



Subject:	Council Response to DOE Consultation Paper on the Identification and Designation of Candidate Quiet Areas
Date:	7th June 2016
Reporting Officer:	Nigel Grimshaw, Director of City and Neighbourhood Services
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Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	At the Committee meeting of 12 January 2016, Members considered the designation of Quiet Areas by DOENI for the Belfast City Council area. The designation of Quiet Areas is a requirement of the Environmental Noise Directive (END) and the Environmental Noise Regulations (NI) 2006.
1.2	In order to identify Candidate Quiet Areas, DOENI conducted a screening exercise for the Belfast area on the basis of noise level, land area and public accessibility, and had proposed that Ligoniel and Tullycarnet Parks be designated as Quiet Areas.
1.3	In its response to DOENI, the Council stated that it did not support the designation of Ligoniel or Tullycarnet Parks as Quiet Areas and that it would seek further dialogue with the Department in order to better understand the impact that the designation might have on these Parks. In addition, the Council highlighted a lack of guidance from DOENI on managing, maintaining and revoking Quiet Areas. Furthermore, the Council expressed concern regarding DOENI's application of a 5 hectare de minimus in the identification of Candidate Quiet Areas.
1.4	Officers have reviewed the noise modelling data utilised by DOENI and, having referred to the European Environment Agency 'Good practice guide on quiet areas' publication, would

	invite the Committee to consider the Lagan Meadows (Appendix 1 – to be tabled at meeting) for proposal to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) as a Candidate Quiet Area.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To consider the report and to endorse the draft response to DAERA (attached at Appendix 2).
3.0	Main Issues
3.1	Quiet areas make a beneficial contribution to public health, particularly for people living in noisy city areas. Accordingly, END requires Member States to ‘preserve environmental noise quality where it is good’ through the identification and protection of Quiet Areas within agglomerations. An agglomeration is a geographic area having a population in excess of 250,000 persons, a population density equal to or greater than 500 people per km ² ; and which is considered to be urbanised. Once designated, councils are required to manage the local noise environment within Quiet Areas to avoid increases in noise from sources covered by END.
3.2	On 11 March 2016, DOENI provided the council with a copy of its noise modelling data with a view to the Council proposing alternative Quiet Areas and revised criteria that should be used for identifying subsequent Candidate Quiet Areas.
3.3	Officers have reviewed this data and have identified the Lagan Meadows as a potential Candidate Quiet Area. The overall area of the Lagan Meadows is approximately 47 hectares and therefore greater than DOENI’s 5 hectare de minimus. A map of the area proposed for designation has been provided in Appendix 1 to this report.
3.4	The Lagan Meadows are situated to the south of the city but are nonetheless in a location readily accessible by the general public and public transport. Furthermore, the Meadows are located within the wider Lagan Valley Regional Park (LVRP), which has been designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and a site of local nature conservation within BMAP. As a consequence of these designations, it is unlikely that revocation of the Lagan Meadows Quiet Area would have to be considered in the future. Moreover, it is considered that the natural environment at the Lagan Meadows is more in keeping with the soundscape and functional objectives described in the European Environment Agency publication, ‘Good practice guide on quiet areas’, i.e. a calm place to relax, think, walk, bike, read or picnic.

Although the Department will have to consult upon this proposed Candidate Quiet Area, it should be noted that the majority of respondents to the Department's previous consultation supported designation of the Lagan Meadows as a Quiet Area.

3.5 Officers have met with representatives of the LVRP Management Board in order to discuss the proposal of the Lagan Meadows as a Candidate Quiet Area. LVRP Management have indicated that they have no concerns regarding such a proposal but would wish to be kept informed regarding progress with the designation process.

3.6 In its previous consultation response to the Department, the Council indicated that it had concerns regarding the Department's choice of screening criteria and, in particular, the application of the 5 hectare de minimus. It was the Council's view that this arbitrary area criterion precluded consideration of smaller parks and public open spaces located within the city centre. The proposed area of the Lagan Meadows to be designated is greater than 5 hectares and is therefore in accordance with all the Department's screening criteria. It is recommended however that, in its response, the Council states that it will engage with DAERA in order to assist the Department to develop more appropriate Quiet Area screening criteria and supporting guidance to be employed in the subsequent identification, designation and management of Quiet Areas.

3.7 Having regard to the location and nature of the Tullycarnet and Ligoniel Parks, as well as the soundscapes and the Council's leisure and other development objectives for these Parks, it is considered that they continue to be unsuitable at present for designation as Quiet Areas. It is recommended however that, in its response, the Council states that it will reconsider these Parks as Candidate Quiet Areas in the light of revised screening criteria.

3.8 Members will recall that the Committee meeting of 10 May 2016 considered a request from the LVRP to provide a letter of support on its behalf to the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) which has reduced its funding to the Park by more than 70%, for the 2016/17 financial year. It is proposed to make further reference to the need for NIEA to continue to provide appropriate funding for the LVRP as part of the Council's Quiet Area's response.

Financial & Resource Implications

3.9 There will be a requirement for officers to periodically monitor noise levels at the Lagan Meadows to ensure that the Quiet Area is protected. This cost is included within existing

	<p>revenue estimates. Financial and resource implications would be reassessed should the future designation of additional Quiet Areas be considered.</p> <p><u>Equality & Good Relations Implications</u></p>
3.10	<p>There are no relevant equality considerations associated with the proposal of the Lagan Meadows as a Candidate Quiet Area.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
4.1	<p>Appendix 1 (To be Tabled at meeting) - Map of the Lagan Meadows to be proposed as a Candidate Quiet Area.</p> <p>Appendix 2 - Draft letter of response to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.</p>