



Planning Committee Report LA01/2017/0539/F	24th March 2021
PLANNING COMMITTEE	

Linkage to Council Strategy (2015-19)	
Strategic Theme	Protecting and Enhancing our Environment and Assets
Outcome	Pro-active decision making which protects the natural features, characteristics and integrity of the Borough
Lead Officer	Development Management & Enforcement Manager
Cost: (If applicable)	N/a

<u>No:</u>	LA01/2017/0539/F	<u>Ward:</u>	PORTRUSH AND DUNLUCE
<u>App Type:</u>	Full Planning		
<u>Address:</u>	Lands at Curran Strand, Portrush		
<u>Proposal:</u>	Proposed 20m rock armour taper and associated sand trap fencing and planting		
<u>Con Area:</u>	No	<u>Valid Date:</u>	21.04.2017
<u>Listed Building Grade:</u>	N/A		
Agent:	Royal Portrush Golf Club, Dunluce Road, Portrush, BT56 8JQ		
Applicant:	Clyde Shanks, 5 Oxford Street, Belfast, BT1 3LA		
Objections:	0	Petitions of Objection:	0
Support:	0	Petitions of Support:	0

Executive Summary

- Full planning permission is sought for a proposed 20m rock armour taper and associated sand trap fencing and planting.
- The site is located within open countryside as designated within the Northern Area Plan 2016. Designations on the site include Causeway Coast and Glens AONB, Designation PHL 04 Royal Portrush Local Landscape Policy Area (LLPA) and Portrush Golf Links Site of Local Nature Conservation Interest (SLNCI).
- Designations adjoining and in close proximity to the site include Portrush Curran (East Strand) and Whiterocks Bathing Waters, Skerries and Causeway Special Area of Conservation and White Rocks ASSI.
- Other designations include Ramore Head and the Skerries ASSI is and Portrush West Strand ASSI located to the west, three unscheduled monuments to the south and one unscheduled monument to the west.
- No concerns have been raised by DFI Roads, DFI Rivers, Environmental Health, DAERA Drainage and Water or Historic Environment Division.
- Concerns have been raised by DAERA Coastal Development, DAERA Natural Heritage and Shared Environment Division. These concerns relate to impact from the proposal on the coastline, designated sites and protected habitats and species.
- The precautionary principle is outlined under the SPPS, PPS 2, UK Marine Policy Statement and draft Marine Plan and must be applied to the consideration of the proposal.
- There are potential impacts on local biodiversity, landforms and features of geological interest. It has not been clearly demonstrated that the proposal will not have a significant adverse impact on Skerries and Causeway SAC, Portrush Golf Links SLNCI, protected species, coastal dunes priority habitats and species associated with these designations, White Rocks ASSI and Royal Portrush LLPA.

- The site is located in an AONB and directly adjacent to designated bathing waters. Impact on the dunes and beach in the area will potentially impact on the visual amenity of the area and the amenity value of the bathing waters.
- The proposal is considered to be contrary to the provisions of the Northern Area Plan 2016, SPPS, PPS 2, PPS 21, APSRNI, the Marine Policy Statement for the United Kingdom and the draft Marine Plan for Northern Ireland.
- The application is recommended for refusal.

Drawings and additional information are available to view on the Planning Portal- <http://epicpublic.planningni.gov.uk/publicaccess/>

1 RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 That the Committee has taken into consideration and agrees with the reasons for the recommendation set out in section 9 and the policies and guidance in sections 7 and 8 and resolves to **REFUSE** planning permission subject to the refusal reasons set out in section 10.

2 SITE LOCATION & DESCRIPTION

- 2.1 The site is comprised of an area of beach on Curran Strand, Portrush. The site is located to the rear of the beach adjoining the dune system. Directly to the south of the site is Royal Portrush Golf Club which adjoins the dune system. The beach continues to the east and west of the site with the dune system continuing to the west. The site extends to the east along the beach and rises up to join the lower car park at White Rocks.
- 2.2 The site is located outside any settlement development limits and there are a number designations both on and within close proximity to the site as designated within the Northern Area Plan 2016.

Designations on the site include:

1. Causeway Coast and Glens Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
2. Designation PHL 04 Royal Portrush Local Landscape Policy Area (LLPA).
3. Portrush Golf Links Site of Local Nature Conservation Interest (SLNCI).

Designations adjoining the site include:

1. Skerries and Causeway SAC and SCI approximately 22 metres to the north.
2. White Rocks ASSI approximately 50 metres to the east.
3. Ramore Head and the Skerries ASSI approximately 2km to the west.
4. Portrush West Strand ASSI approximately 2.3km to the west.
5. Three Unscheduled Monuments approximately 98 metres, 113 metres and 144 metres to the south and One Unscheduled Monument approximately 385 metres to the west.

6. Dunluce Road from which the site is accessed by vehicular traffic to the south is a Protected Route.

Other designations beyond the Northern Area Plan 2016 include: Portrush Curran (East Strand) and Whiterocks Bathing Waters located adjacent to the site which are identified under Directive 2006/7/EC and Protected under the Water Framework Directive 2000/60/EC.

3 RELEVANT HISTORY

No relevant planning history on this site.

4 THE APPLICATION

- 4.1 This is a full application for proposed 20m rock armour taper and associated sand trap fencing and planting.
- 4.2 The proposed revetment taper is a 20 metre long structure comprised of three layers of rocks on top a filter layer and geotextile matting. The three layers of rock encompass a primary layer is comprised of limestone rocks, below which sits a secondary layer of basalt rocks, below which is a layer of stones which sit on top of the matting. These layers are buried except the limestone layer which sits at the surface. The revetment is proposed to be sited at the base of the dune with the toe buried 1 metre below the lowest beach level. There are differences in the structural requirements of the revetment based on the distance along the structure. These relate to position, height and size of the structure.
- 4.3 The proposed revetment would adjoin an existing 90 metre revetment structure which is located to the east of the proposal. The proposed revetment will connect into the existing structure. The aim of the proposal is for the taper to assist in the deflection of wave energy away from the adjoining dune.
- 4.4 To the rear of the proposed revetment is an approximately 38 metre line of gabion baskets. These gabion baskets are currently covered in sand and are not visible on the beach. To the east of the existing revetment structure is a similar line of gabion baskets. The base of these baskets are exposed on site.
- 4.5 Sand trap fencing is proposed along with the revetment. This is comprised of chestnut paling which will be installed approximately 4 metres beyond the perimeter of both the existing and proposed rock

armour.

- 4.6 An indicative area of Marram sprigging after sand accretion is indicated to stabilise the dune system after the implementation of the proposal.
- 4.7 Access to the beach for the construction of the proposed revetment is proposed via White Rocks car park. Vehicular access to the car park is via Dunluce Road and Whiterocks Road. Construction is indicated to take 4-6 weeks and have a limited number of HGV movements.

Environmental Impact Assessment

- 4.8 The proposal falls under Category 10(m) of Schedule 2 of The Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (NI) 2017. Category 10(m) relates to Coastal work to combat erosion and maritime works capable of altering the coast through the construction, for example, of dykes, moles, jetties and other sea defence works, excluding the maintenance and reconstruction of such work and the site is within a sensitive area as defined in regulation 2(2). A determination as to whether the proposal would be an EIA development is required under regulation 12 of the same regulations.
- 4.9 The original proposal was comprised of a 60 metre extension to existing rock armour, sand trap fencing and ancillary development. The Council determined on 3rd August 2017 that the proposal was EIA development and as such, the planning application was required to be accompanied by an Environmental Statement.
- 4.10 A scoping report was received by the agent on 1st May 2018 requesting a formal scoping opinion from the Council and the scheme was reduced from a 60 metre extension to a 20 metre taper.
- 4.11 The revised proposal was re-screened under the aforementioned regulations and an Environmental Statement was determined on 18th July 2018 to still be required.
- 4.12 Due to the location of the proposal, it is also subject to a Marine License. The agent has advised that this has been submitted by the applicant to DAERA Marine & Fisheries Division and that both a screening and scoping opinion has been formulated by DAERA Marine & Fisheries Division under The Marine Works (EIA) Regulations 2017 (amended). The Marine License forms a separate

determination to this application and is outside the remit of planning.

Environmental Statement

4.13 The Environment Statement was received on 7th February 2019 and covers a range of topics identified within the Council's Scoping opinion dated 11th October 2018. The Environmental Statement is comprised of 11 Chapters, each with Appendices. These chapters are as follows:

- Chapter 1: Introduction. This chapter includes background to the proposal, timeline of consideration of the application, methodology and requirements of EIA and summaries of contributions. Appendices include the Council and DAERA Screening and Scoping opinions and meeting notes.
- Chapter 2: Description of the Site and Proposal. This chapter describes the site and proposal and includes details on the requirements of the construction process. Appendices include the proposed layout and cross-section and a Construction and Environmental Management Plan (CEMP).
- Chapter 3: ES Scoping. This chapter discusses the screening and scoping process carried out. It refers to the Council's Scoping Opinion and addresses the matters for inclusion – highlighted under paragraph 4.13.
- Chapter 4: Consideration of Reasonable Alternatives. This chapter refers to the requirements of Schedule 4 of the 2017 regulations to consider reasonable alternatives. This considers the threat of coastal erosion at the site and a variety of options including coastal management and hard and soft engineering options. Appendices include correspondence from Mackenzie and Ebert International Golf Course Architects and R&A.
- Chapter 5: Coastal Processes. This chapter considers the coastal processes along Curran Strand including info on the tidal regime, wave climate and sediment transport regime. Assessment of this has been carried out for pre-project and post-project scenarios through the use of modelling. Appendices include a Coastal Erosion and Mitigation Measures Report.
- Chapter 6: Ecology and Nature Conservation. This chapter discusses the habitats, flora and fauna found on and surrounding the site through desktop and site surveys. It considers the impact of the proposal on flora and fauna, habitats and designated sites. The appendices includes a Shadow Habitats Regulation Assessment, Botanical Assessment,

Wintering Bird Survey, Molluscan Survey, White Rocks ASSI Citation Documents and Map, Information from DAERA Map Viewer and Proposed Layout and Cross-Section.

- Chapter 7: Transportation. This chapter discusses existing baseline conditions and predicted environmental impacts from vehicle movements to construct the proposal. Mitigation measures are included and assessment of significant effects.
- Chapter 8: Population. This chapter discusses predicted environmental impacts and proposed mitigation on recreation, landscape and amenity from the construction and operation of the proposal.
- Chapter 9: Cultural Heritage. This chapter discusses cultural heritage located both on the site and within a 1 kilometre radius of the proposal. It discusses a desktop assessment carried out for the site and the mitigation measures during construction and operation of the proposal including a programme of works.
- Chapter 10: Inter-relationships and Cumulative Impacts. This chapter considers the material discussed within Chapters 5 through 9 and determines whether there will be a cumulative impact/relationship between the chapters.
- Chapter 11: Conclusions. This chapter outlines conclusions regarding the proposal with respect to the content of the previous chapters.

5 PUBLICITY & CONSULTATIONS

5.1 External:

No objections received

5.2 Internal:

DFI Roads: No objections subject to conditions.

DFI Rivers: No objections.

Environmental Health: No objections.

Historic Environment Division: Archaeology and Built Heritage:
No objections subject to conditions.

DAERA Coastal Development: Object.

DAERA Drainage and Water: No objections.

DAERA Natural Heritage and Conservation Areas: Object.

Shared Environment Division: Object.

6 MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 Section 45(1) of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 requires that all applications must have regard to the local plan, so far as material to the application, and all other material considerations. Section 6(4) states that in making any determination where regard is to be had to the local development plan, the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 6.2 The development plan is:
- Northern Area Plan 2016 (NAP)
- 6.3 The Regional Development Strategy (RDS) is a material consideration.
- 6.4 The Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS) is a material consideration. As set out in the SPPS, until such times as a new local plan strategy is adopted, councils will apply specified retained operational policies.
- 6.5 Due weight should be given to the relevant policies in the development plan.
- 6.6 All material considerations and any policy conflicts are identified in the “Considerations and Assessment” section of the report.

7.0 RELEVANT POLICIES & GUIDANCE

The Northern Area Plan 2016

Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS)

Planning Policy Statement 2: Natural Heritage

Planning Policy Statement 3: Access, Movement and Parking

Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning, Archaeology and The Built Heritage

Planning Policy Statement 16: Tourism

Planning Policy Statement 21: Sustainable Development in the Countryside

A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland

UK Marine Policy Statement

Draft Marine Plan for Northern Ireland

8.0 CONSIDERATIONS & ASSESSMENT

8.1 The main considerations in the determination of this application relate to: principle of development, coastal development, Skerries and Causeway SAC, White Rock ASSI, Protected Species and Habitats, Sites of Local Nature Importance, AONB, LLPAs, Transportation, Historic environment, Bathing Waters.

Principle of Development

8.2 The principle of development must be considered having regard to the SPPS, PPS and other policy documents before mentioned.

Background

8.3 The proposal relates to a proposed 20 metre extension to existing rock armour. The existing rock revetment was constructed in the 1980s following a severe storm event in 1983 which resulted in the erosion of a portion of the 6th tee. The existing structure is located in front of the existing 5th green and 6th tee of the Royal Portrush Golf Club course. The Coastal Erosion and Mitigation Measures Report states that the design of the existing structure has a lack of any significant termination detail. This lack of detail with the combination of outflanking of the structure has resulted in an increase in erosion adjacent to the structure, immediately below the 6th tee. This process is referred to as 'terminal erosion' and can only occur when the structure interacts with the hydrodynamic regime – during periods of

high water levels and wave energy typically experienced during storm events.

- 8.4 Royal Portrush Golf Course commissioned RPS to undertake a study of the existing coastal processes and to assess the morphological evolution of the coastline with the aim to identify a sustainable measure that could be implemented to reduce the terminal erosion at the western extent of the existing revetment, maintain the unique features at Curran Strand and the integrity of the Championship course over the foreseeable future.
- 8.5 Due to the sensitive location on the coast line and the proposed works involving hard infrastructure the proposal is considered below in relation to the relevant legislation and policy.

Climate Change and Coastal Development

- 8.6 Mitigating and adapting to climate change is set out in the SPPS along with the commitment to sustainable development. The SPPS advises that amongst other points the planning system should help to mitigate and adapt to climate change by: avoiding development in areas with increased vulnerability to the effects of climate change, particularly areas at significant risk from flooding, landslip and coastal erosion and highly exposed sites at significant risk from the impacts of storms.
- 8.7 The SPPS outlines planning policy with regard to Coastal Development. Paragraph 6.35 outlines the regional strategic objectives for coastal development to:
- conserve the natural character and landscape of the undeveloped coast and to protect it from excessive, inappropriate or obtrusive development; and
 - facilitate appropriate development in coastal settlements and other parts of the developed coastline (subject to all other relevant planning policies) that contributes to a sustainable economy and which is sensitive to its coastal location.#
- 8.8 Para 6.42 of the SPPS advises that development will not be permitted in areas of the coast known to be at risk from flooding, coastal erosion, or land stability.

- 8.9 Paragraph 6.50 of the SPPS advises of the legislative requirement under Section 58 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and Section 8 of the Marine Act (NI) 2013 that all public authorities taking authorisation decisions that affect or might affect the UK Marine area must do so in accordance with Marine Policy Statement or Marine Plan once adopted, unless relevant considerations indicate otherwise.
- 8.10 In relation to climate change and adaptation and mitigation, paragraph 2.6.7.4 of the Marine Policy Statement, states that inappropriate types of development are not permitted in those areas most vulnerable to coastal change, or to flooding from coastal waters. It also states that development will not cause or exacerbate flood and coastal erosion risk elsewhere. In paragraph 2.6.8.3 it states the interruption or changes to the supply of sediment due to infrastructure is said to have the potential to affect physical habitats along the coast. A precautionary approach and risk based approach in accordance with the sustainable development policies of the UK, should be taken in terms of understanding emerging evidence on coastal processes. The MPS advises the assessment of proposals should be made in consultation with the relevant statutory agencies.
- 8.11 Northern Ireland's draft Marine Plan is a material consideration. Proposals should be located and designed to cope with current and future conditions. Care is also to be taken to ensure that proposals do not adversely impact on natural ecosystems. Proposers should ensure that proposals do not cause or exacerbate flood risk or coastal change elsewhere (paragraph 117) and it is important to minimise and/or mitigate potential changes to coastal processes (paragraph 118) which, for the purpose of this policy includes sediment transport, coastal change (erosion and accretion) and inundation of the land by the sea (coastal flooding). If it is not possible to avoid, minimise and/or mitigate any adverse impact, a proposal will only be allowed where the public benefit clearly outweighs the adverse impact.
- 8.12 Like the MPS, paragraph 119 of the draft Marine Plan states that public authorities will apply a precautionary approach in assessing proposals including when considering the impacts of proposals on national and international natural heritage resources.
- 8.13 Public authorities should only authorise a proposal if they are satisfied that there are no unacceptable adverse impacts on coastal processes and that the decision is consistent with requirements

under UK and EU legislation and the UK's obligations under international law. The draft plan (paragraph 225) highlights that the various legislative duties:

- The Wildlife and Natural Environment Act 2011 places a statutory duty on public bodies to further the conservation of biodiversity;
- The Environment (NI) Order 2002 puts in place a general duty on public bodies to further the conservation and enhancement of ASSI features in their existing functions; and
- The Marine Act (NI) 2013 places a general duty on public authorities to exercise their function in a way which the authorities consider best furthers the conservation objectives for the Marine Conservation Zone. Internationally designated areas (Ramsar and European), are afforded the highest form of statutory protection and a proposal that could adversely affect the integrity of such areas may only be allowed by a public authority in exceptional circumstances as laid down in the appropriate legislation (paragraph 233). Public authorities must only authorise proposals where they are not likely to have an adverse effect on the integrity of MCZs, ASSI and Nature Reserves, including the value of the area to the habitat network or feature of interest (paragraph 234).

8.14 PPS 2 advises of the statutory designations protected under international, national or local legislation and that certain species and habitats also benefit from legal protection. Under Article 191 of the Lisbon Treaty environmental policy continues to be based on the precautionary principle which exists in order to protect the environment where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage. The Precautionary Principle is listed in the Rio Declaration as "Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as reasons for postponing cost effective measures to prevent environmental degradation."

Skerries and Causeway Special Area of Conservation

8.15 Policy NH 1 relates to European and Ramsar Sites and states that planning permission will only be granted for a development that, either individually or in combination with existing and/or proposed plans or projects, is not likely to have a significant impact on:

- A European Site (Special Protection Area, proposed Special Protection Area, Special Areas of Conservation, candidate Special Areas of Conservation and Sites of Community Importance); or

- A listed or proposed Ramsar Site

Where a development proposal is likely to have a significant effect (either or alone or in combination) or reasonable scientific doubt remains, the Authority shall make an appropriate assessment of the implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. Appropriate mitigation measures in the form of planning conditions may be imposed. In light of the conclusions of the assessment, the Authority shall agree to the development only having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site.

- 8.16 Paragraph 6.177 of the SPPS mirrors these requirements of Policy NH 1.
- 8.17 The proposal is located approximately 22 metres away from Skerries and Causeway Special Area of Conservation. There are linkages between the site and the proposal through coastal processes.
- 8.18 The Environmental Statement reaches the conclusion that the proposed rock revetment taper is the most appropriate form of development to address the erosion issues caused by the existing structure and from storm events on the dunes below the 6th tee of Royal Portrush Golf Club. It considers that the proposal will not result in any significant effects for the coastline, designated sites and habitats and species. This includes impact on Skerries and Causeway SAC upon which it was determined that the proposal will not give rise to a likely significant effect and at the worst the potential adverse effects would be de minimis.
- 8.19 Consultation with DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division, DAERA Natural Environment Division and Shared Environmental Services has raised serious concerns with the proposed revetment, citing the erosion caused by the existing structure, that the modelling used to assess coastal processes cannot make accurate predictions at the scale of the proposal and the real life implications of the proposal are unknown. This has then lead to concerns from the usage of a hard engineering solution which may impact on the coastline systems beyond the site including dunes, habitats, species and designated sites where the proposal has the potential to give rise to issues elsewhere due to increased coastal erosion and changes to the movement of sediment.
- 8.20 The SPPS, PPS 2, Marine Policy Statement and the draft Marine Plan state that a precautionary approach should be applied in

assessing proposals which could impact on natural heritage or coastal processes.

- 8.21 With regard to the content of the Environmental Statement, rebuttal statements from the agent and consultants and responses from DAERA and SES there is a lack of consensus between the agent/consultants and the consultees in the approaches and findings used in assessing the impact of the proposal.
- 8.22 The conclusions reached within the Environmental Statement were that the proposal is of no significance to the existing tidal regime, wave climate and sediment transport regime along Curran Strand and the wider area, including the Skerries and Causeway SAC. These conclusions were informed by modelling completed by RPS. The conclusions with regard to impacts of natural heritage and designated sites were also informed by this modelling and concluded that the proposal would not have a significant impact on sites at any level. The appropriateness of this approach has been argued through the Environmental Statement and within the agent/consultant rebuttal letters which disagree with the responses provided by DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division and Natural Environment Division. The rebuttal statements outline that the modelling is considered fit for purpose by the agent/consultants and in line with other models described in published academic research. The RPS team responsible is indicated to have appropriate experience and understanding of the coastal environment. Further disagreements relate to the interpretation of policies within the UK Marine Policy Statement and the Marine Plan.
- 8.23 The response from DAERA Marine and Fisheries has queried the usage of the modelling and raised concerns with the usage of further hard defences which do they do not consider to be sustainable. Alteration to the existing defences and the exploration of alternatives to hard defences is recommended at the site. Their response has informed the responses from DAERA Natural Environment Division and Shared Environmental Services who have also raised concerns regarding the impact of the proposal on Skerries and Causeway SAC.
- 8.24 The Council's Coast and Countryside Unit has advised that ongoing monitoring of coastal processes at this location would be appropriate in the longer term to ascertain any impact or transfer of energy to other coastal cells and that this would also complement a wider approach that is being suggested for coastal monitoring throughout NI.

- 8.25 The precautionary approach is the baseline for assessing proposals which could impact on environment. This is outlined within both planning and marine policy and weight must be given to approach. The further lack of consensus between consultees and the agent with regard to this proposal is considered to strengthen the requirement for the application of this approach.
- 8.26 The usage of this approach is accepted by Ecology Solutions in their rebuttal statement. However, they consider that this should be proportional, not aimed at zero risk and that it is not scientifically robust to conclude that simply because previous hard engineering has not fully addressed an issue or other impacts arisen that the proposal should be refused, having adopted a precautionary stance.
- 8.27 These comments are noted. However, there are fundamental disagreements between consultees and the agent/consultants regarding the form of development which is appropriate to address coastal erosion on the site. Zero risk is not being sought but a clear demonstration that the proposal has a scientific basis were no doubt remains. DAERA and Shared Environmental Services are the competent authorities for providing advice to the Council in relation to the designated sites, natural heritage and marine issues within this application. Their responses raise concerns with the approach being sought under this proposal.
- 8.28 The agent has made reference to resilience under the Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change section of the SPPS and made reference to paragraph 3.12 and 3.13.
- 8.29 The objective of this application in seeking to maintain the integrity of the dunes and by extension the protection of land encompassing the golf course is accepted. It is accepted that coastal erosion is occurring at the site. DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division have referred to Section 2.6.8 of the Marine Policy Statement and advised that this area is known to be vulnerable to coastal change. The role that climate change may have in relation to the impact on this site from the increased number of storm events and the desire to mitigate against impacts on this land from coastal erosion under both existing conditions and potential future conditions under climate change is recognised. The location of the proposal within the footprint of the existing sea defences is also acknowledged.
- 8.30 Reference has been made by the agent/consultants to Section 2.6.8.5 of the Marine Policy Statement, 'that the proposal is safe over its planned lifetime and will not cause or exacerbate flood and coastal

erosion risk elsewhere' and Section 2.6.8.6 that 'Marine Plan authorities should not consider development which may affect areas at high risk and probability of coastal change unless the impacts upon it can be managed. Marine plan authorities should seek to minimise and mitigate any geomorphological changes that an activity or development will have on coastal processes, including sediment movement'. The safety of the proposal over its lifetime is not considered to have been clearly demonstrated by DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division who consider that hard engineering is not sustainable on the site which is contrary to this viewpoint. It is accepted that marine planning policy does not set a presumption against the hard engineering form of development proposed. However, in this instance and with regard to the consultation responses received, doubt remains as to whether this form of development is appropriate in this location and there are concerns that this may result in a significant impact within Skerries and Causeway SAC, White Rocks ASSI and on the adjoining dune system.

8.31 Applying the precautionary approach from both terrestrial and marine planning policy, it has not been clearly demonstrated that the proposal will not give rise to significant impacts and reasonable scientific doubt remains. It is considered that the findings of the Environmental Statement have not demonstrated that the proposal will not give rise to significant impacts to the coastline, designated sites including Skerries and Causeway SAC and habitats and species. The proposal fails Policy NH 1 in this respect.

8.32 Policy NH 1 goes on to states that in exceptional circumstances, a development proposal which could adversely affect the integrity of a European or Ramsar site may only be permitted where:

- there are no alternative solutions; and
- the proposed development is required for imperative reasons of overriding public interest; and
- compensatory measures are agreed and fully secured.

8.33 Following a meeting with DAERA and SES, a request for further details and items for consideration were put forward by DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division. These details and items were forwarded to the agent for consideration. These include:

- More consideration on the soft option such as infilling behind the revetment and management of the area using such methods as chestnut fencing.
- Carrying out the option above as a pilot scheme over a number of years to monitor the situation and any potential land loss.
- Consider further the option to taper the existing armour.
- Further define the actual need. The situation in Scotland and England had been briefly looked at including how the golf courses there are adapting and moving holes as a result of coastal erosion.
- Apply for a marine license to further explore concerns in relation to the precautionary approach.

8.34 The consideration of the option to taper the existing armour was previously requested by Marine and Fisheries Division through the consultation process. Their response on 19th April 2019 advised that this option has been discounted within the Environmental Statement without any scientific basis.

8.35 The response from the agent on these points stated that these matters have all been previously identified by DAERA and addressed in their submissions. The agent's letter of 6th June 2019 indicates that the proposal seeks to enhance the resilience of the existing sea defence and not to remove any part of that which would reduce its effectiveness which has maintained the integrity of the duneland to the rear of the 5th green and 6th tee. It is considered by the agent to counter the primary objective of this planning application.

8.36 DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division have advised in their consultation response dated 23rd September 2019 that alternative design and/or the use of habitat restoration/soft defences has not yet been explored or modelled by the applicant and they consider the assessment of this application to be incomplete. In their response of 19th April 2019 they advocated a position of co-existence which is encouraged within the UK Marine Policy Statement and draft Marine Plan for Northern Ireland between different activities. They outline concerns that further inappropriate development may impact on the dune systems, beach and sediment supply. The ability to co-exist between the golf club and the amenity of the beach is required to be considered. It was considered that the hard engineering solution was inappropriate and alternatives sought.

8.37 The Council's Coast and Countryside Unit has advised that potential soft engineering options identified such as sand trap fencing, vegetation stabilisation and pedestrian management referenced in the

environmental statement are noted and further consideration would be welcomed.

- 8.38 The consideration of alternatives is considered within the Coastal Erosion and Mitigation Measures Report as an appendix to Chapter 5. The consideration of soft engineering solutions are under page 72 and Tables 8.2 and 8.3 of this document. Options including sand trap fencing, vegetation stabilisation and pedestrian management were identified to be considered further. However, other options were discounted. It is noted that the consideration for each of these options are limited to a few lines of assessment. There is no modelling of these options indicated as noted by DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division.
- 8.39 Sand trap fencing and vegetation stabilisation through the planting of marram grass are proposed. The sand trap fencing is to encourage sand accretion. The accumulated sand will reduce the height and energy of waves providing a natural defence. Where this sand accumulates, marram grass sprigs will be planted to stabilise. This will support the recovery of the dune front and will develop into fixed dune grassland as protected.
- 8.40 The proposed fencing and planting are examples of softer options which are sought following the meeting with DAERA and SES. However, in this instance the fencing and planting proposed are to complement the taper for which there are concerns. The concerns about the potential impact of the proposed taper remain and alternatives to that form of development are sought.
- 8.41 The ability to co-exist suggests a form of development which allows both the beach and the golf course to function together. There are disagreements regarding the modelling and the hard engineering proposed. Alternatives to the proposed taper have been sought by DAERA Marine & Fisheries Division under the precautionary principle. No further alternatives have been sought by the agent beyond that contained within the Environmental Statement. The agent in his letter states that the modelling presented addresses the requirement of the draft Marine Plan insofar as it has examined the impacts of the proposed taper on the existing tidal regime, wave climate and sediment transport regime. Doubt remains with regard to the DAERA response as to the appropriateness of the hard engineering solution sought and justified through the modelling. There are concerns regarding the ability of the proposal to co-exist without

detrimental impact to the dune systems and designated sites including Skerries and Causeway SAC.

- 8.42 Having considered the detail of the Environmental Statement and the responses from the consultees and agent. It is not accepted that there are limited alternatives and solutions.
- 8.43 Paragraph 4.37 – 4.39 of the SPPS states that the quality of our local environment is world renowned. Its exceptional quality provides an important contribution to our sense of place, history and cultural identity. Our region has a rich and diverse archaeological and built heritage as well as a distinctive and beautiful landscape. It also plays a critical role in supporting the local economy, and must continue to do through sustainable economic development activity. The quality of our local environment can also influence our health and well-being, and help tackle social deprivation.
- 8.44 Paragraph 4.20 - 4.21 of the SPPS states that when assessing the positive and negative economic implications of planning applications planning authorities should ensure the approach followed is proportionate to the scale, complexity and impact of the proposed development. When taking into account the implications of proposals for job creation, planning authorities should emphasis the potential of proposals to deliver sustainable medium to long-term employment growth. Furthermore, in processing relevant planning applications planning authorities must ensure appropriate weight is given to both the public interest of local communities and the wide region.

Supporting sustainable economic growth through proactive planning does not mean compromising on environmental standards. The environment is an asset for economic growth in its own right and planning authorities must balance the need to support job creation and economic growth with protecting and enhancing the quality of the natural and built environment.

- 8.45 With regard to paragraphs 4.20 - 4.21 and 4.37 – 4.39 of the SPPS, a development which prioritises economic development while comprising on environmental standards is not sustainable. It is argued by the agent that evidence before the Council demonstrates that proposal will bring a betterment over what currently exists without causing indirect changes. However, it has not been demonstrated that the proposed taper will not have a significant impact on Skerries and Causeway SAC having regard to the responses from DAERA and SES. The extent of betterment that the proposal will bring appears to be solely linked to the continued operations of the

adjoining golf course. The exception being the development of habitats on the land between the golf course and the proposal which is protected. The economic value of the Royal Portrush Golf Club course and the desire to protect this asset is acknowledged. However, the protection of the course does not outweigh the potential damage to the coastline, designated sites and protected habitats and species from the proposal.

- 8.46 The agent has referenced planning permission LA02/2018/0787/F relating to the replacement and extension of an existing rock revetment at Blackhead Path, Castletown, Whitehead in Mid and East Antrim Borough Council. The agent argues that DAERA Marine and Fisheries remained opposed to the development throughout the consultation process and that Shared Environmental Services responded that they were content.
- 8.47 In the response under LA02/2018/0787/F DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division stated that further information did not alleviate their concerns but acknowledged that the vehicular access needs to be provided for existing properties and that suggested alternatives have been explored and solutions are extremely limited.
- 8.48 Clarification was sought on this decision from Marine and Fisheries Division who explained that this application was different as it related to the proposal under consideration as it related to the completion of an access path for health and safety reasons which was considered as necessary infrastructure to access the dwellings. They advised that the problems were associated with the land not the sea as the issues related to groundwater penetration. The circumstances under this application are considered to be different to that under LA02/2018/0787/F. The revetment in the case of LA02/2018/0787/F was to provide a road to existing houses and was required for access.
- 8.49 In Appeal Ref 2019/A0094 The Commissioner stated that given the conflicting expert opinion, reasonable scientific doubt remains, and that it was therefore appropriate to adopt a precautionary approach and dismiss the appeal.
- 8.50 Policy NH 1 continues that as a part of the consideration of exceptional circumstances, where a European or Ramsar site hosts a priority habitat or priority species listed in Annex I or II of the Habitats Directive, a development proposal will only be permitted when:

- It is necessary for reasons of human health or public safety or there is a beneficial consequence of primary importance to the environment; or
- Agreed in advance with the European Commission

8.51 Skerries and Causeway SAC is a European site which includes the qualifying features: Annex I Reef, Annex I Sandbanks slightly covered by seawater at all times, Annex I Submerged or partially submerged sea caves and Annex II Harbour porpoise. It also contains non-qualifying Annex II species, grey seal, common seal and bottlenose dolphin.

8.52 No evidence has been submitted to demonstrate that the proposal has been agreed in advance with the European Commission.

8.53 The proposal relates to the protection of the dune adjoining the Royal Portrush Golf Club. Chapter 1 of the Environmental Statement outlines that the Open Champion was expected to generate more than £70m in terms of economic impact and destination marketing benefit and that a new 7th hole was completed at the golf course in June 2017. It continues that 'given the proximity to the dune system, concern has been expressed regarding the vulnerability of this new hole to future coastal erosion in addition to the current threat of coastal erosion at the existing 5th green and 6th tee of the Dunluce course.

8.54 On the basis of the evidence submitted there are no reasons of human health or public safety provided to justify the proposal.

8.55 Beyond seeking to protect an area of the dune system behind the defences there is no beneficial consequence of primary importance to the environment identified from the proposal. Concerns raised by consultees are contrary to this and indicate that there may be significant environmental impacts from the proposal within the wider area which includes Skerries and Causeway SAC.

8.56 Having regard to above, it is considered that the proposal is contrary to Policy NH 1 of PPS 2 and the requirements of the draft Marine Plan and Marine Policy Statement.

White Rocks ASSI

8.57 Policy NH 3 relates to Sites of Nature Conservation Importance – National and states that planning permission will only be granted for a development proposal that is not likely to have an adverse effect on

the integrity, including the value of the site to the habitat network, or special interest of:

an Area of Special Scientific Interest
a Nature Reserve
a National Nature Reserve
a Marine Nature Reserve

A development proposal which could adversely affect a site of national importance may only be permitted where the benefits of the proposed development clearly outweigh the value of the site.

In such cases, appropriate mitigation and/or compensatory measures will be required.

- 8.58 White Rocks ASSI is located approximately 50 metres to the east of the site. As with Skerries and Causeway SAC, the site is linked to White Rocks ASSI through coastal processes. The site comprises a section of coastline characterised by the presence of Cretaceous chalk cliffs in addition to other coastal landforms. The declaration for this designation notes a range of plant communities present which are typical of coastal cliffs and the support for breeding Peregrine Falcons and nesting locations for a notable population of Black Guillemot.
- 8.59 Information from CEDAR informed a botanical survey of the site and noted plant species present which are also found within White Rocks ASSI. These species were identified as being common and widespread and not of any significant intrinsic ecological value. The Wintering Birds Survey identified the Herring Gull, a NI priority species and 6 amber list species including the black-headed gull and Dunnock, both NI priority species. Priority species were identified as flying over the site and given the distance of White Rocks ASSI and Portrush West Strand ASSI it was concluded that there would be no impacts on these species or habitats. No Black Guillemot associated with White Rocks was recorded. No species of birds associated with White Rocks were recorded and it was concluded that there would be no significant effect on wintering birds at White Rocks.
- 8.60 Reference is made to the citation for the designation which outlines operations which are likely to damage the supported features of interest. It is concluded that of the identified activities likely to damage the flora, fauna or geology of the ASSI that none are likely to arise

from the proposal. Several impacts upon White Rocks ASSI have been identified including

- Increased or decreased sedimentation, and potential erosion of geological interest features along the coastal boundary of the ASSI as a result of altered sediment regimes in the adjacent marine environment
- Air quality impacts associated with traffic and plant movement during the construction phase

8.61 It was concluded that changes to the sediment regime from the proposal would be insignificant in context of ongoing levels of sedimentation across Curran Strand and the huge variation in sedimental regimes caused by regular storm events and predicted climate change effects. It is noted that the geology of White Rocks ASSI are subject to ongoing coastal processes including erosion. Such erosion is likely to be influenced by the effects of sedimentation. As the proposal will lead to an insignificant reduction in quantity of sediment available it is not considered that there is potential for significant impacts in this respect.

8.62 Limited potential for adverse air quality impacts associated with traffic movements are considered during the construction phase. It is noted that the ASSI is close to Dunluce Road, A2 which is subject to high volumes of traffic passing in close proximity to the features of interest. It is noted that the effects from traffic are likely to have been ongoing before the designation of the site and the habitats within the ASSI are unlikely to be sensitive to any air pollutants from traffic. It is also noted that air quality effects associated with traffic movement are not outlined within the operations likely to damage the supported features of interest. The comparatively small number of vehicle movements against that along the Dunluce Road leads to the conclusion that the impacts are likely to be insignificant. It is concluded that given the increase in traffic movements are for a limited period only within the construction phase that any potential for quality impacts associated with traffic movements are insignificant.

8.63 It was concluded that potential impacts are considered to be neutral at the national level and of no significance in relation to statutory designated sites.

8.64 Concerns have been raised by DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division regarding the impact on coastal processes within White Rocks ASSI as related to the operations and activities within the Schedule to the Declaration of the ASSI at White Rocks.

- 8.65 The declaration for the designation of White Rocks ASSI discusses the chalk cliffs of the designation and the associated features formed by processes of erosion in the area including caves, blowholes, shore platforms, cliff benches, stacks and sea arches. A characteristic profile of slop-over-wall cliffs is noted.
- 8.66 Policy NH 3 outlines that proposals will only be granted were they are not likely to have an adverse effect on the integrity, including the value of the site to the habitat network. A development proposal which could adversely affect a site of national importance may only be permitted where the benefits of the proposed development clearly outweigh the value of the site.
- 8.67 White Rocks ASSI is designated partially with regard to its geological value and features formed through erosion. It is acknowledged that that coastal erosion is already occurring at this designation. However, applying the precautionary principle, the impact of the proposal has not been clearly demonstrated with respect to determining any impact on this designation. The conclusions reached through the modelling based approach are not accepted by DAERA Marine & Fisheries Division and there is no consensus reached between the agent/consultant and consultees that the proposal would not have any significant adverse impact on White Rocks ASSI. The proposal relates to the protection of the sand dunes associated with and adjoining Royal Portrush Golf Course. The desire to protect the value of the golf course is noted. However, applying the precautionary approach, it is unclear of the impact of the proposal on White Rocks ASSI and there are concerns that the proposal may result in an impact on this designation. The protection of the golf course is not considered to outweigh any potential impact on White Rocks ASSI designation. No concerns have been raised regarding the impact on air quality from traffic movements. It is considered that air quality associated with the traffic movements and construction of the proposal would not result in any significant impacts on this designation.
- 8.68 The proposal is considered to be contrary to Policy NH 3 of PPS 2.

Protected species and Habitats

- 8.69 Policy NH 2 relates to European and National species protected by law. In relation to European protected species it states that planning permission will only be granted for a development proposal that is not likely to harm a European protected species. In exceptional

circumstances a development proposal that is likely to harm these species may only be permitted where:- there are no alternative solutions; and it is required for imperative reasons of overriding public interest; and there is no detriment to the maintenance of the population of the species at a favourable conservation status; and compensatory measures are agreed and fully secured. In relation to National protected species it states that planning permission will only be granted for a development proposal that is not likely to harm any other statutorily protected species and which can be adequately mitigated or compensated against. Development proposals are required to be sensitive to all protected species, and sited and designed to protect them, their habitats and prevent deterioration and destruction of their breeding sites or resting places. Seasonal factors will also be taken into account.

- 8.70 Policy NH 5 relates to habitats, species or natural heritage importance and states that planning permission will only be granted for a development proposal which is not likely to result in the adverse impact on, or damage to known priority habitats, priority species, features of earth science conservation importance, features of the landscape which are of major importance for wild flora and fauna, rare or threatened native species and other natural features worthy of protection. A development proposal which is likely to result in an unacceptable adverse impact on, or damage to, habitats, species or features may only be permitted where the benefits of the proposal outweigh the value of the habitat, species or feature. In such cases, appropriate mitigation and/or compensatory measures will be required.
- 8.71 Skerries and Causeway SAC includes the following European protected habitats and species: Annex I Reef, Annex I Sandbanks slightly covered by seawater at all times, Annex I Submerged or partially submerged sea caves and Annex II Harbour porpoise which the area is described as supporting a significant presence. It also contains non-qualifying Annex II species, grey seal, common seal and bottlenose dolphin. Under Schedule 5 of The Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 the grey seal and common seal are listed as protected at all times.
- 8.72 The site adjoins coastal sand dunes which are identified as a Northern Ireland priority habitat by DAERA. The site is also located within Portrush Golf Links SLNCl, a dune grassland which is identified by DAERA as containing priority habitats. The coastal sand dunes are identified within the Environmental Statement as mobile dune, semi-

fixed dune grassland/dune grassland, dune grassland and dune scrub. This designation is considered further below with regard to the requirements of Policy ENV 2. The Moss Chrysalis Snail and Heath Snail were identified within the submitted Molluscan Survey and are indicated to be priority species. The species *Vertigo angustior* (Whorl Snail) was not recorded. The Herring Gull, Black-Headed Gull and Dunnock are recorded within the Wintering Birds Survey and are also NI Priority Species.

8.73 Concerns raised by DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division are referred to under the previous consideration under Policies NH 1 and NH 3 in relation to modelling, alternative solutions and the precautionary principle. Further and specific concerns are outlined in relation to the dune habitats. They consider that further rock armouring may impact on the exposed dune system to the west which is already an area under threat from coastal erosion. This may in turn increase the risk to the new 7th tee at the golf course. They argue for co-existence as referred to under the draft Marine Plan and Marine Policy Statement, stating that further inappropriate development may impact on the amenity value of the beach and may experience further erosion and dune systems may be lost. Concerns raised by DAERA and Shared Environmental Services indicate that there may be significant environmental impacts on the features of Skerries and Causeway SAC. These include the aforementioned Annex I habitats, Annex II species and non-qualifying Annex II species also protected under the Wildlife Order.

8.74 DAERA Natural Environment Division have concerns regarding the impact of the proposal on Northern Ireland Priority Habitats and the Narrow-mouthed Whorl Snail (*Vertigo angustior*) an Annex II and priority species. They note the location of the site within Portrush Golf Links SLNCl and the botanical surveys undertaken. They note that the Environmental Statement states that the construction of the proposal result in the loss of mobile dunes and semi-fixed dune grassland but because of the stabilisation of the dunes from the proposal that semi-fixed and fixed dune grassland will become more dominant due to the prevention of ongoing erosion. DAERA NED advise that dune habitats are naturally mobile and have concerns that works to stabilise could have an impact on the whole system. They note that the proposed development has the potential to increase erosion pressures further around shore which may necessitate additional defences to protect the golf course in the future and that further artificial control of sedimentary processes could result in significant changes to the dune habitats in the area. They refer to the

Environmental Statement outlining that the proposal will lead to a small loss of successional dune habitat and that the supported mollusc assemblage is not likely to be impacted because works will create a stable dune structure of value for molluscs within and around the site, especially as molluscs remain present in dunes which are already armoured. They reiterate concerns that the proposal has the potential to increase erosion pressures which may require additional defences and that further artificial control of sedimentary processes could result in significant changes to the dune habitats on which the whorled snail depends.

- 8.75 No concerns have been raised regarding the wintering bird surveys with the recommendation to undertake works outside the bird breeding season or to survey breeding activity if work is to be carried out within the season.
- 8.76 The rebuttal statements received from RPS and Ecology Solutions disagree with the comments from DAERA. The comments from RPS outline that the modelling system used was fit for purpose and resolved the coastal processes in the study area to the necessary level of accuracy. They refute the NED comments that the development is likely to increase erosion pressures further around shore which may necessitate additional defence and that their assessment has been prejudiced by the views of Marine and Fisheries Division. They state that the proposal has been robustly assessed by an Ecological Impact Assessment, SHRA, valid and an appropriate numerical modelling study and found no evidence to suggest the proposal would lead to a significant adverse impact on any known protected species or ecological features at international, national, county or local level.
- 8.77 The evidence base for the proposal is indicated through the rebuttal statements to be based on the modelling carried out by RPS. Ecology Solutions indicate this for the conclusions reached through Chapter 6 of the Environmental Statement. DAERA have raised concerns regarding the modelling and the hard engineering approach sought and the impact on Skerries and Causeway SAC. Further concerns relate to the potential damage to the adjoining exposed dune system from the proposal and the loss of habitat on the site. These conclusions are disputed by the consultants. Applying the precautionary principle, it has not been clearly demonstrated that the proposal will not impact on European and National Protected Species, Coastal Dune priority habitat and associated priority species including molluscs. In the case of the European Protected Species, it

was considered under Policy NH 1 that alternative solutions to the proposal have not been fully explored and that the proposal is not required for imperative reasons of overriding public interest. The ability to maintain species populations at a favourable conservation status is in doubt and applying the precautionary principle it cannot be clearly demonstrated that there would be no detriment. No compensatory measures have been agreed and fully secured. In the case of National Protected Species, applying the precautionary principle it has not been clearly demonstrated that the proposal is not likely to harm these protected species. The proposal is considered to be contrary to Policy NH 2 and NH 5 of PPS 2.

Sites of Local Nature Importance

- 8.78 Policy NH 4 of PPS 2 relates to Local Sites of Nature Conservation Importance and states that planning permission will only be granted for a development proposal that is not likely to have a significant adverse impact on a local nature serve; or a wildlife refuge. A development proposal which could have a significant adverse impact on a site of local importance may only be permitted where the benefits of the proposed development outweigh the value of the site. In such cases, appropriate mitigation and/or compensatory measures will be required.
- 8.79 Policy ENV 2 of the Northern Area Plan 2016 relates to Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance and states that planning permission will not be granted for development that would be liable to have a significant adverse effect on the intrinsic nature conservation interest of a designated Site of Local Nature Conservation Importance.
- 8.80 The proposal is located within Portrush Golf Links SLNCI, a grassland habitat and identified by DAERA NED as containing priority habitats. The technical supplement for the Northern Area Plan 2016 outlines vegetation contained within the foredunes, dune slacks and older dunes. It notes that although a significant proportion of the site is intensively managed as an active golf course, enough quality dune and species-rich grassland habitat remains for the site to have considerable value for biodiversity in the local context. Under Chapter 6 of the Environmental Statement, impacts on this designation are considered to neutral at the national level and of no significance with potential benefits to the designation as the proposal may contribute positively to ongoing conservation status by preventing erosion. DAERA NED outlines that dune habitats are naturally mobile and have concerns that works to stabilise them could

have an adverse impact on the system as a whole. NED have concerns that the proposed development has the potential to increase erosion pressures further around the shore which may necessitate additional defence structures in order to protect other sections of the golf course in the future and that further artificial control of sedimentary processes could result in significant changes to the dune habitats in the area including including that of the Whorled Snail (Annex II species under the Habitats Directive and NI priority species). The Environmental Statement relies on modelling to demonstrate that the proposal will not have an impact. The content of the rebuttal statements highlighted under the consideration of Policy NH 5 and the Ecology section (Appendix) further support the modelling approach. Both RPS and Ecology Solutions through their rebuttal statements disagree with Natural Environment Division regarding the impact on priority habitats and species associated with the grassland habitat which is associated with this designation. However, DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division state that the real life implications of the proposal are not known and have raised concerns with the modelling. With regard to this response and applying the precautionary principle, it has not been demonstrated that that the proposal would not be liable to have a significant adverse effect on the intrinsic nature conservation interest of Portrush Golf Links SLNCI. As such it is considered that the proposal would not outweigh the value of the SLNCI. The proposal is considered to be contrary to the requirements of Policy ENV 2 and Policy NH 4.

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

- 8.81 Policy NH 6 relates to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and states that new development will only be granted where it is of an appropriate design, size and scale for the locality, the siting and scale of the proposal is sympathetic to the special character of the AONB in general and of the particular locality, it respects or conserves features of importance to the character, appearance or heritage of the landscape and the proposal respects, local architectural styles and patterns, traditional boundary details and local materials, design and colour.
- 8.82 The Causeway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Summary Management Plan outlines the vision for the AONB. This includes that it 'is universally recognised as containing world class, spectacular and unspoilt scenery, comprising unique geological features and cultural

history and supporting outstanding assemblages of habitats and species.’

- 8.83 The Council’s Coast and Countryside Unit has advised that Whiterocks is a popular beach attracting in excess of 250,000 visitors annually, that visitor levels are consistently high throughout the year as the beach is a valuable outdoor recreation resource for a range of beach users both in the water and the beach itself and that it is important in terms of a valued outdoor space for locals and visitors.
- 8.84 With regard to the requirements of Policy NH 6 it is considered that the proposal may result in a significant impact on the landscape amenity of Causeway Coast AONB. It is accepted that when partially buried there would be limited views of the proposal and when visible it would integrate with the existing rock armour revetment. However, there are concerns that the proposal may have an impact on the adjoining dune system. It has been acknowledged through the Environmental Statement there will be a loss of mobile dunes and semi-fixed dune grassland. Concerns have been raised by DAERA regarding the impact on the dune habitats and species. Ecology Solutions refute these concerns. The impact on other designations are also disputed between the consultees and agent/consultants. The lack of consensus provides doubt regarding the extent of erosion and there are concerns that the both the designated sites and dune system and their associated habitats and species may be significantly impacted by the proposal. Causeway Coast AONB includes a number of these features including the geological features of White Rocks ASSI, the dunes and the sea. It is considered that it has not been demonstrated that the proposal will not impact on the features of importance to the character, appearance or heritage of the landscape. The proposal is considered to be contrary to Policy NH 6 of PPS 2.

Undeveloped coast

- 8.85 Policy CO 1 of A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland relates to The Undeveloped Coast and seeks to conserve the natural character and landscape of the undeveloped coast. It outlines that:

‘It has been long been recognised that the Northern Ireland coastline with its diversity of landscapes and habitats, some of outstanding quality, is a very important but non-renewable resource. Already much of the coast has been designated within Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Areas of Special Scientific Interest, Nature Reserves

or falls within existing rural policy areas. The effect of development on both local wildlife and the beauty of the landscape can be serious and widespread.’ It continues that ‘regard will be paid to the visual and physical impact of coastal protection schemes, particularly on the undeveloped coastline.’

- 8.86 As discussed and considered under the above assessment there is a lack of consensus between the consultees and the agent/consultants regarding the modelling approach, form of development proposed and potential impacts. There are potential impacts on the adjoining dune system and designated sites and the habitats and species associated with them. Applying the precautionary approach it has not been clearly demonstrated that the proposal will conserve the natural character and landscape of the undeveloped coast and would not impact on the local wildlife. The proposal is considered to be contrary to the requirements of Policy CO 1 and paragraph 6.35 of the SPPS.
- 8.87 The proposal is located outside any settlement development limit as defined under the Northern Area Plan 2016. The proposal falls under the requirements of Policy CTY 1.
- 8.88 Policy CTY 1 lists a range of types of developments which are in principle considered to be acceptable in the countryside. The proposal does not fall into one of these criteria.
- 8.89 Policy CTY 1 continues that other types of development will only be permitted where there are overriding reasons why the development is essential and could not be located in a settlement, or it is otherwise allocated for development in a development plan.
- 8.90 There are no zonings linked to developments of this nature within the Northern Area Plan 2016. The proposal is required to be located in this location given the nature and objective of the proposal.
- 8.91 Policy CTY 1 states that All proposals for development in the countryside must be sited and designed to integrate sympathetically with their surroundings and to meet other planning and environmental considerations including those for drainage, access and road safety.
- 8.92 Paragraph 6.70 of the SPPS outlines that all development in the countryside must integrate into its setting, respect rural character, and be appropriately designed.
- 8.93 As outlined under the consideration of Policy NH 6, it is considered that although there will be limited visual impact from the integration of

the proposal itself. There are concerns that the proposal may have a detrimental impact on the neighbouring dunes which would erode the character of the area and visual amenity of this section of the beach. It is considered that the proposal is contrary to Policy CTY 1 and paragraph 6.70 in that the proposed works would impact on rural character.

Local Landscape Policy Areas

- 8.94 Policy ENV 1 of the Northern Area Plan 2016 relates to Local Landscape Policy Areas and states that planning permission will not be granted for development proposals that would be liable to affect adversely those features, or combination of features, that contribute to the environmental quality, integrity or character of a designated LLPA.
- 8.95 The proposal is located within Designation PHL 04 Royal Portrush LLPA. The features or combination of features that contribute to the environmental quality, integrity or character of this area include: the area dominated by Curran Strand, commonly known as East Strand and the related extensive sand dunes and the slopes rising behind which provides one of the most memorable vistas along the North Coast, especially when approaching Portrush from the east, the area is also within Causeway Coast AONB and also contains the Portrush Golf Links SLNCI. The designation states that no further development will be acceptable other than minor modifications and extensions to existing buildings.
- 8.96 The aim of the proposed rock revetment provided under the Environmental Statement is to reduce the terminal erosion at the western extent of the existing revetment, maintain the unique features at Curran Strand and the integrity of the Championship course. The features of the LLPA include the sand dunes, associated slopes and memorable vistas along the North Coast. It is accepted that the aim is to try to preserve the sand dunes at the 5th and 6th tee and the vistas from the 6th tee of Royal Portrush Golf Club. However, it is considered that this cannot be at the risk of potential significant effects to the sand dunes further along the coastline, Causeway Coast AONB and Portrush Golf Links SLNCI. The impact on these designations and features has already been considered with regard to the content of the Environmental Statement and the issues from DAERA and

Shared Environmental Service with the conclusion being reached that it has not been demonstrated that the proposal will not have a significant adverse impact. As such it has not been demonstrated that the proposal will not affect the environmental quality, integrity or character of Royal Portrush LLPA and contrary to the requirements of Policy ENV 1.

Transportation

8.97 Policy AMP 2 of Planning Policy Statement 3: Access, Movement and Parking states that planning permission will only be granted for a development proposal involving direct access, or the intensification of the use of an existing access, onto a public road where: such access will not prejudice road safety or significantly inconvenience the flow of traffic and the proposal does not conflict with Policy AMP 3 Access to Protected Routes.

8.98 Chapter 7 of the Environmental Statement relates to the consideration of the impact on transportation. The site is accessed from Dunluce Road (A2) and Whiterocks Road towards the lower car park at White Rocks. Dunluce Road is a Protected Route. Construction is indicated to take 4 – 6 weeks with the site materials and construction equipment kept in a secured area within Whiterocks beach car park. The total number of trips is estimated as 40 trips which will be spread across the 4 – 6 week construction period. Based on the type of stone, the type of vehicles used and the number of trips per vehicle type will vary. Haulage routes are outlined to minimise highway safety conflicts from HGVs navigating challenging junctions. A draft Construction and Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) has been submitted as a part of the Environmental Statement (Appendix of Chapter 2) which includes details of the compound, plant and equipment and delivery requirements and preliminary traffic management details. Traffic management details are to be agreed by the Council and DFI Roads in the final CEMP prior to the commencement of construction. There are no predicted transport impacts on the operational phase.

8.99 A Transport Assessment Form was submitted earlier within the application process and DFI Roads consulted on this information.

8.100 DFI Roads were consulted on the Environmental Statement and responded with no objections subject to conditions and informatives.

8.101 The Council's Coast and Countryside Unit has advised that the site is promoted and managed as part of the wider Whiterocks Coastal Park concept and that the suggested compound and haul access road onto the beach as well as any restriction on the site requires further, considered discussion. To close or restrict public access to the beach and associated infrastructure for any prolonged period would require co-ordination, communication and management with Council's Coast & Countryside Team.

8.102 With regard to the Construction and Environmental Management Plan, the material subjected under Chapter 7 and the DFI Roads response on the application, it is considered that the proposal satisfies Policy AMP 2 of PPS 3. There are cumulative issues regarding impact of traffic movements on White Rocks ASSI which are considered under the impact on designated sites in the above paragraphs. It was concluded that any potential for air quality impacts associated with an increase in traffic movements during the construction phase would be insignificant.

8.103 With regard to above, it is considered that there will not be a significant adverse effect from the proposal with regard to transportation.

Historic Environment

8.104 Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning, Archaeology and The Built Heritage provides the policy context in relation to the identification and protection of archaeological remains and the built heritage. Policy BH 3 relates to the requirement for Archaeological Assessment and Evaluation.

8.105 Chapter 9 of the Environmental Statement relates to the consideration of the impact on Cultural Heritage. The chapter states that although there are 7 archaeological sites identified with an approximate 1 kilometre radius of the proposal, a desktop survey has identified no known archaeological sites within the development area. There are no other designations (listed buildings, battle sites, historic parks and gardens, defence heritage sites) either on or in proximity to the site. It has identified that archaeological features will most likely be impacted on during the construction phase of the development and that the operational phase will have no impact. Regarding the construction phase it concludes that given the level of activity in the area that unknown sub-surface remains could be present and as such

the proposal may impact on them. The report recommends the adoption of a construction phase mitigation strategy, in this instance through standard archaeological conditions in relation to a programme of works.

- 8.106 No interactions with other chapters or cumulative impacts were considered in relation to Cultural Heritage.
- 8.107 Consultation has been carried out with Historic Environment Division (HED) on the proposal. HED outlined that the application site is in close proximity to several sites which have produced evidence of activity including occupation and burial which are monuments of local importance. The existence of these monuments indicate the potential for further archaeological features to be encountered in the area. HED advised that they are content the proposal satisfies PPS 6 policy requirements, subject to conditions for the agreement and implementation of a developer-funded programme of archaeological works, to identify and record any archaeological remains in advance of new construction, or to provide for their preservation in situ.
- 8.108 With regard to the Cultural Heritage material submitted within the Environmental Statement and the response from Historic Environment Division, it is considered that the proposal satisfies the requirements of Policy BH 4 of PPS 6 and paragraph 6.11 of the SPPS. The Environmental Statement identifies that there are no archaeological features on site and a programme of works will identify any features to be protected.

Bathing waters

- 8.109 Chapter 8 of the Environmental Statement relates to the consideration of the impact on Population by ways of the recreational, landscape and amenity value afforded by the bathing waters of Curran Strand. Portrush Curran (East Strand) and Whiterocks are identified Bathing Waters under Directive 2006/7/EC and Protected Areas under Directive 2000/60/EC. The chapter was informed by the coastal erosion study prepared by RPS and CEMP prepared by STRI.
- 8.110 The Outline Construction Environment Management Plan submitted addresses the construction methodology for the proposal and outlines traffic and environmental management measures to be adopted. The document includes an Emergency Response Plan outlining procedures to address any potential spillages. It is stated that construction works will take place outside summer and peak usage of the Strand, access to the Strand for public will be maintained with

pedestrian routes near the site compound and the compound and working area designated, signed and fenced. Mitigation on pollution of any bathing water is considered including the appropriate storage and use of hazardous liquids including fuel.

- 8.111 Impacts on population during the operational phase are indicated to be with respect to landscape amenity and the sediment regime. The proposal is considered to be a modest extension which does not extend beyond the footprint of the existing hard defences. It is indicated to be likely that the 20m taper will only be exposed during storm events and the proposed limestone boulders are consistent with those already on the beach. The proposed fencing has previously been utilised and is unlikely to be a permanent feature due to damage and removal. The planting of marram sprigs is in keeping with that located within the dune system.
- 8.112 The reduction in sediment supply is stated to have been addressed in the RPS report and the reduction from the proposal during a 1 in 100 year storm event (1,463m³) is smaller than the actual sediment transport within the wider Skerries and Causeway SAC which was found to be in order of 1 million cubic metres. The results from the simulation is indicated to be imperceptible with respect to longshore sediment transport and no mitigation required.
- 8.113 It is concluded that the proposed population impacts will be temporary and limited to the construction period of the revetment taper. The impacts will not be significant as public access will be maintained and mitigation will ensure water quality of the bathing waters. During the operational phase, no significant impacts are predicted as assessment has demonstrated impact of the proposal on the existing sediment transport regime is negligible.
- 8.114 The rebuttal statements submitted do not specifically mention bathing waters but re-affirm that the proposal will not have an impact on the sediment regime.
- 8.115 Cumulative impacts with population are coastal processes and ecology and nature conservation in so far as the operational phase of the development. No significant impacts are predicted as the proposal will have a negligible impact on the existing sediment transport regime.
- 8.116 Paragraph 285 of the Draft Marine Plan for Northern Ireland states that Public Authorities should only authorise a proposal if they are satisfied that it will not have an unacceptable impact on water quality

and will secure compliance with the requirements of the Bathing Water, WFD and MSFD and that the decision is consistent with requirements under UK and EU legislation and the UK's obligations under international law.

8.117 Paragraph 2.6.4.3 of the UK Marine Policy Statement states that 'the marine plan authority should satisfy itself where relevant that any development will not cause a deterioration in status of any water to which the WFD applies, subject to the provision of Article 4.7 of that Directive, or prevent compliance with any WFD obligation and is consistent with the requirements of daughter directives of the WFD including those on priority substances and groundwater. Decision makers should also take into account impacts on the quality of designated bathing waters and shellfish waters from any proposed development.

8.118 Paragraph 6.50 of the SPPS requires that all planning authorities taking authorisation decisions with regard to both the Draft Marine Plan and the UK Marine Policy Statement.

8.119 It is considered that will mitigation and appropriate working practices as indicated that there is unlikely to be a significant adverse environment effect with respect to the pollution of the bathing waters from the construction phase with respect to the operation of vehicles and machinery.

8.120 There has been no objection in principle to the proposal from Environmental Health. DAERA Water Management Unit state they are content subject to adhering to standing advice and the explanatory note. The explanatory note refers to the detailed CEMP to be submitted to ensure effective avoidance and mitigation methodologies have been planned for the protection of the water environment.

8.121 DAERA Marine & Fisheries Division highlighted within their response of 19th April 2019 that the proposal is directly adjacent to Whiterocks Bathing Water which is identified as a bathing water under The Bathing Water Directive and a Protected Area under Directives 2006/7/EC and 2000/60/EC respectfully. They advise that this designation must be taken into consideration and that possible long term effects of sand loss at these beaches as a consequence of the proposed works should be considered. They advise that this may be included with modelling looking at sediment transport but also in how it may impact the amenity value of the bathing waters. They advise that there is evidence of sediment and sand loss issues at other high

amenity value beaches around Northern Ireland which have been shown to be detrimental to these areas.

8.122 The potential long term loss of sediment would have an impact on the amenity value of the bathing waters and by association, tourism and the local economy.

8.123 It is considered that it has not been clearly demonstrated that the proposal will not have an unacceptable impact on the amenity value of bathing waters. The proposal is considered to be contrary to the requirements of the Marine Policy Statement and the draft Marine Plan.

9.0 CONCLUSION

9.1 The proposal relates to a proposed 20 metre rock armour taper and associated sand trap fencing and planting. The reactionary principle under the UK MPS and the draft Marine Plan for NI has been applied as it is still uncertain what the real implications would be of further hard engineering on the site, especially given the large exposed dune face adjacent to where the further works are requested. Concerns have been raised by DAERA in relation to the modelling of the proposal and its accuracy in making predictions, the impact on designated sites including Skerries and Causeway SAC and White Rocks ASSI, priority habitats and species and bathing waters.

9.2 Applying the precautionary principle, there are concerns regarding the impact on Skerries and Causeway SAC, White Rocks ASSI, Portrush Golf Links SLNCl, protected habitats and species and Coastal Sand Dunes priority habitats and species. Impact from the proposal could rise to impacts to landscape amenity which is recognised through the sites inclusion in Royal Portrush LLPA and Causeway Coast AONB and there are concerns with the impact on these designations. The amenity value of the beach is also recognised through its association with the designated bathing waters which could be impacted by the proposal. The value of the golf course is recognised. However, it is not considered to outweigh the potential impacts on biodiversity and the environment which is internationally recognised and irreplaceable. Impacts from the proposal on the landscape and biodiversity has the potential to impact on tourism and the local economy.

9.3 It is considered that alternatives have not been fully explored as requested by DAERA. For these reasons, the proposal is considered

unacceptable having regard to the content of the Environmental Statement, consultation responses, responses from the agent and their consultants, Northern Area Plan 2016, planning policy, marine planning policy and all other material considerations. It has not been demonstrated that the proposal will not result in significant environmental effects on designated sites, protected habitats and species, landscape amenity and bathing waters. The proposal is considered to be contrary to the Northern Area Plan, SPPS, PPS 2, PPS 21, A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland, the draft Marine Plan and Marine Planning Policy Statement for UK.

10 Refusal reasons

1. The proposal is contrary to paragraphs 3.13 and 6.42 of the Strategic Planning Policy Statement for NI, paragraph 117 of the Draft Marine Plan for Northern Ireland and section 2.6.8.4 of the UK Marine Policy Statement in that the area of coast is known to be at risk from coastal erosion and insufficient information is available to determine that this development will not further exacerbate coastal erosion in the locality.
2. The proposal is contrary to paragraph 6.176 of the Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland and Policy NH 1 and NH 3 of Planning Policy Statement 2: Natural Heritage in that it has not been demonstrated, on applying the precautionary approach as set out in paragraph 1.6 of PPS 2, that the proposal is not likely to have a significant effect on designated sites namely the: Skerries and Causeway Special Area of Conservation, and the White Rocks Area of Special Scientific Interest.
3. The proposal is contrary to paragraphs 6.180, 6.181 and 6.192 of the Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland and Policies NH 2 and NH 5 of Planning Policy Statement 2: Natural Heritage in that it has not been demonstrated, on applying the precautionary approach as set out in paragraph 1.6 of PPS 2, that the proposal is not likely to harm a European protected species or any other statutorily protected species and not likely to result in an unacceptable adverse impact or damage to known priority habitats, priority species and features of the landscape which are of major importance for wild flora and fauna.
4. The proposal is contrary to paragraphs 6.190 of the Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland, Policy NH 4 of

Planning Policy Statement 2: Natural Heritage and Policy ENV 2 of the Northern Area Plan 2016 in that it has not been demonstrated, on applying the precautionary approach as set out in paragraph 1.6 of PPS 2, that the proposal is not likely to have a significant adverse impact on Portrush Golf Links Site of Local Nature Conservation Importance.

5. The proposal is contrary to paragraphs 6.35, 6.70 and 6.187 of the Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland, Policy NH 6 of Planning Policy Statement 2: Natural Heritage, Policy ENV 1 of the Northern Area Plan 2016 and Policy CO 1 of A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland in that it has not been demonstrated, on applying the precautionary approach as set out in paragraph 1.6 of PPS 2, that the proposal would not impact on rural character and the beauty of the landscape and not affect the environmental quality, integrity or character of Royal Portrush Local Landscape Policy Area and the special character of Causeway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Site Location Plan:



Site Plan

