

Settlement Character Assessment County Donegal



Comhairle Contae
Dhún na nGall
Donegal County Council

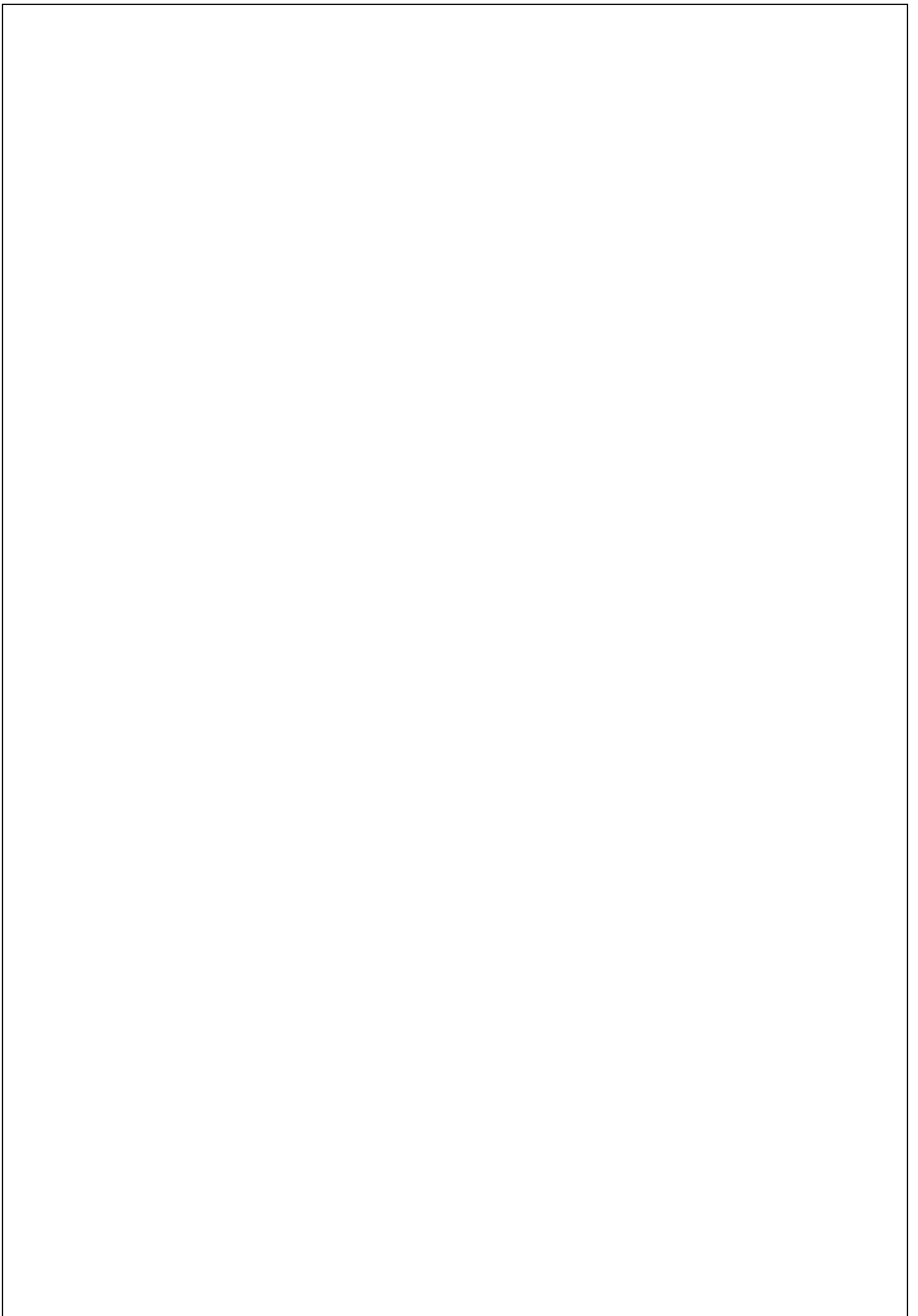




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Settlement Character Assessment

1 INTRODUCTION

Donegal is a largely rural county with a long and diverse coastline that hosts a plethora of settlements of varying physical sizes, scales and origins providing a diversity of functions. These settlements are entities in themselves whilst also informing the landscape, reflecting the culture and history of the evolution of the landscape and its people.

In order to define the parameters of this Assessment, the 62 settlements identified within tiers 1-4 of the Donegal County Development Plan 2012-2018 form the focus of this study. These settlements are categorised in the CDP as Gateway Towns (tier 1), Strategic Support Towns (tier 2), Strong towns and Villages (tier 3) and small villages (tier 4). 37 other settlements including clachans, crossroads settlements and small nodes/clusters of rural dwellings are identified within tier 5 of the County Development Plan and these play a role as a social and cultural focus locally, however these have not been included as part of this Settlement Character Assessment.

The purpose of this Settlement Character Assessment is to identify, describe and evaluate 62 settlements across the County and create a narrative to describe the individual qualities and features of each settlement, and thereby define the overall character of each settlement, in themselves and in how they are informed by the surrounding landscape and (where applicable) seascape.

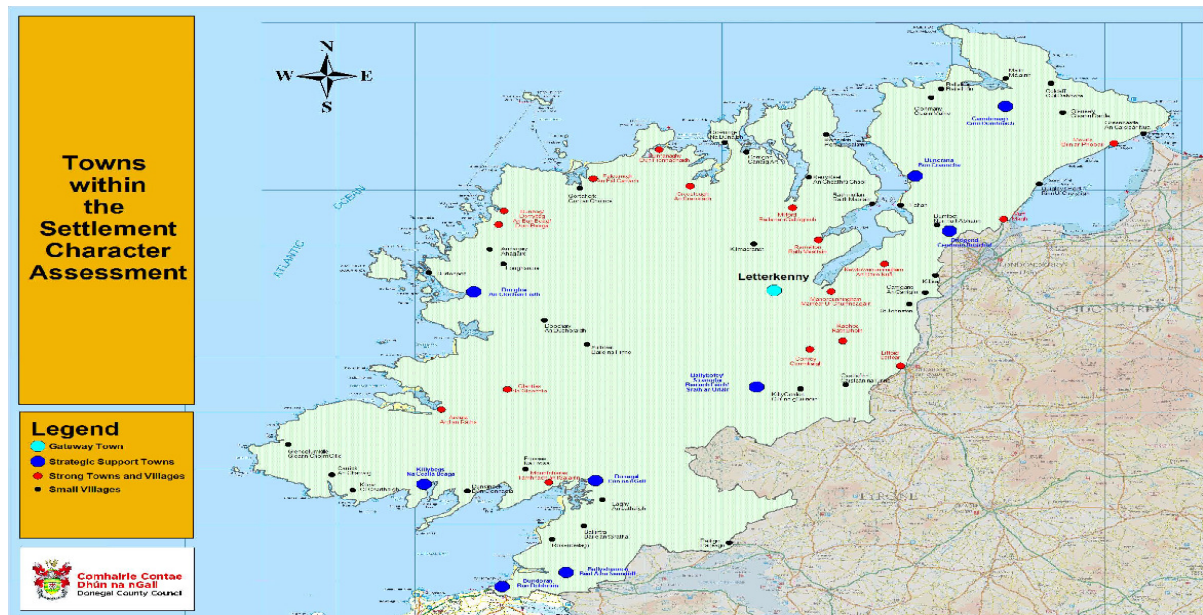
1.1 Objectives of the Settlement Character Assessment

- Carry out a Settlement Character Assessment that identifies key characteristics, components, designations and features that contribute to the character of each settlement and give a narrative of the defining elements.
- Incorporate elements from the Landscape Character Assessment and Seascape Character Assessment that will inform the settlement character assessment and conversely feed into these assessments that shall be concurrently carried out for County Donegal.

Figure 1.1: Table showing settlements per tier as extracted from the County Donegal Development Plan 2012-2018

Tier	Name	Location
1	Gateway	Letterkenny
2	Strategic Support Towns	Buncrana & Environs, Ballybofey- Stranorlar, Ballyshannon & Environs, Bundoran, Killybegs, Dungloe, Bridgend, Donegal Town, Carndonagh
3	Strong towns and villages	Lifford, Merville, Bunbeg-Derrybeg, Convoy, Ramelton, Raphoe, Newtowncunningham, Manorcunningham, Muff, Falcarragh, Milford, Glenties, Ardara, Mountcharles, Creeslough, Dunfanaghy
4	Small Villages	St Johnston, Kilmacrennan, Castlefinn, Rossnowlagh, Killea, Greencastle, Rathmullan, Clonmany, Fahan, Burnfoot, Dunkineely, Killygordon, Ballyliffen, Kerrykeel, Pettigo, Burtonport, Carrick, Carrigart, Quigleys Point, Kilcar, Annagry, Ballintra, Frosses, Carrigans, Laghy, Gleneely, Culdaff, Gortahork, Fintown, Doochary, Malin, Downings, Portsalon, Loughanure, Glencolmille, Bruckless
5	Rural area	RURAL AREA and: Naran- Portnoo, Glengad, Portnablagh, Magheraroarty, Rannafast, Mulladuff, Redcastle, Porthall, Malinmore, Inver Glebe, Ballindrait, Tieveban, Churchill, Crolly, Teelin, Termon, Lettermacaward, Dunlewey, Cloghanbeg, Maghery, Ardaghy- Cranny, Kincasslough, Meenaneary, Liscooley, Malinbeg, Inch, Carrowmenagh, Drumoghill, Cashelard, Glen, Bridgetown, Drumfries, Doneyloop, Killymard, Rosnakill, Tamney, Cloghore, Eskaheen, Cranford, Glenvar, Maghera, Drumkeen

Figure 1.2: Town locations within Landscape Character Areas



The Settlement Character Assessment was prepared as a standalone assessment that forms part of a parallel and re-iterative process alongside a Landscape Character Assessment and a Seascape Character Assessment that were carried out for County Donegal. All three of these individual but linked character assessments inform and complement each other whilst focusing on a particular element of the landscape of Donegal.



Urban landscape is an important, individual but integral element of the wider landscape that merits separate and focused analyses within the remit of a wider landscape and seascape appraisal of the County.

Settlements have a dynamic social, cultural and economic focus supported by a population concentration that allows vibrancy and vitality. The physical character of the settlements reflects the geology, topography and hydrology of the landscape, this along with the built heritage within the towns as well as the more intangible histories and local traditions, contribute to the uniqueness of place of each town and village. Despite being individual entities in themselves, settlements can also have common attributes and can have a general identity as a settlement type such as 'market town' or 'plantation settlement'.

1.2 History of Settlement in County Donegal

Donegal has evidence of 'settlement' from as far back as the Mesolithic (from 7000BC) period following a trend over time, of settlements moving from coastal areas inland,

although evidence of these settlements appears to be somewhat fluid and transient,. The migration of these hunter-gatherers inland marks the first modification of landscape by people.

The Neolithic period (from 4,000BC) had a profound effect on society, culture and landscape making a more settled life of farms, communities and territories that passed on from generation to generation. The bronze age heralded a further increase in social and cultural complexity, evident by the many hillforts in the county.

Christianity was introduced early to Donegal, both St.Patrick and St.Colmcille have strong associations with the county. The arrival of Christianity radically transformed social and cultural systems, in particular the arrival of monasteries that accumulated land and property alienated from individuals, contrasted to traditional family and community ownership. Monasteries were also involved in significant levels of trade and communications and took on the character of towns within a wider rural landscape.

The Flight of the Earls from Rathmullan in 1607 marked the end of the old Gaelic Order and paved the way for the 'Plantation of Ulster'. Lands throughout the county were confiscated from the native Irish by the English and divided between English and Scottish settlers. More fertile lands in the 'Lagan' area, around Donegal Bay and around Lough Swilly in Inishowen were settled. A number of notable plantation towns are Carndonagh, Donegal, Letterkenny, Malin, Moville and Raphoe; all characterized by the best homes and buildings in the town arranged around a market square or 'diamond'.

The 18th and 19th Centuries saw the emergence of more small coastal settlements, with small scale subsistence fishing as well as fishing for export. The fish supply during this period was so plentiful that the Marquis of Cunningham constructed a new linear village with a pier, houses and stores on Rutland Island; the ruins of this abandoned settlement remain on this uninhabited island. During the 19th century, the inland rural farming population lived in clusters of dwellings and clachans, served by market towns and smaller villages. By the mid 1830s a number of market towns had expanded to include an array of functions, such as services, schools, local government, health care, constabulary barracks, workhouses and dispensaries.

The arrival of the railway to Donegal contributed to a further metamorphosis of many of Donegal's towns and villages, the first line from Strabane to Stranorlar opened in 1863. By the early 1900s the Donegal Railway radiated from Lifford to the South, West and North and east into what is now Northern Ireland. This provided easier transport and connectivity to and through many settlements opening up these areas to wider markets.

The towns and villages continued to grow at a modest rate throughout most of the 20th century, however a period of sustained growth occurred during the 1980s and 1990s. This was as a result of continued and steady economic growth, in coastal areas this was partly fuelled by tourism and in the border region by an overflow of population from Northern Ireland and in particular Derry. This was magnified at the beginning of the Millennium during the 'Boom' years resulting in often sporadic development led growth in the urban areas. The 'Bust' that followed in 2008-2009 left a visible and pronounced legacy in many of the towns in the form of dereliction and vacancy, this is being steadily redressed in more recent years.

Towns and villages, as landscapes, have been entirely modified by man, and influenced by factors such as topography, history, culture, land ownership and more recently planning controls. All these intertwining elements combine to the distinctive uniqueness of place.

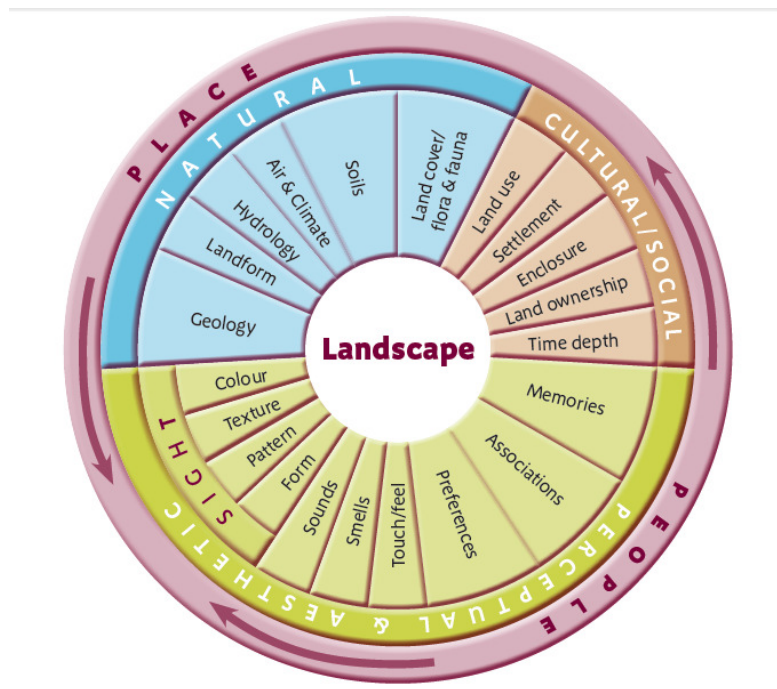
2. METHODOLOGY

In the absence of set guidelines for Settlement Character Assessment, the process for carrying out the Landscape Character Assessment of County Donegal was mirrored and the methodology is set out over the following pages.

2.1 Components of a Settlement

Settlements are a constituent element of a landscape with a similar set of variables to rural areas, as such the components of a landscape as identified by the European Landscape Convention are also applicable to a settlement, and these are illustrated in **Figure 1.3** the Landscape wheel below.

Figure 1.3: Components of a Settlement.

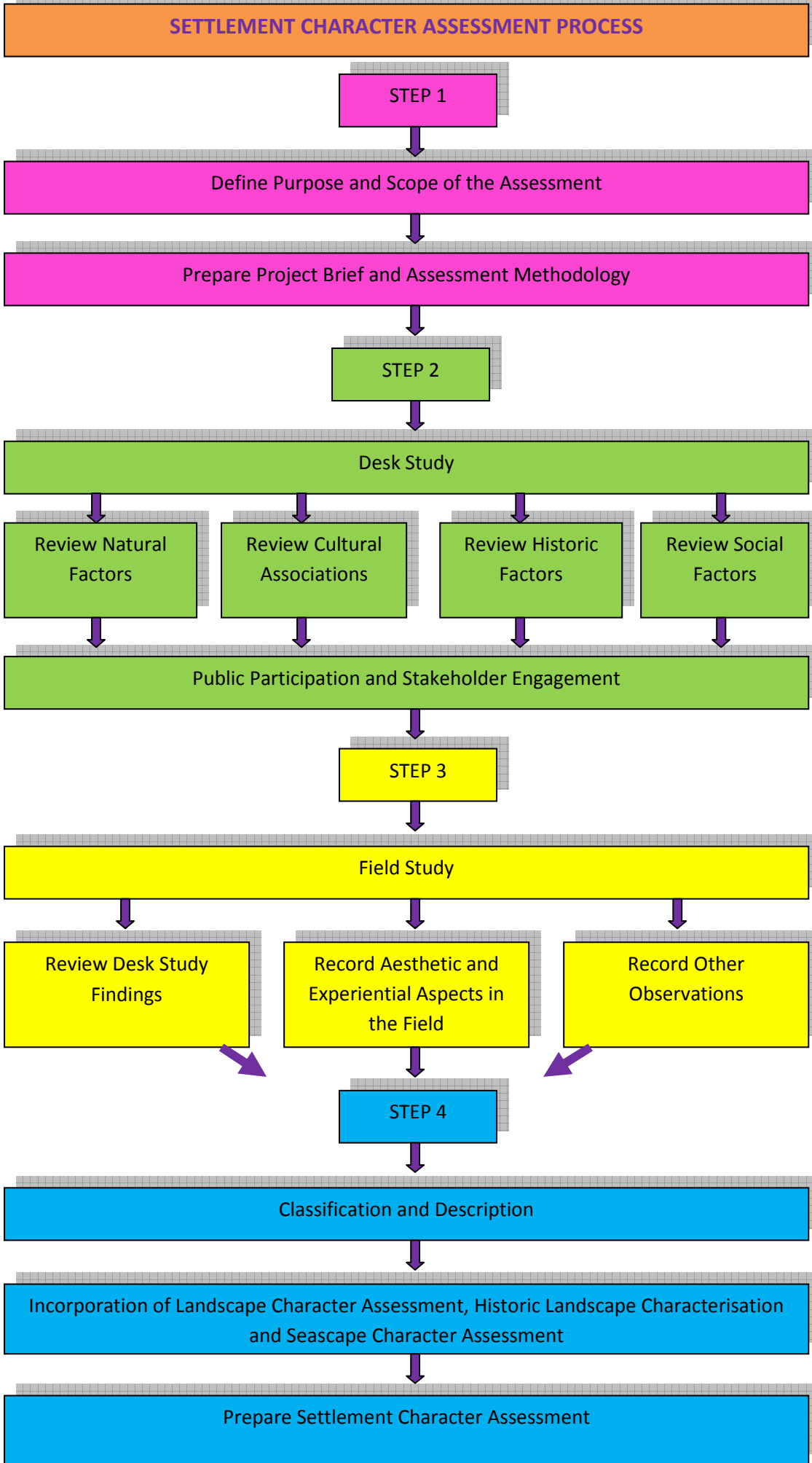


Source: An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment, October 2014, Natural England.

2.2 Settlement Character Assessment Process

The process followed to carry out the Settlement Character assessment is set out as four steps as illustrated in **Figure 1.4:** Flowchart for the Settlement Character Assessment on the next page and as described in section 2.3 to 2.6 of this report.

Figure 1.4 Settlement Character Assessment Process Flowchart (page7)



2.3 Settlement Character Assessment Process – Step 1

2.3.1 Purpose and Scope of the Assessment

The purpose of the assessment is to provide an overall picture of the towns and villages in the County by identifying the various attributes, as illustrated in figure #, that together contribute to the character and unique identity of each settlement at a level of detail that informs both the Landscape Character Assessment and (where applicable) the Seascape Character Assessment, whilst also being a standalone assessment that can be used to inform plans and projects such as 'local area plans' and development projects relating to the settlements.

The scope of the assessment in so much as it forms an integral and parallel process alongside the Landscape Character Assessment and Seascape Character Assessment, is set out as part of the Landscape Character Assessment process. A scoping document was prepared for this in August 2013 and set out the content and procedure, scope and level of detail, the process and the resources and staff to be allocated to the project as detailed in the abstract from the scope and terms of reference documents copied below:

"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 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.

2.4 Settlement Character Assessment Process – Step 2

2.4.1 Desk Study

A desk study was carried out that utilized existing digital and spatial datasets pertaining to each of the settlements; this involved consideration and examination of over 100 layers of spatial data in addition to published material and previous survey work carried out by Donegal County Council on each of the settlements.

2.4.2 Public Participation

Public Participation on the Settlement Character Assessment occurred as part of the wider LCA public consultation process during a three month period in January 2014. The LCA process was advertised in local press, on the council's website and on Facebook and Twitter. A letter and information leaflet, **Figure 1.3** below, were sent out to over 400 community groups throughout the County outlining the LCA (and including Settlement Character Assessment) process, detailing drop-in events and explaining how to make a submission and become involved in the LCA (and including Settlement Character Assessment) process. Similarly, a letter and information leaflet was sent out to all public libraries, primary schools and secondary schools in the County in order to target a younger age cohort in the consultation process. Targeted notification on the LCA was also sent out to all neighbouring Local Authorities. An interactive mapping tool was developed encouraging digital submissions that were localised to a geographical point and to which submissions and photographs could be attached, and all methods of submission including digital submissions were encouraged and welcomed, screenshot of this is illustrated in **Figure 1.4** below.

There were a series of 5 structured public 'drop in' events throughout the County during February 2014 and attended by members of the LCA team. There were a number of draft maps on display including those listed below in addition to rolling presentations and hand-out maps and documentation. The purpose of the public events was to encourage

informed public participation and on the whole these events were well attended and had positive outcomes.

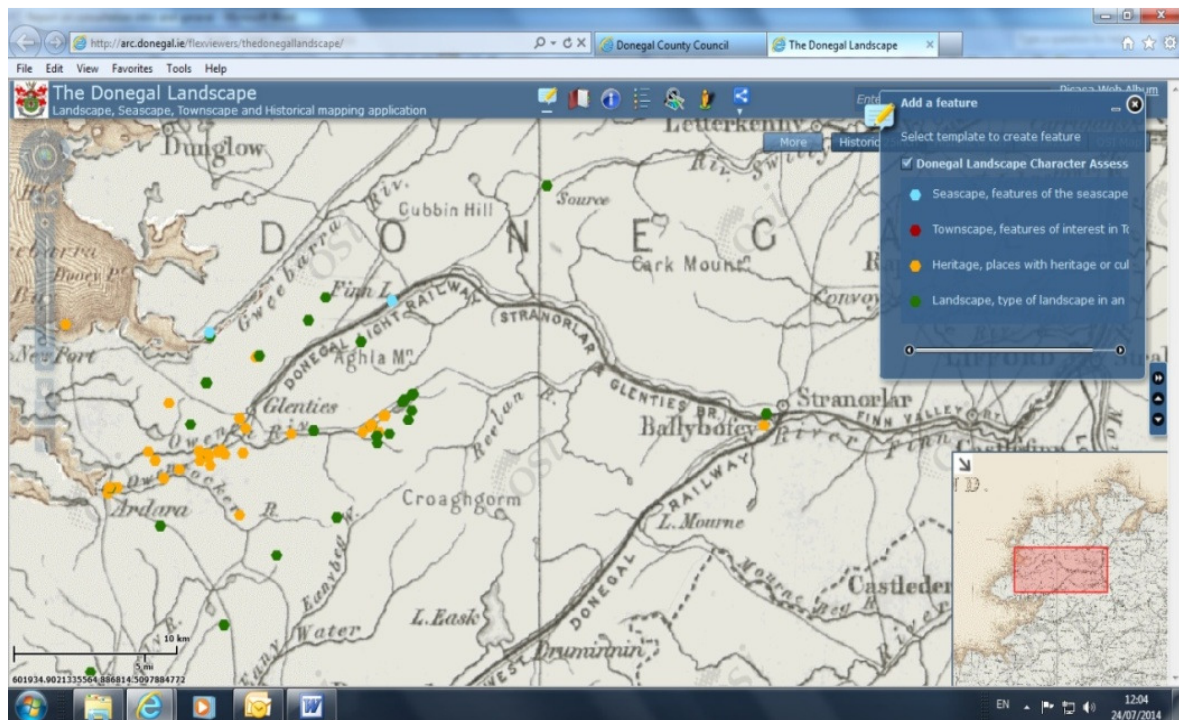
Draft maps on display at the public events were:

- Landscape Character Areas.
- Landscape Character Types.
- Historic Landscape Characterisation.
- Seascape Character Assessment.

Figure 1.5: 'Have Your Say About Your Landscape' Leaflet.



Figure 1.6: Screen shot from the interactive map based consultation method.



The robust and varied methods for encouraging public participation resulted in the receipt of a substantial amount of submissions; 18 public written submissions (30 via email, 16 at organised drop in events), and 203 online submissions via flexi viewer, the online interactive mapping tool. Of all these responses, only 11 were not associated with any particular area.

2.4.3 Stakeholder Consultation

41 Stakeholders were consulted by letter at the outset of the process in July 2013, requesting input from the earliest stage that would fully inform and help shape the project. The stakeholders were identified based on their specialist knowledge and particular interest in the Donegal landscape and in the LCA process and assistance invited that would provide access to relevant data, guidance, or observations that would enhance the quality of the process and project outputs. 9 of the 41 identified stakeholders responded formally whilst others maintained a more informal consultative role.

On the basis of expressed interest a round table meeting took place on 26th February 2014 with 14 targeted stakeholders comprising a short presentation on the LCA methodology and work to date and detailing the work programme going forward. The stakeholders were then asked to discuss the draft work to date and give a steer as to how the process could be improved upon and an indication of how it should shape up. All elements of the LCA and its process were up for discussion however the LCA team tried to focus the meeting to the regional scale LCA and the draft maps published to date. In particular the 4 areas below were focused on:

- Draft Landscape Character types
- Draft Seascape Assessment units
- Draft Historic landscape Characterisation
- Draft Landscape Character Areas
-

A number of issues were raised giving direction to the LCA at the meeting that have been incorporated in the process and 3 written submissions followed.

2.4.4 Cross border consideration

41 Stakeholders were consulted by letter at Stage 1 of the process in July 2013, requesting input from the earliest stage that would fully inform and help shape the project. The stakeholders were identified based on their specialist knowledge and particular interest in the Donegal landscape and in the LCA process and assistance invited that would provide access to relevant data, guidance, or observations that would enhance the quality of the process and project outputs. 9 of the 41 identified stakeholders responded formally whilst others maintained a more informal consultative role. On the basis of expressed interest a round table meeting took place on 26th February 2014 with 14 targeted stakeholders comprising a short presentation on the LCA methodology and work to date and detailing the work programme going forward. The stakeholders were then asked to discuss the draft work to date and give a steer as to how the process could be improved upon and an indication of how it should shape up. All elements of the LCA and its process were up for discussion however the LCA team tried to focus the meeting to the regional scale LCA and the draft maps published to date. In particular the 4 areas below were focused on:

- Draft Landscape Character types

- Draft Seascape Assessment units
- Draft Historic landscape Characterisation
- Draft Landscape Character Areas

A number of issues were raised giving direction to the Settlement Character Assessment at the meeting that have been incorporated in the process and 3 written submissions followed. Stakeholder consultation during Steps 2 and 3 raised no further issues or amendments.

2.5 Settlement Character Assessment Process – Step 3

2.5.1 Field Study

Site survey work was undertaken during 2014 to verify and inform the draft 'Settlement Character Assessment. In accordance with best practice guidance, site survey was carried out for each settlement.

- A visual analysis of each settlement using written survey work, referenced maps and photographs.
- Definition of the primary characteristics of each settlement
- Consideration of the relationship between the settlement and the rural hinterland.

Site survey work was undertaken during 2014 and 2015, this in addition to desktop and digital mapping research informed the description and assessment of the 'character' of the settlements to inform the Seascape Character Areas. Photographs were taken at certain points to record variations in character and to record typical aspects of the landscape.

For each of the Settlements identified, the following information is provided within the profiles:

- Settlement Context
- History, Culture and Heritage
- Natural Conservation Areas (where applicable)
- Landscape Characteristics
- Identification of Settlement Type
- Views and prospects

A myriad of seascape features, uses, and activities were identified within each of the defined seascape units, as well as natural and cultural factors. Reflective of the long and varied coastline of Donegal is the diversity of its many uses throughout history to the present day that include military use, recreation, commercial fishing, tourism, shipping, settlement, and farming to name a few, with more recent tourism and leisure uses and some renewable energy uses. All of which have shaped and informed the character of the seascape as well as creating opportunities and presenting pressures on the seascape character.

2.6 Settlement Character Assessment Process – Step 4

2.6.1 Classification and Description

Each of the 62 settlements has been described in section # of this report and are listed alphabetically within their respective tiers. They are described in their context, their history, culture and heritage, their receiving landscape, identification of settlement type, key characteristics and views and prospects.

The list below describes the most recurrent types of settlement identified within the county and could be considered the 'generic' town type although the elements within vary having evolved over time.

- **Plantation towns** were set up in the 16th and 17th centuries by the British during the planned colonisation of Ulster. These towns were usually planned around a central town square or diamond.
- **Coastal settlements** developed for a number of reasons; initially access, defence and a steady food source, more recently coastal settlements have experienced tourism development and expansion.
- **Market towns** traditionally evolved around local markets and market squares, and many such as Letterkenny and have retained and developed as key retail centres.
- **Rural Based Towns and Villages** provide a small range of local services (groceries, petrol, church, school etc) for the rural hinterland
- **Recreational settlements** are towns which have developed around beach or other leisure facilities that have a leisure function such as boating activities and holiday home developments.
- **Cross border settlements** have important residential functions and provide a range of services; there is a degree of fluidity in these areas associated with the fluctuation in exchange rates.
- **Traditional Linear Settlements** usually display a compact centre around a 'main street'.
- **Traditional clachan settlements** evolved as clusters of dwellings and outbuildings centred around an 'infield' system based on a traditional shared farming system, and reflect a vernacular settlement pattern of Donegal in the past and are important in the landscape.
- **Traditional cross roads settlements** evolved as clusters of dwellings around important junctures along local roads and lanes.

In addition, the towns listed below have been identified for their heritage and archaeological qualities: Heritage towns have been designated by Donegal County Council and Historic Towns by the Heritage Council

- **Donegal's Heritage Towns** – Ardara, Ballyshannon, Moville, Raphoe and Ramelton.
- **Donegal's Historic Towns** – Ballyshannon, Donegal Town, Killybegs, Lifford, Ramelton and Saint Johnston have been included in the Record of Monuments and Places. The areas within the historic boundaries identified are known as Zones of Archaeological Potential and are areas where intense archaeology is present.



