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Appendix 1 - Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA)

Template

1E. Please provide details of the aims and/or objectives of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.

Outdoor Recreation Action Plan (ORAP) for Northern Ireland in 2014.

1D. Please provide the official title (if any) of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service document or initiative relating to the category indicated in Section 1C above.

Developing a Policy Strategy Plan

Adopting a Policy Strategy Plan

Implementing a Policy Strategy Plan

Revising a Policy Strategy Plan Designing a Public Service

Delivering a Public Service

x

1C. Please indicate which category the activity specified in Section 1B above relates to.

Support for the delivery of the Outdoor Recreation Action Plan (2025–2026) through investment into Outscape.

1B. Please provide a short title which describes the activity being undertaken by the Public Authority that is subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

Sport Northern Ireland

1A. Name of Public Authority.

**SECTION 1 - Defining the activity subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016**

The

The 6 key themes highlighted in the ORAP are noted below, within each of these themes are a number of actions please see the link below:

Structures and Partnerships/ Legislation, Policy and Responsibilities/ Making the Outdoors More Accessible/ Investment of Time, Energy and Resources/ Communication, Marketing and Promotion and Research and Monitoring.

<https://www.sportni.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Our-Great-Outdoors.pdf>

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N/A

*Reasons why a definition of ‘rural’ is not applicable.*

N/A

*Rationale for using alternative definition of ‘rural’.*

N/A

*Details of alternative definition of ‘rural’ used.*

Population Settlements of less than 5,000 (Default definition). Other Definition (Provide details and the rationale below).

A definition of ‘rural’ is not applicable.

X

1F. What definition of ‘rural’ is the Public Authority using in respect of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

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Whilst the proposed investment will promote outdoor recreation across Northern Ireland, some work will be more targeted to participants from rural areas, such as “Greenspace NI” in line with the evidence from POMNI as noted above.

Access to quality greenspace is disproportionately lower in rural areas. POMNI data shows only 57% of rural residents have greenspace within easy walking distance (vs 79% in urban areas). This investment targets those disparities by funding outdoor projects in underserved rural communities, helping to equalise opportunities for recreation and wellbeing.

The investment programme has been developed to support delivering against Sport NI’s Corporate Plan (2021/26) outcomes.

**Outcome 1:** People adopting and sustaining participation in sport and physical activity.

These outcomes are underpinned specifically by four cornerstones

* Building a positive and inclusive sports culture, recognising the rights of everyone to access and participate in sport.
* Retaining a duty of care to all those engaged in the Sporting System.
* Promoting wellness and well-being.
* Targeting sport in **rural communities**, in disadvantaged areas and with under-represented groups.

2C. If the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas *differently* from people in urban areas, please explain how it is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently.

This investment will support the delivery of strategic outdoor recreation initiatives aimed at increasing and sustaining participation in sport and physical activity throughout the 2025-2026 period through investment into Outscape.

This investment highlights Outscape’s significant role in delivering these initiatives, including the Get Wet, Stay Safe programme, a key component designed to promote water safety and outdoor activity participation.

The People in the Outdoors Monitor for Northern Ireland (POMNI) gathers evidence and trend data through an omnibus survey relating to how people in Northern Ireland engage with the natural environment, the benefits they gain from it, and the barriers they face trying to access it.  POMNI identified:

* Only 57% of those living in rural areas stated their local greenspace is within easy walking distance vs 79% of those living in urban area

This investment will enable projects that promote and deliver participant opportunities for those that live in Rural areas e.g. Walking trails, Walk Leaders programme- Peace Plus funding and Get Wet Stay Safe.

2B. Please explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas.

Yes No If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **2E**.

X

2A. Is the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service likely to impact on people in rural areas?

**SECTION 2 - Understanding the impact of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service**

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N/A

2E. Please explain why the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is NOT likely to impact on people in rural areas.

If the response to Section 2A was YES GO TO Section 3A.

Rural Businesses Rural Tourism Rural Housing

Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas Education or Training in Rural Areas

Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas

Poverty in Rural Areas Deprivation in Rural Areas

Rural Crime or Community Safety Rural Development

Agri-Environment

Other (Please state)

X

X

X

X

X

X

2D. Please indicate which of the following rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to primarily impact on.

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In writing Sport NI’s Corporate Plan ‘The Power of Sport’ (2021/26), there was a significant consultation processes including several focus group meetings with organisations including those representing Rural Communities. The Corporate Plan Equality Impact Assessment, Sport NI reviewed academic and other sources pertaining to rural needs in NI and their experiences of sport.

* (2016) Young People and Sport In NI: A response to the 2015 Young Life and Times and Kids Life and Times surveys, Sport NI.
* (2019) Education Authority Data
* (2019) Behan, Stephen, Belton, Sarah Jane, and Dublin City University, Ireland’s Children Moving: Examining fundamental movement skills in Irish school children as a key component for physical literacy.
* (2016) OUTstanding in your field: Exploring the needs of LGB&T people in rural Northern Ireland, Rainbow Project.
* (2015) Marie H. Murphy, Niamh M. Murphy, Catherine Woods, Alan M. Neville, Aoife Lane, Prevalence and Correlates of Physical Inactivity in Community-Dwelling Older Adults in Ireland.
* (2020-2023) Youth Service Regional Assessment of Need
* (2019-20) Sport NI developed and undertook an open ‘Participation Survey’; hosted on ‘Citizen Space’ and invited anyone involved in female sport or physical activity (both male and female), aged 16+ years, to respond to the survey. Subsequent to the survey, Sport NI facilitated a series of focus group sessions across Northern Ireland.

For rural needs data, Sport NI has also drawn on the DAERA Rural Needs Monitoring Database (May 2025 version). [DAERA Rural Needs Monitoring](https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-05/DRAFT%20UPDATED%20-%20Rural%20Needs%20Monitoring%20Database%20Template%20For%20Public%20Authorities%20%289%29.XLSX)

3C. Please provide details of the methods and information sources used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas including relevant dates, names of organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc.

Consultation with Rural Stakeholders Published Statistics Consultation with Other Organisations Research Papers Surveys or Questionnaires Other Publications

Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).

X

X

X

X

X

3B. Please indicate which of the following methods or information sources were used by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

Yes No If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **3E**.

X

3A. Has the Public Authority taken steps to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas that are relevant to the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

**SECTION 3 - Identifying the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas**

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N/A

3E. Please explain why no steps were taken by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas?

If the response to Section 3A was YES GO TO Section 4A.

Key rural needs include:

* Limited public transport reducing access to activity opportunities.
* Lower density of recreational facilities and programmes.
* Increased isolation, particularly for women, older adults, and young people.
* Limited awareness of existing opportunities due to poor signposting.
* Demand for more locally delivered, non-competitive, and affordable options.
* Need for nature-connected recreation close to home.
* Children and young people from rural areas were least likely to say that they walked or cycled to school.
* The lower population density in rural areas means that the distance between family homes and schools is larger, and for some young people it may therefore be unfeasible to walk or cycle to school, especially at post-primary level where some young people must travel significant distances to get to their school.
* 35% of children and young people live in a rural community.
* Females, living alone or in a rural area, retirement, fair/poor emotional health and activity being limited by illness are significantly associated with inactivity.
* Those from rural areas described the challenges they faced such as lack of choice of sports, transport issues and social isolation.
* Physical literacy is a cornerstone of Physical Activity involvement. 77.5% of children scored between ‘very poor’ and ‘below average’ in FMS proficiency. There was no difference between children attending urban and rural schools, but notably, when socioeconomic status is taken into account, the schools in middle and upper-class neighborhoods scored significantly higher.

3D. Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by the Public Authority?

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Cornerstone four in Sport NI Corporate Plan is a key deliverable of the proposed investment in targeting sport and physical activity in rural communities. The investment has the potential to develop greater access to sport and physical activity via clubs, community groups and charities. This will build capacity creating learning and training opportunities at both national and community level.

Sport NI has considered the impact of the following on rural communities:

* Limited access to transport both private and public networks negatively affecting individual ability to access sport and physical activity.
* Opportunities for children in rural areas to engage in active travel is limited especially at post-primary level.
* Females in rural areas greater susceptibility to inactivity.
* Limited choice of sport and physical activity opportunities in rural communities, need to diversify.
* Need for wider promotion of the current sport and physical activity opportunities, acknowledgement that these exist but those living in communities not aware where they can find information.

Outscape project monitoring and participant engagement have also informed this investment. Through evaluation of programmes such as Get Wet Stay Safe and community trail activation work, Outscape has gathered insight into barriers faced by rural communities, particularly around access, safety, and confidence in engaging with the outdoors. Feedback from participants and local partners highlights the value of localised, guided opportunities and infrastructure improvements. These insights directly align with national evidence (e.g. POMNI) and reinforce the need for targeted investment into rural access to outdoor recreation.

4A. Please provide details of the issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

**SECTION 4 - Considering the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas**

Rural evidence has influenced the prioritisation of investment into targeted initiatives like GreenspaceNI, Get Wet Stay Safe, and trail development. The policy incorporates a place-based approach to ensure investment reaches areas where need is greatest, particularly underserved rural communities with low existing provision. Equity and inclusion considerations are embedded, guided by Sport NI’s EDI strategy.

Whilst the proposed investment will promote outdoor recreation across Northern Ireland, some work will be more targeted to participants from rural areas, such as “Greenspace NI” in line with the evidence from POMNI as noted above. This investment targets those disparities by funding outdoor projects in underserved rural communities, helping to equalise opportunities for recreation and wellbeing.

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If the response to Section 5A was YES GO TO Section 6A.

5B. Please explain how the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, has been influenced by the rural needs identified.

Yes No If the response is NO GO TO Section 5C.

X

5A. Has the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, been influenced by the rural needs identified?

**SECTION 5 - Influencing the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service**

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Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:

Conleth Donnelly

Position/Grade:

Staff Officer

Division/Branch

Sport Northern Ireland

Signature:

Conleth Donnelly

Date:

6/6/25

Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:

Rebecca Hope

Position/Grade:

Interim Director of Sport (G6)

Division/Branch:

Sport NI

Signature:

R Hope

Date:

31/07/25

I confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained and relevant information compiled.

X

6A. Please tick below to confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained by the Public Authority and relevant information on the Section 1 activity compiled in accordance with paragraph 6.7 of the guidance.

**SECTION 6 - Documenting and Recording**

N/A

5C. Please explain why the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or the delivery of the Public Service, has NOT been influenced by the rural needs identified.