Help shape this area’s heritage and your family’s future

Our waters and coast have supported people for nearly 10,000 years.

We value this area’s peaceful yet wild beauty.
Our wildlife is internationally important.
Farming and fishing are part of our society and our heritage.
Landscape and wildlife are at the heart of our growing tourism and recreation industries.
We have the potential for more renewable energy generation.
Challenges and opportunities include coastal erosion, derelict buildings, litter, protecting wildlife, competition from other tourism destinations, agricultural reforms and the growing leisure industry.

Please tell us what you think
Your ideas on using our heritage for our health, well-being and prosperity.
Your concerns for our wildlife, scenery and built heritage.
Your thoughts on getting involved.

- Pick up an information pack from the SLLP office.
- Visit strangfordlough.org

The Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership’s Advisory Committee comprises people from many different local and special interest organisations and they have identified the issues listed here.

Feel free to add your own issues and questions
All comments received up to the end of March 2012 will be considered by the Partnership as part of the development of the Strangford Lough and Lecale Management Strategy.
A draft of the Strategy will be available on www.strangfordlough.org and hard copies in local libraries later in the year.

Strangford Lough & Lecale Partnership, No 1 The Square, Portaferry BT22 1LW
A Sense of Place

Our landscape connects us and is part of us. But changes in lifestyle and pressures of modern life may weaken that connection. Some people have asked for new ways to get more involved with their heritage.

If volunteering opportunities were set up would you:
Be a “coastal guardian” learning and sharing knowledge on a stretch of coast near you?
Be a heritage guide?
Be part of a trained team laying hedges and repairing stone walls?
Other?

Could we improve www.strangfordlough.org - the main heritage website for this area. If so, how?

Potential Ideas
• Get more young people around our coast involved in coastal activities such as sailing and paddling.
• Develop short heritage walks in our towns and villages to encourage us all to get out and about.
• Put caring for our heritage in village plans.

What do you think? Have you other comments?

Our changing coast

Our response to coastal erosion has often been to rock armour and this can bring its own problems. Our wildlife will literally be squeezed out if sea levels rise and the shoreline cannot adapt because of stone and concrete. Where will it stop – a fully rock armoured coast?

? Are we wasting money on ineffective coastal protection?

? Are we causing flooding and erosion problems elsewhere?

Potential Idea
• A study on coastal change would help us to understand and plan for the future for our roads, farmland and even our houses but there are no easy solutions.

What do you think? Have you other comments?

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Wildlife Watch

“Out of sight is out of mind” but the shore and seabed are home to thousands of different kinds of animals and plants all linked together in a complex web of life that includes us too.

Many plants and animals are a source of food, medicine and have been used in industry yet there is little understanding of our interaction with them in this area.

Potential Ideas

- Study our boulder shores and how we might be affecting them.
- Provide more public information on our shore wildlife.
- Provide more and better information on the seabed.
- Further develop the Exploris aquarium?

Many local people believe that levels of shore-based shellfish collection has increased in recent years and is damaging the wildlife under and around shore boulders and the associated birdlife. Others feel there is no problem.

? If there is a problem should we develop a new licensed shore based fishery or take other measures?

We have lost many species, and horse mussel beds that were once home to hundreds of species have declined dramatically. This could affect the whole ecosystem. Closed areas may be introduced in Strangford Lough that limit some activities, including pot fishing, boat anchoring or mooring, in areas of the seabed where horse mussel communities need protection. (See also section on pot fishing).

? What are your views on closed areas?

Common or harbour seals are declining on our coast while numbers of grey seal have increased in some areas.

? Would you help to build up our picture of the movements and behaviour of seals, porpoise, whales and basking shark? Could you report incidents of dead or injured seals?

Spot our red squirrels: The Ards Peninsula is one of the last bastions of our native red squirrel – in particular in woodlands owned by the National Trust and on private estates.

? A red Squirrel Group is being set up. Would you help them to spot and monitor the animals?

? How would you feel about culling grey squirrels?

Potential Idea

- Provide suitable habitat, particularly mixed deciduous and conifer woodland.

Hedges criss-crossing drumlins help to define this area. They shelter livestock and support our wildlife. Many landowners take pride in maintaining hedges but some hedges are in a poor state and deterioration is spreading. Part of the difficulty, identified by the Ulster Farmers' Union, is the lack of time and skilled labour. Another issue is that clearing hedges and ditches for development is gradually urbanising our country roads.

? Do you agree this is a problem?

? Could trained volunteers assist farmers with hedge-laying and stone walling?

Potential Idea

- Plant native species that are part of the landscape and good for wildlife in gardens and at new developments?

What do you think? Have you other comments?

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Scrub it! Changes to single farm payments may encourage farmers to clear scrub which is a feature of the landscape and provides essential cover for our wildlife. But this income may be short-lived as CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) reforms could place a high value in future on maintaining such habitats!

? Can farmers forego short-term income to conserve our wildlife and habitats?

Wetlands are havens for wildlife and help define this area. But many have already been lost and we may soon have very few left.

? Do wetlands matter to you? Could this gradual loss of our wetlands be reversed or at least halted?

? The local community at Killough has a scheme to restore Strand Lough. Would you “adopt a wetland” working with landowners and others?

? Many of our ponds are choked with invasive weeds often from people’s aquaria! Have you ideas on how best to stop this?

Cord grass or Spartina is an invasive grass that threatens to take over large swathes of sand and mud flats. The NI Environment Agency appears to be succeeding in eradicating this invader.

What do you think? Have you other comments?
Get Active. Get Outside!

Sailing, paddling and walking are great ways to exercise in harmony with this landscape and can add to our economic prosperity with new businesses and jobs already opening up.

Paddling is one of the UK’s fastest growing activities and our area offers a mix of safe bays and challenging currents for most abilities.

Strangford Lough has most of Northern Ireland’s sailing clubs and new aids to navigation have improved safety and will encourage more visiting vessels.

People in Strangford are hoping to expand their new pontoons, which are already boosting local business.

Lecale offers some of the best coasteering in Northern Ireland.

The Narrows attracts triathlons and sporting challenges.

Angling is popular in some places.

New information packs could enhance the experience for people and help them to avoid disturbing wildlife.

A large part of the area’s attraction is our peaceful scenery and wildlife.

High speed is great fun but can lead to collisions with people and wildlife and the powerful wash from fast motorcraft can knock people into the water. Noise and the loss of tranquillity are also big concerns.

What do you think is needed to develop these activities?

Will voluntary codes or accreditation help to protect wildlife and maintain safety?

Have you concerns?

How could our young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, get involved?

What do you think? Have you other comments?

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New Energy

High winds and strong currents in this area can help to generate electricity in new ways as fossil fuels decline. An area off the Ards Peninsula and Lecale may be suited to off shore wind turbines and the Crown Estate is currently assessing companies wishing to develop proposals. The cables may come on land on the Ards Peninsula – this could help to develop facilities on shore.

SeaGen put Strangford Lough on the world's stage as a technological leader and has brought visitors from all over the globe. The Narrows has been zoned for further experimental current turbine operations. Each proposal would be assessed carefully before approval is given. DETI is taking a holistic approach and all relevant authorities will be expected to consider the overall proposals and their impacts when commenting on their area of responsibility.

Do you have a view on renewable energy proposals?

People are applying for wind turbine micro-generators in Lecale – can or how should they be best accommodated in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty?

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Pot Fishing

Pot fishing has been carried on around our shores for hundreds of years and the Partnership is keen to see a sustainable pot fishery in Strangford Lough into the future. Recent concerns for the loss of wildlife on the seabed of Strangford Lough is leading to the closure of areas to pot fishing and some other activities.

Fishermen are working with the Departments towards producing a management plan for the pot fishery.

A study on the interactions between shellfish potting, other activities and a variety of habitats is proposed in order to plan for sustainable use of the seabed in the long term.

Do you have any views on how the fishery can be maintained while at the same time protecting the wider ecosystem?

Potential Idea

- In other parts of the UK, fishermen supplement their income by getting involved in marine monitoring programmes within Marine Protected Areas.
Our buildings

This area has a very fine built heritage and many buildings and monuments are in excellent condition through state care or private owners. Some, however, are falling into dereliction.

How would you address dereliction?

Would you like better access to our tower houses and other historic buildings and structures? What would you suggest?

Would you volunteer to help maintain or provide guided tours of our built heritage?

How could communities benefit more from our built heritage?

Modern agriculture has made many field architecture features defunct and much is now in disrepair.

Do you value this area’s traditional gateways, corbelled sties in Lecale and other features? What would you like to see happen to them?

Windmills are an unusually prominent feature of the landscape.

Would you like to know more about them? Have you concerns for their future?

Village renewal: Killyleagh has very successfully regenerated an area near the castle through building renovation. Portaferry is working on a programme to repair derelict buildings in the town. Village plans are helping communities to consider the future.

What do you think are the priorities for our towns and villages?

Are there problems with village plans that need to be addressed?

What do you think? Have you other comments?

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Cleaning Up

Raw sewage on our shores, public places knee deep in litter and dumping in secluded spots. How could this happen in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty?

While people have genuine concerns for our water quality there have been improvements in sewage treatment systems. Our designated beaches achieved excellent status under the 2011 EC Bathing Water Compliance, but you can still find raw sewage on our shores, especially after heavy rain. The upgrade of Newcastle Waste Water Treatment Works and proposals to increase storage capacity of Dundrum WWTW should help. (The Department of the Environment has put in place River Basin Catchment Management Plans - see DOENI website).

Privately owned sewers are sometimes misconnected to storm sewers. This can cause pollution as storm sewers carry water straight to the local watercourse.

How do you think these problems could be addressed?

Potential Idea
- Report places where storm waters may still be connected to sewage pipes.

Dumping and fly-tipping still happens.

Potential Idea
- Ask authorities to pool their resources to provide a rapid response system to catch the perpetrators and clean up areas, especially where land ownership is unclear.

Waste management costs our local councils (and us!) tens of millions of pounds every year. We must reduce waste but how?

How could we encourage less packaging?

Would people take their litter home?

Would people clean up after their dogs?

Would you get involved in a regular volunteer litter-picking scheme for your favourite places?

What do you suggest?

What do you think? Have you other comments?

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**Eating Well**

Within an Area of Outstanding Beauty there are special opportunities to develop local foods that benefit people and the environment...

- Is there a niche market for “specialist” high quality seafood from this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty?
- Would you pay extra for fishing based on the principle of high quality / low yield that is environmentally sustainable?

Many people are turning to organic produce, running farm shops and making specialist food such as cheese.

Game hunting is a significant income generating sport in this area and wild game are used at home and in local restaurants.

- What would help these and other businesses to flourish?
- How can they be promoted as part of a growing food tourism industry?

**Getting Around**

Road infrastructure affects business and people’s view of their area. There are serious safety concerns with some roads.

- Summer coastal attractions can bring congestion...

- Do we need investment in roads? Where are the priorities?
- Could public transport be improved efficiently?
- Are there opportunities to hire cycles to visitors?
- Should the Strangford ferry run later at weekends?
- Do we need more / better stopping points and car parks?

What do you think? Have you other comments?
Attracting and accommodating visitors

More serviced accommodation and providing better access to the environment have been identified as top priorities for tourism development in this area (see also the Strangford Lough Tourism Destination Management Plan produced by the local councils).

Attracting people to this area continues to be a challenge against more established destinations.

Tackling litter is also an ongoing theme.

What do you think of these priorities? Have you any suggestions / recommendations?

Let’s Celebrate

Events can bring communities together, protect our heritage and culture and can be great assets to the tourism industry. Maritime culture, paddling, yachting, Vikings, sand sculpture and even the history of chocolate are just some of the themes.

What do you think should be developed into major events and why?

How can we maximise the benefits of these events?

What do you think? Have you other comments?

Strangford Lough & Lecale Partnership, No 1 The Square, Portaferry BT22 1LW

Northern Ireland Environment Agency

ARDSDOWN

Strangford Lough & Lecale Partnership
Strangford and Lecale
Area of Outstanding
Natural Beauty

Help shape this area’s heritage and your family’s future.

Please tell us what you think about any aspect of this area’s heritage.

(Feit free to use the back and other sheets)

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Name: ________________________________________________________________

Area: (eg Portaferry) _____________________________________________________

Contact details (optional): ________________________________________________

e-mail: __________________________________________________________________

Age group (please tick): under 15  under 25  25-65  65 plus

I would like to be informed about volunteering opportunities (please circle)

Yes  No
ek

Post to: SLLP, No 1 The Square, Portaferry, County Down BT22 1LA

e-mail: admin@strangfordlough.org (you can request a “Word” version of this form)

Use www.strangfordlough.org

Please submit by 31 March 2012

__________________________________________________________________________

What do you think? Have you other comments?

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