourism is extremely significant.

The protection of our local landscape and its character in terms of sustainable development, including cumulative impacts, is of paramount concern to this Council and one that we intend to address via the preparation of relevant policies to be contained within our forthcoming Local Development Plan (LDP).

Taking into account our significant shared border, this Committee is in agreement that a holistic approach should be taken to the appreciation and management of our land and seascape in the northwest. Specific comments are as follows:

Landscape Character:

- Possibly refer to the Lough Foyle SPA and Ramsar site in LCA 7. It would be useful to list the appropriate designated sites and in the LCAs along the shared watercourses, it may be worth noting that invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed poses a threat to our common biodiversity.
- LCA 7 Lough Foyle Coast (doesn’t directly abut): There is a very strong visual and physical connection to Northern Ireland as it forms most of the view out of this area; the international boundary runs through Lough Foyle.
- LCA 10 South Inishowen farmland: this LCA forms the natural rural hinterland of Derry city and abuts the border with Northern Ireland.
- LCA 11 Grianan Slopes and Lowlands: this LCA forms the natural rural hinterland of Derry city and abuts the border with Northern Ireland.
- LCA 12 Laggan Valley (doesn’t directly abut): is a vast undulating agricultural landscape of good quality pasture and arable land characterised by large, geometric, hedge trimmed agricultural fields extending over a wide geographical area, close to the Foyle at its east side.
• LCA 13 Foyle Valley: this LCA forms the natural rural hinterland of Derry city and abuts the border with Northern Ireland. This LCA has a strong visual connection to its mirror landscape on the opposite side of the River Foyle in Northern Ireland in terms of the similar landscape type and also that the Northern Ireland landscape inherently informs the views within and without of this LCA.

• LCA 14 Finn Valley: The eastern edge of this LCA borders Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Areas Foyle Valley (27) and Derg Valley (20), a continuum of the landscape type of the Finn Valley, namely good quality agricultural riverine lands of semi-improved geometric fields, with scattered farms, farmsteads and one off rural dwellings served by a number of rural villages and towns.

• LCA 40 Cashelnavern Border & Uplands: is a vast, mountainous, remote and undeveloped upland area bordering Northern Ireland characterized by peat covered hills and the mountain lakes of Lough Mourne and Lough Carn. Adjoins Northern Ireland’s LCA 19, ‘Killeter Uplands Landscape’.

• LCA 41 Croaghnameal Border & Uplands: Adjoins Northern Ireland’s LCA 19, ‘Killeter Uplands Landscape’.

• LCA 42 Lough Derg Uplands and Lakelands: Adjoins Northern Ireland’s LCA 19, ‘Killeter Uplands Landscape’.

• LCA 43 Pettigo Drumlins: Adjoins Northern Ireland’s LCA 19, ‘Killeter Uplands Landscape’.

The Draft Seascape Assessment:

• Seascape Unit 1 Lough Foyle which extends across the western shore of NI and into the mouth of the River Foyle towards Derry City. Donegal shares a long border with Northern Ireland including the shared international marine border along Lough Foyle and the River Foyle. Lough Foyle and the Northern Ireland coastline are inherently integral within the character of the Lough Foyle seascape unit and vice versa.

The Draft Settlement Character Assessment:

• Cross border settlements have important residential functions and provide a range of services; there is a degree of fluidity in these areas, particularly associated with the fluctuation in exchange rates. The settlements of most relevance to Derry City and Strabane District are:
• Tier 1 - Letterkenny which is designated as a linked Gateway within the National Spatial Strategy 2002 (NSS). This linked Gateway status identifies Letterkenny in association with the city of Derry as the primary economic and employment centre for the northwest.

• Tier 2 - Bridgend, as well as Buncrana and Ballybofey-Stranorlar and Donegal Town.

• Tier 3 - Lifford, Convoy, Raphoe, Newtowncunningham, Manorcunningham, and Muff.

• Tier 4 is the Small Villages and Tier 5 is the Rural Area - much of which is in proximity to our District.

I trust that you find these comments useful as you finalise your landscape and associated reports. This Committee looks forward to continuing liaison with Donegal Co Council as we plan for the future of our adjoining Council areas.

Yours sincerely,

Kieran McGuire

Planning Committee (Chair)

Derry City and Strabane District Council