

Castlerock Beach – Sand Dunes Conservation Project	14th March 2017
To: The Leisure and Development Committee For Information	

Linkage to Council Strategy (2015-19)	
Strategic Theme	Protecting and enhancing our environment and assets
Outcome	All environments will benefit from pro-active decision making which protects the natural features and integrity of the Borough
Lead Officer	Head of Tourism and Recreation
Cost: (If applicable)	N/A

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with information regarding the conservation works currently planned for Castlerock beach and sand dunes.

Background

Castlerock beach and sand dunes form part of the Bann Estuary Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Portstewart Strand beach, managed by the National Trust, is also part of this designation.

Owing to the significance of this European designation, there is a duty on land owners and site managers to ensure the important features within this landscape (e.g. embryo dunes) are managed in a responsible and sustainable manner in order to achieve “favourable condition status”.

In 2006 the Embryo dune habitat was considered to be in a favourable condition, though concerns were raised in some areas, due to pressures resulting from recreation and vehicle access issues. By 2013 this feature was recorded as being “Unfavourable” due to its restricted presence, especially at the eastern end of Portstewart beach.

In order to address these pressures, and attempt to regain “Favourable Condition Status” the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) is facilitating the development of a Conservation Management Plan for the Bann Estuary ASSI/SAC. The overall aim of this plan is to ensure that this special landscape is managed in a responsible and sustainable manner by the following landowners and site managers: Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, the National Trust, Castlerock Golf Club and Portstewart Golf Club.

As part of this Management Plan, through a Management of Sensitive Sites (MOSS) agreement, DAERA has provided 100% funding for the following conservation works that are currently being carried out at Castlerock beach and sand dunes:

- Removal of the invasive plant Sea Buckthorn from the sand dunes, and marram grass replanting.
- Installation of post & rope fencing to protect the embryo dunes from vehicular impacts.
- Installation of wooden steps at three designated access points within the dunes to help manage pedestrian usage.

- Installation of interpretation panel on site to help inform members of the public about the conservation works.

It is believed that reducing pedestrian and vehicular impact on the site will assist embryo dune development which has previously been hampered. Human recreational access can result in the destabilisation of dunes and the creation of an expanding path network and also have a negative impact on natural re-establishment of blow-outs in the fore dunes.

Moving forward, DAERA, working in close partnership with Council and the above-named bodies, plans to produce an Access and Recreation Strategy for the whole site, to help deliver the conservation and other site objectives as efficiently as possible. Members will be kept informed accordingly regarding progress of this initiative.