FOREWORD

I am pleased to introduce this Integrated Strategy for Ards and North Down, setting out a vision for Tourism, Regeneration and Economic Development in a planning context. It builds on extensive work by the Council and its partners to date and takes its lead from the Community Plan for Ards and North Down.

This represents the latest in a series of innovative steps that we have taken to drive the Borough forward to create an even better “Place”. In commissioning this strategy, a decision was taken by Council to innovate by adopting a fully integrated approach to these important yet highly inter-related themes. This has resulted in a strategic direction and series of outcomes for us all in partnership to pursue in continued and enhanced collaboration across the Borough.

I would like to thank all who have taken time to contribute to the development of this important strategy and look forward to working with all who share an interest in setting Ards and North Down on the path towards even greater economic growth and prosperity.

Stephen Reid
Chief Executive
Ards and North Down Borough Council
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INTEGRATED STRATEGY FOR ARDS AND NORTH DOWN
2018 - 2030

TOURISM – REGENERATION – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

INTEGRATION

PLACE

VISITOR

INVESTMENT

PROPOSITIONS

JOBS CREATED

ECONOMIC PRODUCTIVITY

VISITOR OVERNIGHT TRIPS

VISITOR EXPENDITURE

TARGETS

BLUE:GREEN Creatively Connected

EXCEL IN VALUE & QUALITY

EQUIP WITH SKILLS & SPACES

CONNECT PLACES & PEOPLE

PROMOTE TO INVEST

UNDERSTAND OUR PROGRESS & POTENTIAL

NURTURE OUR ASSETS

BLUE-GREEN

A natural asset of loughs, land and sea

CREATIVELY

Enterprise, skilled workforce, arts and the creative sector

CONNECTED

Geographic proximities, infrastructure and collaboration

VISION
Executive Summary

INTRODUCING THE INTEGRATED STRATEGY

The Integrated Strategy for Tourism, Regeneration and Economic Development presents a coherent vision for the pursuit of prosperity in the Borough of Ards and North Down. It responds to the vision and outcomes of the Big Plan for Ards and North Down and is to be used as the common point of reference for all those contributing to the growth of our economy, the welcoming of visitors and the improvement of our places, both urban and rural.

The strategy was researched and developed through a highly collaborative process involving stakeholders from the public, private and community sectors. It is built on an evidence base of research that identifies key assets of the Borough, as well as economic and environmental challenges faced at local and regional level. While uncertainties of the wider political and economic prevail, this strategy presents a confident and ambitious plan for the future.

BLUE GREEN CREATIVELY CONNECTED

Ards and North Down has three particular strengths. The natural landscape of sea, loughs and land – a blue green space. The creativity of our people, shaped from earliest times to present day producers, artisans, designers and engineers. Our proximity to places of opportunity, to Belfast, neighbouring districts, to the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain, to Europe and the world beyond. Our distinctiveness is derived in a large part from these three assets and the synergies between them. We are a place of opportunity.

Blue Green, Creatively Connected describes an ethos proposed for our Borough and is an exciting opportunity to drive it forward. It combines these core strengths to convey a fresh approach to how we look after, develop, promote and celebrate Ards and North Down as a place in which to live, work, visit and invest.

Over the 12 year life time of the strategy, it will aim to create jobs, increase economic productivity, increase visitor overnight trips and expenditure. Doing so will be achieved by 19 Integrated Actions for delivery by the Council and its many partners. These are designed to fulfil multiple outcomes for the Borough, complementing existing initiatives and introducing new ideas.

Oversight of the strategy implementation process will be led by Ards and North Down Borough Council and involve establishment of a forum with representatives from the public, private and community sectors. The strategy will be reviewed at 3-year intervals and further shaped through an ongoing process of collaboration with residents, communities and businesses in the Borough.
1.0 Introduction: An Integrated Strategy

1.1 The Role of This Strategy

The Integrated Strategy for Tourism, Regeneration and Economic Development presents a coherent vision for the pursuit of prosperity in the Borough of Ards and North Down. It will be used as the common point of reference for all those contributing to the growth of our economy, the welcoming of visitors and the improvement of our places, both urban and rural.

In 2017 the Big Plan for Ards and North Down established a vision for a “vibrant, connected, healthy, safe and prosperous place to live”. Taking its cue from these outcomes, this Integrated Strategy develops a series of propositions to be made to prospective investors and visitors. It also helps further define how we can most effectively protect, manage and plan our assets, not least the wonderful natural landscape and the talented workforce of the Borough.

The strategy culminates in an Action Plan with a series of Integrated Actions to fulfil specific outcomes. This plan will be used to define and plan the activities of Ards and North Down Borough Council over the next 12 years and to proactively engage with our partners in taking the Borough forward together.

This is not just a Council strategy it is a Borough Strategy and the delivery will be dependent on the impact and influence throughout the strategy.

1.2 Why an Integrated Approach

This strategy integrates the priorities of Tourism, Regeneration and Economic Development for Ards and North Down. Such an integrated approach stems from the recognition that only by working together will it be possible to fully realise the potential of our Borough. To achieve further and more effective collaboration, we must seek to minimise barriers that inevitably form, be they between subject matters, organisations or departments.

This integrated approach responds to recent changes in policy implementation across Northern Ireland. The Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016 – 21, published by the Northern Ireland Executive in 2016, adopts a new, outcomes based approach as opposed to a series of thematic strategies. Similarly, the Big Plan and the Community Planning Process has taken an integrated approach to the fulfilment of outcomes.
1.3 THE STRATEGY PROCESS

The Integrated Tourism, Regeneration and Economic Development Strategy was commissioned by Ards and North Down Borough Council in 2017. It was researched and written by a multidisciplinary consultant team over a period of 6 months. The team was led by placemaking and regeneration practice The Paul Hogarth Company. They were joined by tourism consultancy Louise Browne Associates and by RSM Ltd, providing specialist economic expertise. All members of the team combine national and international experience with a track record of working in the Borough.

From the outset a commitment was made by the Council to shape this strategy through a process of meaningful collaboration. This approach reflects the extent of local knowledge and expertise that exists across the Borough. It also recognises that to bring about positive change, it is vital for Ards and North Down Borough Council to continue to grow effective partnerships with those in the Community, Public and Private sectors. Consequently, the process to create this strategy involved over 40 meetings and workshops and the direct input of over 250 people. The Council extends its gratitude to all who have contributed to this strategy and looks forward to continued collaboration through the course of its delivery.

1.4 THE STRATEGY DOCUMENT

This document summarises the findings and proposals of the Integrated Strategy. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the research that underpins the strategy, including a socio-economic profile of the Borough. Chapter 3 introduces the vision for the Borough, along with accompanying propositions and target audiences. Chapter 4 then introduces a series of Integrated Actions, while Chapter 5 outlines a series of considerations for delivery of the strategy.
INTEGRATED STRATEGY FOR ARDS AND NORTH DOWN (2018 – 2030)

TOURISM – REGENERATION – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
1.5  **Policy & Administrative Context**

This Integrated Strategy for Tourism, Regeneration and Economic Development is positioned as a key point of reference within a broader context of Council and government policies.

It responds to a vision for Ards and North Down set out by the Big Plan, the Borough’s outcomes based Community Plan published in 2017. Each of its Integrated Actions will be assessed against the Community Plan’s 5 outcomes. This Strategy also relates closely to the Council’s Corporate Plan and its 3 categories of People, Place and Prosperity.

The forthcoming Local Development Plan (LDP) shall have regard to the findings of the Integrated Strategy. The LDP shall provide a 15-year framework to support economic, environmental and social needs of the Borough while providing for the delivery of sustainable development.

Alongside this Integrated Strategy are a series of other Council strategy documents. This includes the Integrated Strategy for Arts and Heritage. It also includes Thematic Strategies aimed at progressing specific sectors, such as Food Strategies and Place Specific Strategies prepared for towns, villages and sites across the Borough. As these are updated and revised, it will be important to ensure tie in between these plans and the objectives set out by this strategy.

This strategy takes full cognisance of the wider government policy context, including the Draft Programme for Government, Regional Development Strategy, Industrial Strategy for NI, and sector specific policies for Tourism, Investment and Regeneration. It will also be to used to inform potential investment in the Borough relating to the Belfast Region City Deal announced by government in 2018.

The strategy is written at a time of austerity and uncertainty that will inevitably shape its future roll out. Continued spending cuts will limit central government funding towards projects in the short to medium term. Meanwhile, uncertainty stems from ongoing negotiations to re-establish the Northern Ireland Assembly and on the international stage, to agree the terms of the United Kingdom’s exit from the European Union. The former results in an absence of central government decision making on policies that affect Ards and North Down, including those directly relevant to this strategy such as tourism policy and infrastructure investment. The latter relates to widespread implications of Brexit for administration and the economy, the details of which remain largely unknown at the time of writing. A lack of clarity on the future trading relationship with the Republic of Ireland for example, risks deterring investment decisions in the short term, and once resolved instigate major changes to how businesses in the area can operate over the medium to longer terms. While this may bring opportunities as well as challenges, it will be necessary to monitor such developments very closely, thereby ensuring a continued policy fit at local and regional level. Such a responsive and adaptive approach will be critical to the successful implementation of this strategy.
2.0 Analysis: Ards and North Down Today

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Understanding Ards and North Down and how well it functions as a place to live, work and visit is an essential first step of this strategy. This chapter provides a summary profile of the Borough, drawing upon available data and the findings of the research process. Not only does this enable the identification of key issues that are required to be addressed by the strategy, but as importantly, it highlights core assets that will form the building blocks for prosperity in the Borough.

2.2 THE PLACE

Landscape

- Ards and North Down has a geographical area of 228 square miles and a coastline of 115 miles along two loughs and the Irish Sea.
- Strangford Lough is one of the highest ranking marine environmental sites in Europe, with almost three quarters of all Northern Ireland’s marine species recorded there. Accordingly, it has been afforded European level protection (RAMSAR), was made Northern Ireland’s first Marine Nature Reserve and is both an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and an Area of Special Scientific Interest.
- Strangford Lough also holds designations of Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Area (SPA)
- Aughnadarragh Lough holds a designation of an SAC and lies partially within the boundary of the borough.
- Other SPA include – Outer Ards SPA, Copeland Islands SPA and that related to Belfast Lough SPA.
- At national designation level there are a number of Areas of Special Scientific Interest in the Borough – listed below:
  - ASSI
  - Outer Ards
  - Inner Belfast Lough
  - Outer Belfast Lough
  - Copeland Islands
  - Whitespots
  - Strangford Lough Part 1
  - Strangford Lough Part 2
  - Strangford Lough Part 3
  - Ballymacormick Point
  - Lough Cowey
  - Scrabo
  - Ballyquintin Point
  - Craigantlet Woods
- Significant agricultural settlements including the Comber Potato which has PGI status.
Settlements
- The population of the Borough (as per the mid-year estimate for 2016) was 159,593, comprising of 5 towns and 17 villages.
- When combined, the populations of Bangor and Newtownards (only 1.5 miles apart) would equate to 89,061, making it second only in population size to Belfast.
- There are 17 Areas of Townscape Character (ATC) and Areas of Village Character (AVC) in the Borough and approximately 675 listed buildings.

Transport and Connectivity
- Ards and North Down is served by 1,152km of public roads (4.5% of total NI network).
- Bangor Town Hall is approximately 13 miles from Belfast City Hall.
- George Best Belfast City Airport and the nearby Belfast Docks are approximately 10 miles in distance from Bangor and Newtownards respectively.
- Travel times to major European Capitals include 2 hours to Dublin by road, and by air, 1 hour to Edinburgh, 1.5 hours to London and Amsterdam.

Digital Infrastructure
- 81% of households have access to home broadband in the Borough which is 6% higher than the NI average and ranks 2nd at LGD level;
- 7% of premises are unable to access speeds greater than 10MBps which ranks 3rd at LGD level.

2.3 THE PEOPLE

Population and Travel to Work
- The population of the Borough is growing at a slower rate than the population of Northern Ireland (NI) and official statistics from the Northern Ireland Statistics Agency (NISRA) project it to grow at a significantly lower rate up to 2039 than NI overall (2.5% compared to 9.8%).
- Ards and North Down currently has a slightly younger population than the NI average. However, NISRA statistics suggest that by 2039, AND will have an older population than NI overall, with almost one in three people being aged 65 years or older, compared to a projected one in four in NI.
- The 2011 census identifies that 52% travel outside of the area for work purposes (28,823). This is the 3rd highest level of out of Borough commuting when compared to other Local Government Districts (LGDs).
Economic and Social Deprivation
- As a Council area, Ards and North Down is one of the least deprived in NI in terms of income and employment, however, there are pockets of deprivation. Five of the 48 wards (10.4%) in the Council area were in the top 30% most deprived wards in NI;
- Furthermore, Harbour Ward is in the top 2% most deprived wards in NI in terms of Living Environment and within the top 5% most deprived wards in relation to Crime and Disorder.

Employment, Skills and Wages
- In 2015, Ards and North Down had a higher proportion of its population achieving NVQ Level 4 or higher when compared to the NI average - 35.5% compared to 29.9% - ranked 2\textsuperscript{nd} (out of 11) LGDs;
- It had a slightly lower proportion of its population achieving below NVQ Level 4 when compared to the NI average - 53.3% compared to 53.6% - ranked 6\textsuperscript{th} at LGD level;
- The Borough had the second lowest proportion of its working age population with no qualifications out of the 11 council areas - 11.3% compared to a NI average of 16.5%; and
- Median weekly wages for full time employees (30+ hours) living in Ards and North Down is £440.00 and for people working in the Borough, the median weekly wage is £390.40. These are both above the NI average median earnings (£389.80).

2.4 THE ECONOMY

Business Profile
- 89% of businesses in Ards and North Down are micro businesses (0-9 employees), 10% are small businesses (10-49 employees), 1% are medium sized businesses (50-249 employees) and 0.2% are considered large businesses (250+ employees). These figures are broadly in line with the NI averages;
- In 2015, the business birth rate in Ards and North Down was 9.4% and the business death rate was 8.9%, indicating that the business base grew by 0.5% in this year. This level of growth was lower than the NI average of 2%;
• 2016 data identifies that the sectors with the largest number of VAT/ PAYE registered businesses are:
  o Retail and wholesale (15%);
  o Agriculture, forestry and fishing (13%);
  o Construction (13%); and
  o Professional, scientific and technical (11%).

• As identified in Figure 1, the four largest employing sectors in the Borough area are:
  o Retail and wholesale (22%);
  o Health activities (18%);
  o Education (10%); and
  o Hospitality - accommodation and food services (10%).

• 2015 BRES data identifies 38,182 employee jobs (excluding agriculture) in AND. This reflects a 1.5% increase on 2014 figures.

When grouped, Ards and North Down has a high concentration of employment in tourism-related sectors such as ‘accommodation and food services’ and ‘arts, entertainment and recreation’. Together, they account for a total of 5,258 jobs, which represents 8.7% of all jobs within these sectors in NI. The Borough is ranked 2nd at Local Government District level in terms of jobs in these sectors.

Although Ards and North Down’s manufacturing sector only accounts for 2,825 employee jobs (7.4% of all employee jobs within the Borough) there are eight manufacturing companies in the top 30 employers within the Borough, these include market leading/high-profile manufacturing companies such as Bombardier, Munster Simms Engineering Ltd, Denroy International, Magellan Aerospace Ltd and Valpar. The Borough is also home of some of Northern Ireland’s most prominent agri-food companies, for example Willowbrook Foods, Mash Direct Ltd and Pritchitts.

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1 Total job figures and percentages quoted in this section reflect 2015 BRES data and do not include agricultural labour.
Job Growth Prospects

- Figure 1 identifies the sectors which are projected to grow to a medium extent (10-20% over 10 years) or high extent (20%+ over 10 years) over the next decade where the Ards and North Down area has some presence/activity:

  **High growth:**
  - Information and Communication (1.5% of total jobs);
  - Professional, Scientific and Technical (3.9% of total jobs);
  - Arts, Entertainment and Recreation (4% of total jobs).

  **Medium growth:**
  - Finance and Insurance (2.1% of total jobs);
  - Administration and Support (5.1% of total jobs);
  - Real Estate and Property (1.3% of total jobs);
  - Construction (3.2% of total jobs);
  - Accommodation and Food (9.9% of total jobs);
  - Manufacturing (7.4% of total jobs).

- Sectors that are not expected to grow significantly over the next decade where Ards and North Down has a relatively high level of activity include:
  - Education (10% of total jobs); and
  - Wholesale and retail (21.8% of total jobs).
Figure 1: Ards and North Down Sector Profile by % of Employee Jobs & Sector Growth Prospects (2016 – 2026)

Each circle presented within the above diagram (Fig 1) illustrates the proportion of employee jobs located within a specific sector within Ards and North Down (represented by its position on the vertical axis and the size of the circle), combined with the sectors projected growth rate for the period 2016 – 2026 (represented by its position on the horizontal axis). The growth rates presented within this diagram reflect the ‘high growth’ scenario profiled by the NI Skills Barometer (2017 update).

Business Productivity and Export Orientation

- Ards and North Down productivity (Gross Value Added per head) is significantly lower than the NI average – 2015 GVA per head in the Borough was £11,678 compared to an NI average of £18,584. The business profile of the Borough is dominated by sectors that typically produce low levels of productivity (retail/wholesale, public sector service provision and accommodation/food services).

- 2017 data for Ards and North Down based Invest NI clients highlights that external sales outside NI per employee was £87,252 compared to NI average of £109,714. ANDBC ranked 10th against the other LGDs. Export sales (i.e. sales outside the UK) per employee for the Borough based Invest NI clients was £43,650 compared to an NI average of £52,704 with it being ranked 7th out of 11 LGDs against this measure.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)

- The key sectors where FDI has been attracted to NI include: advanced engineering and manufacturing; financial, professional and business services; and digital and creative technologies.

- Within NI, Ards and North Down has performed poorly in securing FDI, particularly considering the areas proximity to Belfast.
2.5 **The Visitors**

**Tourism**

- In 2016, Ards and North Down Borough Council area attracted 283,229 overnight trips (trips taken by external and domestic visitors), 6% of all such trips in Northern Ireland. They stayed for over a million nights (1,087,260 nights) - 7% of total Northern Ireland nights - and generated almost £46 million, 6% of total revenue generated across Northern Ireland from staying visitors and domestic tourists.

- Taking into account the margin of error associated with the statistical basis for assessing the performance of tourism, 2016 indicates a static position over the last 5 years. However the average spend per trip continued to improve against the Northern Ireland average. See Figure 2

- Ranked 6th among the 11 Local Government Districts in terms of the number of visitors attracted – see Figure 3 - Ards and North Down has a higher than average length of stay – 3.8 nights compared with a Northern Ireland average of 3.2 nights. It came 7th – just behind Mid and East Antrim - in terms of revenue generated in 2016 – see Figure 4

*Figure 2: Visitors to Ards and North Down Borough Council Area*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>% change 2015/16</th>
<th>% of all NI 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trips (000)</strong></td>
<td>443</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>-25%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nights (000)</strong></td>
<td>1,070</td>
<td>1,142</td>
<td>1,087</td>
<td>-7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spend</strong></td>
<td>£63m</td>
<td>£55m</td>
<td>£46m</td>
<td>-16%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Spend</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Per Trip</strong></td>
<td>£100</td>
<td>£135</td>
<td>£162</td>
<td>+20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Holiday Visitors (000)</strong></td>
<td>172*</td>
<td>174*</td>
<td>157*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: NISRA

FIGURE 3: LGD Ranking by No. of Trips (000) 2016

Source: NISRA LGD Tourism Estimates 2016

FIGURE 4: LGD Ranking by Revenue Generated (£m) 2016

Source: NISRA LGD Tourism Estimates 2016

A&N - Antrim and Newtownabbey, AND - Ards and North Down, ABC - Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, CC&G- Causeway Coast and Glens, D&S - Derry City and Strabane, F&O - Fermanagh and Omagh, L&C Lisburn and Castlereagh, M&EA - Mid and East Antrim, Mid U - Mid Ulster, NM&D - Newry, Mourne and Down
2.6 SUMMARY

As outlined in this chapter, Ards and North Down has many significant assets, including the quality of its natural environment, the skills and education of its people and its geographic proximities to market opportunities. Yet the Borough also faces challenges, including its levels of economic productivity and commuters travelling elsewhere for employment. The opportunity exists to provide more jobs in the Borough to stem the flow of residents leaving to find work and encouraging more visitors to area. It also finds itself in an era of political and policy uncertainty, both in Northern Ireland and on the national and international stage.

These factors combine to underline the urgent need for an Integrated Strategy that provides strong direction and a coherent proposition. It must serve to address these complex issues and most importantly, capitalise upon the substantial opportunities that exist here.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
<th>WEAKNESSES</th>
<th>OPPORTUNITIES</th>
<th>THREATS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COASTLINE</td>
<td>RELATIVELY LOW GROWTH IN BUSINESS BASE</td>
<td>INCREASED ACCESS TO ASSETS</td>
<td>POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOW ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION</td>
<td>LOW PRODUCTIVITY (GVA)</td>
<td>NI TOURISM FORECASTS</td>
<td>AGEING POPULATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIGH EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT</td>
<td>LOW EXPORT ACTIVITY</td>
<td>GROWTH OF KEY SECTORS</td>
<td>CONGESTION &amp; INFRASTRUCTURE CAPACITY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LONGER VISITOR STAYS</td>
<td>LOW LEVELS OF FDI</td>
<td>INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT</td>
<td>COASTAL EROSION &amp; ENVIRONMENT CHANGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADVANCED MANUFACTURING</td>
<td>STATIC VISITOR NUMBERS</td>
<td>IMPROVED AIR QUALITY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIODIVERSITY &amp; HABITATS</td>
<td>VACANT BUILDINGS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FERTILE SOILS, SEA &amp; AGRI FOOD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUILT HERITAGE, VILLAGES, PARKS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEOGRAPHIC PROXIMITIES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
INTEGRATED STRATEGY FOR ARDS AND NORTH DOWN (2018 – 2030)

TOURISM – REGENERATION – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Creating positive outcomes for everyone

Outcome 1: Fulfil their lifelong potential
- Empower residents and communities

Outcome 2: Enjoy good health and wellbeing

Outcome 3: Are respected and live in communities where they are safe and feel secure

Outcome 4: Benefit from a prosperous economy

Outcome 5: Feel pride having access to a well-managed, sustainable environment
- Improving the quality and accessibility of all public services
- Reducing inequalities
- Promoting good relations

Ards and North Down is a vibrant, connected, healthy, safe and prosperous place to live
3.0 Vision: Blue Green, Creatively Connected

3.1 The Big Plan for Ards and North Down (2017 – 2032)

In response to The Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 2014, Ards and North Down Borough Council was required to facilitate the development of a Community Plan for the Borough. This document called ‘The Big Plan’ was compiled by members of the Community Planning Partnership, comprising of Council and over 24 government departments and public sector agencies.

The Big Plan establishes an aspirational vision of the Borough in 2032 as:

“Ards and North Down is a vibrant, connected, healthy, safe and prosperous place to live”

The vision will be delivered through the fulfilment of 5 Outcomes shown on the opposite page. These will be measured through a series of Indicators drawn from census data compiled by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

The Council with its partners is fully committed to fulfilling these outcomes. This Integrated Strategy therefore forms an important part of this process. With a remit of Tourism, Regeneration and Economic Development, it contributes most directly to the fulfilment of Outcome 4 (Prosperous Economy) and Outcome 5 (Sustainable Environment). However, the broad ranging nature of the integrated approach means that the delivery of its outcomes will significantly contribute to all five.
INTEGRATED STRATEGY FOR ARDS AND NORTH DOWN (2018 – 2030)
TOURISM – REGENERATION – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
3.2 BLUE GREEN, CREATIVELY CONNECTED

To complement the aspirations of the Big Plan, the following vision for this Integrated Strategy has been established:

“Blue Green, Creatively Connected”

Ards and North Down has three particular strengths: The natural landscape of sea, loughs and land – a blue green space. This provides a home to nature, beautiful scenery, natural produce and a place of inspiration for all our artists and creators. It is ingrained in our heritage and an important part of making the Borough a great place to be. The creativity of our people, shaped from earliest times to present day producers, artisans, designers and engineers. Engagement of our people - young and old - in purposeful, productive and creative endeavour across the Borough will be key for the future. Our proximity to places of opportunity, to Belfast, neighbouring districts, to the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain, to Europe and the world beyond. Our distinctiveness is derived in a large part from these three assets and the synergies between them. We are a place of opportunity.

Blue Green, Creatively Connected describes an ethos proposed for our Borough and is an exciting opportunity to drive it forward. It combines these core strengths to convey a fresh approach to how we look after, develop, promote and celebrate Ards and North Down as a place in which to live, work, visit and invest. The Blue and Green Economies are increasingly important models of economic growth on the global stage. They place the sustainability of our natural environment at the heart of approaches to prosperity through careful stewardship, the minimisation of harm and the pursuit of economic opportunities associated with our landscape. In doing so, they also move us closer towards a circular economy that derives local value from our local assets.

Creativity, which is an intrinsic part of cultural identity, is also key to our economy, through innovation, enterprise and the arts. Our talented producers, makers and creators are central to our society and our economy, both now and increasingly so, in the future. Furthermore, the Creative Industries form a key sector in the Borough, with potential for growth.

Connectivity allows us to avail of opportunities together. Physical connectivity (by sight, foot or transport) holds us together and aids the movement of people, goods and services. Social connectivity brings us together in friendship and endeavour, important to individuals, families and communities, as well as organisations, be they public or private. Finally, digital connectivity is now a fundamental component of 21st century life. Geographic distances are overcome to connect essential services and businesses within the Borough and far beyond.
A Global Context

Blue Green, Creatively Connected is not only tailored to fit the unique attributes of Ards and North Down, but is also firmly set within international efforts to establish sustainable models of economic growth. The United Nations, World Bank and European Union are amongst the strongest proponents of such approaches. Their motivation stems from increased alarm concerning the health of the environment and historic global consensus reached through the 2015 Paris Agreement to mitigate against climate change.

The Blue Economy

The Blue Economy is defined by the World Bank as “the range of economic sectors and related policies that together determine whether the use of oceanic resources is sustainable.” In their 2017 report authored with the UN2, they explain that “the Blue Economy concept seeks to promote economic growth, social inclusion, and the preservation or improvement of livelihoods while at the same time ensuring environmental sustainability of the oceans and coastal areas.”

The Green Economy

The United Nations Environment Programme defines a Green Economy as “one that results in improved human well-being and social equity”3, is linked to the concept of a Circular Economy that seeks to minimise waste and harmful emissions through innovative approaches to how we use and re-use finite resources.

PLACE

The quality of Ards and North Down as a place, both natural and manmade, is its greatest asset. Economic growth and prosperity must therefore be achieved by enhancing, and not detracting from the quality of place.

VALUE
Consistently working to uphold and enhance our quality of place, connections and creativity. Realising positive opportunities for growth and prosperity that add value to our places.

KEY ELEMENTS
Sustainable Planning & Design Place Based Approach.

AUDIENCE
Local Communities & Businesses Potential Investors Developers & Construct Sector Policy & Decision Makers

LOCATIONS
Upholding and increasing the quality of all locations in the Borough Placing value on town & village centres, special buildings and landscapes.

IMPACT
Enhancing the environmental, social and economic value of our Borough, its landscapes, towns and villages.

INTRODUCTION
A need exists to combat the "lack of awareness" relative to the area’s offer of value; to identify & substantiate what is unique, distinctive and differentiating about the destination and align the offer with the motivation of the destination’s best prospect visitors.

VALUE PROPOSITION
A destination marked by water, steeped in history, characterised by creative endeavour where encounters with the place and its people leave an indelible impression.

KEY ELEMENTS
The proposition is substantiated by a suite of experiences Water's Edge, Time Depth, Creative, A Taste of Place and is supported by a range of visitor facilities and services.

AUDIENCE
Great Escapers, Culturally Curious, Time Together, Domestic Niche

LOCATIONS
Route: Coastal Route supported by a coherent network of greenways and blueways. Hubs: Gateways, Food, Service Portals: Key locations of interest. Clusters: partnering to deliver experiences

IMPACT
Raise awareness & generate stand-out. Link and add depth to the offer. Make it easy for visitors to experience its many dimensions.

INTRODUCTION
Enhanced levels of business investment are required to create additional jobs within the Ards and North Down economy; re-orientate the local economy to high-value added sectors; and to increase economic productivity.

VALUE PROPOSITION
Location and connectedness, Skilled and creative people (Education/Skills), Quality of life and environment

KEY ELEMENTS
ICT: Professional, Scientific and Technical; Financial and Insurance; Administration and Support, Arts, Entertainment and Recreation, Accommodation and Food Manufacturing and Agri-food production.

AUDIENCE
Existing indigenous businesses, Prospective entrepreneurs; Inward investment organisations; and The Ards and North Down diaspora.

LOCATIONS
Improve the quality of infrastructure, helping to increase the geographic spread of economic activity and investment; Reduce the environmental and social impact of commuting;

IMPACT
Increased No. of local businesses operating in high-value added / high-growth sectors; Increased Investment in Ards and North Down by businesses / organisations from outside the area; increased number of local employee jobs within high-value added sectors; Increased Economic productivity.
3.3 The Place Proposition

Introduction

The Place Proposition elaborates upon how Blue Green, Creatively Connected and the associated Investment and Visitor propositions are translated into the sustainable regeneration of Ards and North Down. The value of our natural and built heritage is such that economic growth is required to be managed carefully, so that prosperity is brought to the Borough and its people without negatively impacting upon the environment. In fact, through good governance, planning, design and stewardship, all development should contribute positively to the physical richness and diversity of Ards and North Down. In other words, enhancing the quality of the environment and our economic prosperity are complementary, rather than competing objectives.

Audience

It is important to recognise that we all have a part to play in how our places are shaped and managed. The proposition is therefore aimed at local communities and businesses as well as those actively involved in development and construction processes. It must also communicate with decision makers in local and central government, including elected members and their officials. Finally, the Place Proposition must work hard to attract visitors and potential investors to the Borough, demonstrating a clear commitment to sustainability and quality.

Sustainable Planning and Design

To truly fulfil the vision of a Blue Green, Creatively Connected Borough, it will be necessary to embrace the principles of sustainable planning and design. These relate to all levels of the development process, from regional planning decisions regarding the distribution of development and infrastructure right through to the specification of building materials. The integration of such thinking at the outset of any planning and design process will be pivotal to ensuring their delivery, as opposed to ‘greening up’ a project at the end as an add on.

Key Sustainable Planning and Design principles for the Borough are:

- Contributing positively to local ecosystems
- Harnessing existing assets, including natural and built heritage
- Committing to sustainable sources of energy and forms of transportation
- Developing appropriate urban densities, reducing sprawl and increasing walkability
- Integrating green technologies and systems at every stage of development
- Designing with longevity and flexibility in mind
- Embracing new development partnerships and opportunities
A Place Based Approach

Ards and North Down, its constituent towns, villages and rural locations, all have distinctive qualities that reinforce their and the Borough’s unique identity and sense of place. In order to retain and attract residents, visitors and investors, the underlying character of these places must be very well understood, so that new interventions are appropriate and contextual. This calls for a continued and increased commitment to spatial planning, which takes into account these factors unlike earlier approaches of land use or zone led planning. It also requires greater attention paid to the quality of landscape and urban design. This moves away from notions of designing isolated objects in space, to that of placemaking, whereby the relationships between developments, their settings and the quality of the open spaces that connect them are given full attention. In doing so, quality planning and design become key tools by which to increase and sustain physical, social and economic vitality.

Most towns and villages in Ards and North Down in recent years have been the subject of town centre masterplans, village plans and associated action plans. These documents, along with design guidance (currently under preparation) for Areas of Townscape and Village Character, are underpinned with a qualitative analysis of the place in question. They are also consulted upon at a local level. Such spatial planning processes, updated and aligned with planning policy, will be key to ensuring that physical regeneration and development projects in the Borough are appropriate and in context to local needs. Through high standards of architecture, urban and rural landscape design new development must make a positive and lasting contribution to local needs in our towns, villages, small settlements and neighbourhoods.

Furthermore, urban stewardship - the way in which we manage and care for our places - will play an increasingly important role in the regeneration of the Borough’s towns and villages. Bangor’s Project 24, for example, has demonstrated how creative meanwhile uses can breathe life into otherwise derelict places. Voluntary programmes have seen local people actively engaged in the care of local places and both large and small events, which helped to animate the public realm, keeping our urban and rural place safe, lively and attractive.

Key Placemaking Principles for the Borough are:

- Accentuating an area’s unique Sense of Place to attract visitors and investment
- Requiring thoughtful contextual analysis to inform planning and design interventions
- Planning and designing mixed use areas and buildings that contribute to vitality
- Driving standards of architectural, landscape and urban design across the Borough
- Animating public spaces through the creative management of uses, events and artworks
- Applying similar approaches and philosophies in rural context with more localised involvement
3.4 THE INVESTMENT PROPOSITION

Investment Proposition and Audiences

“Blue Green, Creatively Connected” provides the overarching framework for developing the Ards and North Down investment proposition. The proposition will be underpinned by the following key elements:

- **Connectedness** – Ards and North Down is within close proximity to Belfast and Northern Ireland’s main ports and airports, providing investors with ease of access to markets within Northern Ireland, Ireland and further afield.

- **Quality of people** – The Borough has one of the highest proportions of workers with high level skills in Northern Ireland, future business and economic growth will require these high-level skills. The area has also the lowest proportion of its working age population with no qualifications, providing a solid base for future skills development. Ards and North Down also has a history of entrepreneurialism, creativity and innovation, which has helped establish and grow many market leading businesses within the locality.

- **Quality of environment** – the natural landscape of the Borough provides the setting for a quality of life that, when combined with the areas connectedness, is attractive to both business owners and workers. The natural assets of the area also provide a unique setting for future research, development and investment in activity that will support the growth of businesses within the blue, green and circular economies.

The investment proposition will support further growth and development of existing sectors of strength within Ards and North Down (i.e. Agri-Food, Manufacturing and Tourism), as well as the development of critical mass within emerging sectors. In doing so, it will promote the development of businesses and initiatives that are aligned with the areas Blue Green credentials. Examples of such activity include, but are not limited to: food/seafood production; marine and renewable energy; waste management and reduction; marine research, science and technology; coastal/marine tourism. Economic development activities supported by the strategy and the communication of the investment proposition will involve targeting of/engagement with the following key audiences:

- **Indigenous business** – the strategy will:
  - Promote and reinforce the strengths of Ards and North Down as a base for existing and new local businesses;
  - Facilitate the development of strategic infrastructure (e.g. digital connectivity) and further development of effective support services to contribute to the development and growth of local businesses;
  - Establish structures and a new way of working that will deliver robust engagement with local businesses, to address sector specific issues and to support the development of local supply chains
• **Prospective entrepreneurs** – in order to contribute to the further development of the local business base, the strategy will contribute to enterprise promotion, pre-enterprise support and the enhancement of the level of local business start-ups. In carrying out these activities it will target local students, recently retired workers and individuals currently excluded from the labour market. The strategy will also specifically target highly skilled professionals who are travelling outside the area for work, to explore opportunities to support these individuals in creating new high added-value businesses within Ards and North Down.

• **Inward investment organisations** – the strategy will:
  - Establish structures to deliver effective engagement with prospective inward investors.
  - Provide a framework to support a communications/marketing strategy to target prospective inward investors;
  - Facilitate the development of strategic infrastructure (e.g. enhanced digital connectivity, workspace and improved transport infrastructure) to support the attraction of innovative and high value businesses to the area;
  - Support effective engagement with ANDs diaspora, to contribute to the promotion of the area in key markets and to support the attraction of investment.

The analysis in Chapter 2 highlights that:

• Although Ards and North Down businesses provide employment across a wide range of sectors, the majority of employee jobs are located in sectors that are projected to experience low to modest growth over the next decade;

• Sectors that are expected to experience high growth in the next decade are under-represented within the Ards and North Down economy.

Analysis suggests that future economic development activities should prioritise:

• The development of new businesses and the growth of existing businesses in the following medium to high growth sectors: **ICT; Professional, Scientific and Technical; Financial and Insurance; and Administration and Support**. The ICT and Professional, Scientific and Technical sectors also provide high value-added jobs;

• Supporting the development of businesses that contribute to tourism, namely: **Arts, Entertainment and Recreation and Accommodation and Food** – both of these sectors are projected to grow to a medium/high extent over the next decade; and

• Support the growth and development of local sectors that contain market leaders and offer opportunities for development in innovation, export development and delivery of high value added, namely: **Manufacturing** and **Agri-food** production.
Investment Locations

It is important that economic investment reaches across the entirety of the Borough, bringing tangible benefits to communities and businesses located there. However, the distribution of populations, geographic proximities and the quality of infrastructure will all have an influence on the kinds and levels of development each area is able to attract.

An objective of this strategy must be to improve the quality of infrastructure, helping to increase the geographic spread of economic activity and investment. It should also seek to reduce the environmental and social impact of commuting which is a key issue for the Borough.

In considering the location of physical economic development, the following principles should apply:

**Town and Village Centres**
It is vital that the centres of our urban settlements are hubs of economic investment, this helps to maintain a critical mass of facilities and services, while contributing to their social and physical vibrancy. This strategy recommends assessment of the feasibility of the development of workspace and flexible workspace within towns and villages within the Borough, as well as continued focus on the development of Queen’s Parade, Bangor. Given the need to ensure the vibrancy of local towns and villages, out of town development must be minimised.

**Public Transport Corridors**
Another key consideration for the location of development is proximity to public transport. Train, bus and rapid transit routes, park and ride facilities and greenways should be key factors in determining the location of economic growth, cluster development and higher density residential development.

**Cluster Development**
Where existing clusters of similar economic activity exist, measures are required to service and support their needs. Their presence and associated infrastructure are also likely to attract investment from similar entities. However, care is required to avoid an unresponsive zoning approach that stymies the potential for mixed use development or pioneering developments in new locations.

**Enterprise/Investment Zones**
Identifying a specific area for incentivised investment is encouraged by this strategy. Its location must take into account the above factors, so ensuring that such a zone is also a successful thriving place, as opposed to a separate entity detached from its surroundings. This would create an attractive proposition for inward investment into the Borough.
Rural Development

It is of course important to ensure economic investment and growth in rural locations, supporting for example, the agri-food and leisure-based recreation sectors. A careful balance is required to ensure any associated development is appropriate to its context.

This strategy includes a range of place-based actions that will support the development of a robust investment proposition. For example:

- Identification and provision of access to investment sites to support the growth of new and existing businesses,
- Facilitation of the development of land and buildings in locations that maximise the areas connectedness to transport and digital infrastructure,
- Identifying cluster development opportunities to develop sector collaboration and to showcase industry excellence, in particular in relation to professional services, agri-food and advanced manufacturing,
- Supporting the vibrancy of local towns and villages by developing work hubs and flexible working space,
- Assessing the cost, benefits and feasibility of the development of an enterprise/investment zone to support the development of investment, and,
- Assist in informing the Local Development Plan process to allocate appropriate land for employment use.

Outcomes/Impacts

The intended outcomes and impacts associated with the effective development and marketing of the Ards and North Down investment proposition are:

- An increase in the number of local businesses operating within high-value added and high-growth sectors across the Borough,
- Increased levels of investment in Ards and North Down by businesses/organisations from outside the area,
- An increase in the number of local employee jobs within high-value added sectors,
- Increased levels of economic productivity, and,
- Reduce levels of commuting outside of the Borough for work purposes.
3.5 **THE VISITOR PROPOSITION**

**Introduction**

Drawing upon the Blue Green, Creatively Connected ethos, the visitor proposition for Ards and North Down has been guided by the following principles:

- The need to create greater awareness of the destination by communicating that Ards and North Down has a wealth of living and historic culture; specific things to participate in; specific places to encounter and a programming of events designed to showcase the essence of the destination.
- The proposition is centred around a unique, distinctive and differentiating aspect of the destination – a place marked by water - to create a distinctive suite of experiences which will generate enhanced motivation to purchase.
- Creativity, as expressed through the ways in which visitors will encounter the destination’s places, people, personality, product and programming of events, is central to the proposition.
- The ‘experiences’ will be true to the motivations of those visitors who represent the best prospects for the destination.

**Key Theme**

The key theme of the proposition has been developed from our understanding of the essence of this place which is a ‘watermarked’ place – a destination shaped by water where encounters with the place and its people leave an indelible impression. It implies fragility, a delicate impression rather than over-bearing expression; it suggests an opportunity to experience tranquility, creativity, great quality food and, with the help of people locally, the chance to navigate the portals to a place steeped in history.
Supporting Experiences

Experience development will seek to substantiate the destination proposition whilst also addressing the challenge of meeting the needs of the destination’s key segments; nurturing the growth of emerging niche markets and responding to more specific consumer trends that resonate particularly well with Ards and North Down’s offer in food, heritage, and creativity. The creation of a suite of experiences – activities, products and programmes which showcase the unique characteristics of the destination - supported by a range of visitor facilities and services will seek to spread the benefits of tourism throughout the destination. Key experiences will include:

- **Water’s Edge Encounters – feeding the spirit** – access to, along, on and in the water for walking, cycling, swimming, boating, sailing, racing or just viewing the spectacle. Experiences in places where the land meets the sea and the sea the land – earthbound and waterborne.
  - Building on the maritime and loughshore possibilities presented by providing opportunities to spontaneously engage in activities on, in and beside the water. These could include the provision of fun, lively, not too active adventures, easy to get to, with great food and views. What is important is that these experiences should cater not just for those who want to get their feet wet, but also those who want to remain on dry land but still enjoy and immerse themselves in the spectacle or just walk the water’s edge and enjoy the view. Opportunities to learn are also a key aspect of this experience - whether it is learning a new water sports skill, discovering how the marine environment is being looked after or being moved by the stories of the area’s rich maritime heritage. Opportunities to enjoy good food nearby will be critically important with menus geared to satisfying a range of appetites. Another key aspect of this type of experience will be the opportunity for visitors to participate in the celebration of the maritime and in the events and festivals which will showcase this to best effect.

- **Time Depth Encounters - feeding the mind** - the past is all around us. We live our lives against a rich backdrop of built features, landscapes and other physical reminders of this area’s history of successive arrivals.
  - Building on an increased interest in tangible historic heritage such as sites, buildings, monuments and cultural landscapes, as well as the intangible aspects of heritage - the living heritage of oral traditions, customs and practices – there are opportunities to focus on the ways in which the destination’s key stories can be integrated into the visitor experience. Encounters might focus on the key moments in the development of Ards and North Down– the tidal treasures of the Mesolithic communities who took advantage of the plentiful supply of oysters, cockles and mussels in Strangford Lough; monastic communities such as the monks of Nendrum, who with their sophisticated technological skills - such as the creation of fish traps - brought the harvesting of the marine environment to new levels and also created one of the oldest known tidal mills in Europe; the great literary tradition which began in Bangor with Columbanus and his subsequent impact on Continental monasticism; the arrival of the Vikings and later the Anglo Normans who commanded defensive views over land and water from their distinctive stone built tower houses; the private settlements of 1609 – the first permanent lowland Scottish settlement in Ulster - and the grand estates of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries all of which have left their mark on the landscape.
• **Creative Encounters - feeding the imagination** - tapping into an original new aesthetic emerging in every artistic persuasion; taking visitors into the hearts, minds, workshops, galleries, stages and creative kitchens of the people who are shaping the destination’s artistic future.
  o Creativity can provide activity, content and atmosphere for tourism. Whether through the spectacle of performance events, the development of creative spaces or the evolution of a creative tourism offer which is built around a series of courses and workshops offered by local artists, food and drink producers, artisans or designer workers, the scope for creative encounters within Ards and North Down is enormous. The curation of experiences for visitors which build on the added value creativity generates both in new and more traditional products and services will not only form a key strand of growing the area’s visitor economy but will also provide the potential for the development of new narratives, meanings and identities both about and within the destination.

• **Great Food Encounters – feeding body and soul** – offering visitors an authentic taste of place.
  o Virtually any experience can be enriched by food and drink. When done well, food tourism can become a primary driver for a destination and make a valuable contribution to the economic and social development of the community. A focus on food tourism will not only enable the area’s agricultural story to be told but will also shine a light on its seafood offer. While Ards and North Down is well positioned to become a leading food destination on the island of Ireland, much more work needs to be done as articulated in the Food Destination Development Plan for the Borough. Particular opportunities include the availability of authentic artisan produced food, agricultural and seafood products, food / farmers’ markets, restaurants with a demonstrated focus on local sourcing, new and emerging craft breweries and the prospect of festivals and events that will showcase the provenance, heritage and quality of the food offer.
Key Markets

The Domestic Market
The domestic tourism market sustains a level of investment in tourism product that is of considerable benefit to Ards and North Down’s visitor economy and domestic demand also maintains sector revenue during non-peak periods. It addresses the needs of the family market as evidenced by the nature of the product currently available. The high level of domestic tourism consumption (49%) by residents here, suggests that while there are important benefits in encouraging and sustaining domestic tourism, the potential for further growth needs to be augmented by focusing attention on other source markets such as the Republic of Ireland and international demand.

Non-Domestic Markets
The sector’s best prospects for growth are in generating increased levels of non-domestic revenue. The focus of this strategy is to gradually increase the contribution which markets other than the domestic market – principally visitors from Great Britain (29%), the Republic of Ireland (11%), Mainland Europe (6%) and North America (5%) - make to the visitor economy. It should be noted however that Europe visitor numbers may weaken post Brexit and greater market diversification will therefore be a key factor in delivering and sustaining growth.

The Republic of Ireland Market
In its recently published, ‘Market Recovery and Taskforce Review and Strategy’ for the Republic of Ireland (RoI) market, Tourism Northern Ireland has indicated that this market ‘undeniably represents an opportunity for accelerated and sustainable growth’. The RoI market is stronger for regional dispersion than other markets with approximately 75% of RoI visitors staying outside Belfast; RoI consumers are more likely to visit Northern Ireland outside peak season and the cost to reach, connect and influence them is significantly less than that involved in targeting consumers in overseas markets. However Northern Ireland is currently not a sufficiently compelling or motivating destination for RoI consumers whose knowledge about the destination is low. Ards and North Down is well placed to establish the required range of products (attractions, accommodation, food & drink) and connected experiences that at minimum rivals what is available in the domestic RoI market.
Market Segments

In terms of market segments, while Tourism Ireland and Tourism Northern Ireland will continue to target Ireland’s key ‘culturally curious’ audience, which has the strongest propensity to visit the island of Ireland, they will also reach out to the ‘social energiser’ and ‘great escaper’ audiences in markets where significant potential exists. Tourism Ireland will also target niche segments – including golfers, business and incentive visitors, as well as the diaspora in Britain, North America and Australia. Within this wider context there are specific opportunities for Ards and North Down to focus on. These include, of the main segments being pursued at a wider (island of Ireland) destination level, the following:

**Great Escapers**
- these audiences are in serious need of time out from busy lives and careers
- they are interested in rural holidays, getting physical with nature
- they appreciate peace and quiet between activities - the point is the trip itself. It’s ‘down time’, it’s being off the beaten track, it’s a great escape
- they want to actively explore more remote places, on foot or by bicycle

**GREAT ESCAPERS**
To connect with the landscape, to feel the earth beneath their feet, to soak up the beauty. A sense of history, of their place in the vastness of nature – they want to feel part of it. Against this kind of backdrop Great Escapers can spend real quality time bonding with those closest to them. They can rebalance themselves and take stock of their lives, concentrating on what’s important to them. They appreciate peace and quiet between activities ... the point is the trip itself. It’s ‘down time’, it’s being off the beaten track, it’s a great escape. But it’s important that getting away from it all is easy enough – they want the ‘wow’ factor without too much effort. Most importantly, Great Escapers want to come home refreshed and revitalised, their batteries recharged. They enjoy;
- Escaping to breath-taking landscapes
- Actively exploring more remote places, on foot or by bicycle
- Gentle exploration of the place - walking, cycling, pleasure boating
- Relaxed meal of fresh local produce, or a fun evening in an authentic pub
**Culturally Curious**
- these audiences invest in activities, not just relaxation
- they expect hassle free, convenient experiences
- they expect safety, cleanliness, value

**CULTURALLY CURIOUS**
They choose their holiday destinations carefully and are independent 'active sightseers' looking to visit new places, and expand their experience by exploring landscapes, history and culture. They are unlikely to return for some time once they have visited a new place, and often travel in a couple or as individuals and rarely in a family group. The age group for this demographic is 40 plus. They love to delve deeper into the history of a location, and crave unusual experiences and enjoy connecting with nature and wandering off the beaten track. Culturally Curious are most likely to stay in a hotel, self-catering accommodation or a B&B as long as there’s a lot to see. They will usually choose somewhere with access to scenery and good walks. They are three times more likely to take long breaks than average but they also take more short breaks than average, both at home and overseas. They are unlikely to return for a while unless a destination is truly diverse, preferring to move on to new discoveries. They enjoy peace and quiet with good quality food because they are looking after their health.

**Priority Segments (RoI)**
In light of the renewed emphasis on the RoI domestic market – new priority segments have been singled out for attention by Tourism Northern Ireland in the drive to capture greater market share. These include;

- ‘Open to Ideas’ market segment is characterised by a willingness and disposition towards trying new things, going new places and being open to new experiences. This segment has a greater focus on activity, the outdoors and nature

- ‘Open-minded Explorers’ segment is also characterised by a willingness and disposition towards trying new things, going new places and being open to new experiences, but with a greater interest in people, place and culture.

- ‘Active Maximisers’ is smaller in size but is currently more likely to visit Northern Ireland than the majority of other segments. This is a younger segment, more focused on getting the most out of their short breaks and seeking unique and mind-broadening experiences. As such, this segment represents not only holidaymakers of today but holidaymakers of the future.
**Niche opportunities**

In terms of more niche, but potentially high value opportunities MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Events and Exhibitions) is one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry in Ireland. At a strategic level, Tourism Northern Ireland works collaboratively with Failte Ireland to promote, through a common ‘Meet in Ireland’ platform this particular opportunity. Business tourists spend more than leisure visitors, tend to travel in the off-peak and shoulder season and often choose locations beyond but within easy reach of points of access – principally airports. Of particular interest to Ards and North Down is the ‘incentive’ aspect of the business tourism opportunity which, while resource intensive in terms of collaborative working, is starting to gain traction largely as a result of the quality of the product on offer – in terms of food, heritage, events, attractions – and the efforts underway within the higher end accommodation sector in particular to work collaboratively with other providers to develop imaginative itineraries, showcase these opportunities to the key international decision makers in this highly competitive market and slowly begin to build a profile for the destination in relation to incentive travel. Connectivity is key – not only in terms of access to market but also across and between those operators and businesses on the ground who are critical to providing access to their particular offer of value as part of a wider experience geared towards the incentive market. ‘Food tourism’ is not only a niche opportunity for tourism in Northern Ireland but it has a specific relevance for Ards and North Down. Artisan foods in particular present opportunities to showcase local ingredients and specialties and present gift opportunities for visitors. Several other niche tourism markets identified by Tourism Northern Ireland which have significance for Ards and North Down include:

- Christian heritage tourism
- Cultural and heritage tourism
- Golf tourism
- Nature tourism
- Screen tourism
- Sustainable tourism
Tourism Routes, Hubs, Portals and Clusters

Tourism Routes

The development of themed routes, trails and visitor itineraries as a way to attract, package and promote destinations has gained increasing traction in recent years. A key aim of such route development, apart from attracting visitors to an area, is to tie-together several attractions, products or experiences that independently would not have the potential to draw visitors in to spend time and money. Route development whether aimed at visitors wanting to walk, cycle, drive or use public transport relies on producing a synergy effect which, if well considered, promises to have greater pulling power; can serve to disperse the impact on specific places and sites as well as spreading the benefit of visitor spend to a wider area. Most route network development is initiated with one or more of the following objectives in mind:

- To diffuse visitors and disperse income from tourism
- To bring lesser known attractions, features or potential experiences into the scope of the visitor economy
- To increase the overall appeal of the destination
- To increase length of stay and spending by visitors
- To attract new visitors and to attract repeat visitors
- To increase the sustainability of the tourism product
Hubs

Key to the development of a route network is the concept of ‘hubs’ – points of concentration within the destination which serve a number of purposes including the provision of:

- Orientation
- Information
- Visitor facilities (food, toilets, accommodation, etc)
- Visitor interest and appeal (attractions, experiences, activities, etc)
- ‘Mini destinations’, depending on their location within the network of routes and their stage of development, may be able to attract visitors as a location for a short break or as a base to explore the region.

While hubs may take on an important ‘gateway’ role at points of entry to the destination – at Bangor and Portaferry for example – they may also play a role relative to the development of particular experiences – experiential hubs – such as the ambition, as highlighted within the forthcoming Food Destination Plan, to create food hubs at Comber, Donaghadee, Portavogie and Bangor.

Other coastal and loughshore settlements can also aspire to hub status provided they can demonstrate their capacity to:

- deliver on the experience development opportunities indicated above;
- serve as important ‘staging’ points in the visitor journey / along visitor itineraries by providing supporting visitor services, facilities and orientation,
- have a disposition / appetite for working collaboratively with key players to develop and deliver connected experiences.
Portals

A further feature of the network will be ‘portals’ – more specific sites or focal points - such as those places which best:

- exemplify the ‘key moments’ in the historical / cultural development of the area,
- amplify the essence of the proposition,
- are already attracting or if further developed, have the capacity to attract significant visitor interest.

Clusters

As the tourism industry is dominated by small and medium enterprises as well as by sole traders, many of whom operate on a part-time basis, it will be important to develop mechanisms by which these firms can create linkages and collaborate to develop new experiences, products and service bundles, which will not only contribute to the sustainability of their businesses but also to the viability of the entire region in the long term.

‘Clusters’ can provide the mechanism for businesses within the sphere of influence of hubs:

- to work collaboratively with other providers of product as well as with those who can access publicly, privately or community owned tourism assets,
- to develop, manage and promote a suite of experiences which will align with the proposition,
- to ensure experiences are accessible, capable of being scaled up in line with visitor demand, and,
- to ensure experiences are promotable, bookable and easily purchased.

The development of routes, hubs and portals must support a balanced tourism development strategy which:

- Takes into account the future tourism trends and demands,
- Safeguards key tourism assets,
- Considered environmental considerations resulting from tourism development,
- Contribute to the economic development, conservation and urban regeneration of the Borough, and,
- Assists in informing the local development plan process to allocate appropriate land for tourism use.
3.6 OUTCOMES & TARGETS

Introduction
In order to realise the vision, set by this strategy a series of outcomes and targets have been identified. Effective delivery against the identified targets will require focussed and collaborative effort by all relevant stakeholders and delivery organisations. Further more detailed targets are likely to be identified against implementation of specific actions and agreed with partners.

With reference to the Big Plan for Ards and North Down, this strategy responds directly to:

Community Plan Outcome 4

“All people in Ards and North Down benefit from a prosperous economy”

To grow the number of jobs and business productivity within the Borough

To grow visitor spend and overnight stay within the Borough

JOBS CREATED
ECONOMIC PRODUCTIVITY
VISITOR OVERNIGHT TRIPS
VISITOR EXPENDITURE
Job Targets

**Target**: Increase job growth by an ambitious 22% resulting in an additional 7,500 jobs by 2030.

**Context/ Rationale:**

The job creation target proposed by this strategy is highly ambitious and it is acknowledged that it involves a high risk of non-achievement. However, the identified target reflects the high level of ambition held by key stakeholders and their focus on delivering prosperity and economic vibrancy within Ards and North Down.

Delivery against the stated target is reliant on the achievement of the ‘high growth’ scenario identified by the NI Skills Barometer forecast, which identifies job growth averaging 1.1% per annum at a regional level. Application of this high growth scenario to Ards and North Down’s current sectoral profile suggests the creation of circa 4,000 jobs over the strategy period. This is the encompassing figure which includes the detailed figures and sectors outlined below. Achievement of this level of growth carries a high level of risk as it is exposed to a range of political and economic uncertainties.

Achievement of the strategy’s job creation target will require a reorientation of the local business base to increase the number of businesses that are active within medium and high growth sectors. This reorientation will need to be supported by targeted interventions to achieve significant increases in business starts and survival, enhanced levels of business growth and the attraction of inward investment within these sectors.

By way of illustration, 2015 data highlights that Ards and North Down had 1,025 registered businesses within sectors that are expected to experience high growth over the next decade i.e. ICT; Professional, Scientific and Technical; and Arts, Entertainment and Recreation. These businesses generated c3,500 employee jobs in 2015. Increasing the baseline number of local businesses/jobs within these sectors by 25% could result in the creation of 875 additional jobs (assuming that the baseline metrics remain constant).

In addition to new interventions, the Council’s ‘Go for It’ Business Start Programme has a statutory target to deliver 85 additional jobs per annum. If achieved, this programme could help to deliver 1,020 additional jobs over strategy period.

For example, in addition, Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, Rural Business Investment Scheme targets the creation of 40 full time jobs through supporting new and existing small micro businesses to expand through a capital grant scheme. Similar support scheme to assist business should be encouraged. Reviewing the evidence on enterprise zones established in the UK demonstrates that on average they generate 45 jobs per hectare. We can therefore estimate that a proposed enterprise zone in the region of 50-55 acres could create in the region of 1000 direct and in direct jobs.
The delivery of the Strategy’s job creation target will require a significant investment in time and resource by the Council, other public-sector support organisations (e.g. SERC and Invest NI) and the private sector in working collaboratively together to develop effective investment promotion and enterprise support initiatives. Also, in keeping with the Ards and North Down Big (Community) Plan, it is essential that activity associated with future employment creation focuses on creating high quality, better paid jobs, for local people.

The impact of Brexit and wider economic and political uncertainty is currently unknown and these factors contribute significantly to future delivery risk. As the impact of these events becomes clearer, the Strategy and its Action Plan should be revisited to ensure that the Ards and North Down businesses and its support organisations are positioned to maximise the opportunities emanating from changes within the wider political and economic environment and to mitigate future threats.

**Productivity Target**

**Target:** To increase GVA per head in the Ards and North Down area to at least the NI average by the end of the strategy period (2030). (2015 AND baseline £11.7k; 2015 NI baseline £18.6k, Source: ONS Regional Accounts).

**Context/ Rationale:**

As previously identified, economic productivity within the Ards and North Down economy (as measured by GVA per head) is significantly lower than the NI average. This, in part, reflects the local profile of businesses, which is dominated by sectors that typically produce low levels of productivity.

In order to improve the economic productivity, the Borough needs to attract additional jobs and investment in high value-added sectors. Greater levels of investment are required in research, development and innovation by local businesses and the skills of the local labour market must meet the needs of businesses within high value-added sectors. In addition, although export orientation does not necessarily translate into higher productivity, evidence suggests that exporters perform better than non-exporters. Therefore, there is a need for an enhanced focus on developing the export capacity of local businesses.
Visitor Targets

**Target:** Increase share of Overnight Trips from 6% in 2016 to 10% in 2030

- Overnight Trips to increase from 283,229 in 2016 to 507,227 in 2030*
- Associated Visitor Expenditure to increase from £46m in 2016 to £82m in 2030*
  *Assumption that overnight trips in NI increase to 5 million by 2030

Key Assumptions

Ards and North Down’s market share of Overnight Trips is currently sitting at 6% (283,229) of all overnight trips in Northern Ireland (4.6m). Historically Ards and North Down has achieved a higher market share for example securing a 9.5% share in 2014. Aiming to recover to these levels and applying a market share of 10% is not, therefore, unrealistic. As overall growth in overnight trips in Northern Ireland is assumed, working on the basis of an uplift to, for example, 5m NI overnight trips by 2030, securing a 10% share of these trips could realise an increase to 507,227 overnight trips for Ards and North Down over the period, as illustrated in the table*. In terms of growth in expenditure, taking the baseline figure for 2016 of average spend per overnight trip of £162 and applying it to the performance of overnight trips results in an uplift from £45,883,098 in 2016 to £82,170,774 in 2030.

*Assumption that NI trips / expenditure increases as per forecast

Growth Target Scenarios

In addition to this, tourists’ length of stay is a variable of key importance for any tourism destination due to its crucial effect on overall tourism expenditure. Attempts to increase visitor expenditure through an exclusive focus on increasing visitor numbers tends to mask the importance of the role which length of stay plays in generating and sustaining visitor expenditure. The average length of stay for visitors to Ards and North Down at 3.8 nights is higher than the Northern Ireland average (3.2 nights). Historically it has been higher and a concerted effort through a combination of measures to address accommodation capacity through carefully considered bespoke provision; improve the occupancy levels of existing accommodation; develop a suite of experiences to extend and deepen dwell time, address seasonality issues and promote return visits are all key ingredients in persuading visitors to come; off peak to enjoy experiences which incorporate seasonal highlights – for example water’s edge encounters with nature and wildlife; stay longer and come back.
INTEGRATED STRATEGY FOR ARDS AND NORTH DOWN (2018 – 2030)

TOURISM – REGENERATION – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Vision

Proposition

Thematic Priorities

Place

Visitor

Investment

TARGETS

- Jobs Created
- Economic Productivity
- Visitor Overnight Trips
- Visitor Expenditure

- Promote to Invest
- Connect Places & People
- Equip with Skills & Spaces
- Excel in Quality & Value
- Nurture Our Assets
- Understand Our Progress & Potential
Having established the vision and objectives for this Integrated Strategy, is it now necessary to consider how these are translated into tangible actions. A set of Thematic Priorities are established that draw upon the findings of the research and consultation process. These shape the approach that will be taken in the Borough and provide a framework within which to identify specific actions.

These are projects that are of strategic importance to the Borough owing to the multiple benefits and outcomes they can potentially provide. For delivery in phases, they are designed to complement existing activities of the Council and other organisations in the Borough. While dependent on approvals and the availability of funding, through collaboration and persistence, they will form the key pillars of growing our economy. Together they represent an ambitious plan for Ards and North Down.
4.2 Promote to Attract Investment

To attract new businesses, residents and visitors, it will be critical that key markets know about Ards and North Down. In a competitive environment the message must be clear, simple and focussed on the unique assets the Borough has to offer. The promotion of Ards and North Down is not, however, simply a marketing exercise for an external audience. It must be a collective effort that builds pride and confidence across the area.
A. BOROUGH MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

A vital exercise in attracting investment, visitors and new residents to the Borough will be the delivery of an effective marketing and communications strategy. Consideration will be given to undertake branding process that encapsulates the vision and unique selling points of the Borough. Drawing upon the vision and priorities set out in this strategy, the marketing and communications process must convey dynamic proposition to target audiences, key sectors and markets, including Great Britain, RoI and the European Union. An effective PR Strategy including relationship building and strategic placed opinion pieces will be key.

Coordination with national and regional agencies, such as Invest Northern Ireland, Tourism Northern Ireland and Tourism Ireland, will help to ensure a cohesive approach to promoting the Borough in different markets at home and abroad. Furthermore, the strategy should complement the marketing activities of the Borough’s business community, so that stakeholders from the private and public sectors can work together to attract investment.

The creation of Borough Ambassadors may also be explored, helping to network and deliver core messages on behalf of Ards and North Down. Such activity will support the delivery of other actions of the Integrated Strategy aimed at fostering enterprise, attracting inward investment and engaging with the diaspora and volunteers.
B. INWARD INVESTMENT AND DIASPORA PROGRAMME

An increasingly proactive approach is required to attract inward investment to Ards and North Down. This will involve ongoing liaison with Invest Northern Ireland on inward investment opportunities, potentially in the context of the development of an Investment Zone and/or other strategic initiatives within this Strategy. Promotional activity will also be necessary, with potential for Council led trade missions, investment conferences and other undertakings. In time consideration may be given to the development of an International Relations Strategy to support the attraction of foreign direct investment, commercial investment and tourism to the Borough.

Our analysis highlights a need for the Borough to attract increased numbers of high value and high growth businesses to the area. Therefore, future investment promotion activity should focus on attracting businesses involved in the ICT, Professional, Scientific and Technical, Financial/Insurance and Administration/Support sectors.
C. ENTERPRISE PROMOTION AND SUPPORT

Key to growing the economy of Ards and North Down will be an ability to create a more efficient and more co-ordinated enterprise pipeline and greater levels of business start-up activity while also supporting the growth of existing local businesses. Enterprise promotion and pre-enterprise/start-up support will therefore play a key role in achieving these goals and contributing to increased levels of employment and economic productivity. As reflected in the graph below, the strategy includes a Council led Enterprise Promotion and Support Programme that will aim to generate increased levels of business start-up within the area, which will support entrepreneurs at pre-start and business start, as well as during the early stages of business growth.

In addition to existing baseline activity, the programme will provide:

- General enterprise promotion activities;
- Targeted enterprise promotion activities focused on: pupils/students within schools and colleges; people who have recently retired from full-time employment; individuals currently excluded from the labour market; and, highly skilled/well paid workers that currently travel to work outside the Borough, who might consider establishing a start-up within the AND area;
- Pre-enterprise support to individuals considering establishing a new business;
- Start-up support to assist newly created businesses.
- Develop the potential of existing business base

The programme will be structured so that there is a clear focus on a number of priority sectors, namely:

- Those sectors that provide the potential for the creation of high growth and/or high value jobs i.e. ICT; Professional, Scientific and Technical; Financial and Insurance; and Administration and Support;
- Sectors that will support enhanced tourism performance (e.g. Arts, Entertainment and Recreation and Accommodation/Food); and
- Sectors that are well established within the Borough, which offer opportunities for increased levels of exporting, new product development and high value-added activity i.e. Manufacturing and Agri-food production.
D. BOROUGH EVENTS STRATEGY

Events encompass a wide range of potential activities and are undertaken for a diverse range of reasons. Events tend to be held to fulfil a particular objective and/or support specific outcomes and may be targeted at specific customer groups. They can be extremely resource intensive and the scale, timing, theme and purpose can influence the impact. Events of various sizes and themes take place across the Borough and are organised and supported by both Ards and North Down Borough Council, Government Agencies, private and third sectors.

A more integrated, strategic and outcomes based approach to planning and delivering events across the Borough would help the Council and others to fulfil their objectives, while ensuring quality and value for money. A Borough wide Events Strategy will be shaped to plan and co-ordinate events in Ards and North Down. Delivery models will be explored to ensure the most efficient use of financial and physical resource. Establishment of a Festival and Events Forum, in partnership with the Arts and Heritage Strategy, would also be beneficial.

Events have an important and strategic role to play in shaping and delivering the objectives set out by this Strategy. To maximise their impact and return on investment, where the primary objective of an event falls under Regeneration, Economic Development or Tourism, the event must closely align with the relevant target audience and proposition. Care is required to ensure a consistency of message that reinforces the unique attraction of the Borough, rather than duplicates similar events that may take place elsewhere.
DEFINITION
Events encompass a wide range of potential activities. Acknowledging this breadth and the pros and cons of each type will be a key first step to shaping a strategic approach.

1. A PLANNED PUBLIC OR SOCIAL OCCASION
"A planned public or social occasion" is an event that is organized and planned in advance. It can include a variety of activities such as shows, rallies, walks, installations, performances, conferences, tours, markets, competitions, readings, festivals, viewings, concerts, and parades.

OBJECTIVES & OUTCOMES
Events are held for diverse range of reasons. They also bring other benefits, planned or incidental. These require identified and understood in the context of strategic outcomes identified for the Borough.

3. FACTORS OF STRATEGIC INFLUENCE
The potential strategic value of an event is influenced by several factors:

- **Timing**: The regularity and timing of an event will influence its impact.
- **Scale**: Events are delivered having breadth of impacts or only a few people.
- **Local**: The place of event location will influence the strategic impact at a local and regional level.
- **Event**: Events can deliver lasting beneficial impacts in a place and its people.
- **Legacy**: Events have long-term impacts.

4. AN INTEGRATED APPROACH
In the context of limited resources, events that deliver multiple outcomes should be prioritised. This will involve taking a more integrated and less sector specific approach to planning and delivering events.

INTEGRATED STRATEGY FOR ARDS AND NORTH DOWN (2018 – 2030)
TOURISM – REGENERATION – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
4.3 **Connect our Places & People**

For the economy to grow and the Borough to flourish, people, places and assets must be as well connected as possible. This will require strong physical links between places, ensuring its assets are accessible. It will require faster digital links across the Borough and beyond and it will require further social links between organisations, communities and individuals. Such linkage will allow for the efficient movement of people, information, goods and services. It will also create the right conditions for more effective collaboration and partnership.
A. BLUE AND GREENWAY NETWORK

With a beautiful landscape of land, loughs and sea, a key objective of this strategy is to facilitate sustainable access for all residents and visitors. This will be achieved through the development of a network of blueways and greenways.

Blueways are routes and points of access to Belfast and Strangford Lough and the Irish Sea. Investment in infrastructure, such as harbours, pontoons and jetties, should be accompanied by clear identification and promotion of routes for safe leisure use, as well as programmes to ensure inclusive access for all in the Borough.

Greenways are dedicated foot and cycle paths that link towns, villages, neighbourhoods and public spaces. Used by commuters and leisure users, they are proven to bring many benefits to the environment and local economy, as well as the encouragement of healthier lifestyles. The popularity of the Comber Greenway and North Down Coastal path are testament to their potential for further expansion and linkage. Where space does not permit traffic free routes, such as in urban areas or narrow country roads, safe pedestrian and cycle friendly corridors should be developed.

The strategic development of access to the Blue Green environment in this manner will contribute to the quality of life of local residents. As importantly, such infrastructure investment will be serve to attracting investment, from new residents and businesses, to visitors from near and far.
B. CONTINUOUS COASTAL ROUTE

The continuous coastal route and loughshore of Ards and North Down is a major asset enjoyed by residents and visitors alike. Building on the Mourne Coastal Route, great scope exists to incorporate the loughshore coast to provide a continuous coastal circuit and to specifically promote this route as a visitor experience in its own right, linking places and points of interest along its way; creatively interpreting the significance of the areas enroute; intersecting strategically with the Blue and Green Network while developing supporting visitor services, facilities and amenities at key locations along its length. Such an initiative be accompanied by improvements to roadway, laybys and points of orientation along its way, where information about local attractions, history and cultures can be shared with the visitor. This should be executed in line with the visitor and place proposition and developed in such a way as to attract key visitor segments particularly the two key segments of most relevance to the destination's coastal, maritime and marine experience – Great Escapers, who want to connect with nature - but not too energetically - and the Culturally Curious who are keen to expand their experience by exploring new landscapes and seascapes, history and culture.

Three quarters of settlements in Ards and North Down are located along its coast. Development of the Coastal Route, thereby brings considerable scope to generate increased economic activity to the retail, leisure and hospitality sectors, while also improving amenity for local residents.
C. SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT STRATEGY AND ADVOCACY

Ards and North Down requires a transport network that facilitates direct and convenient movement of people and goods to, from and around the Borough, while minimising adverse environmental impacts. To support economic growth and regeneration, this will require a strategic approach to shaping its future transport network and increasing the use of sustainable modes such as public transport and cycling. This will be achieved through a Sustainable Transport Strategy for the Borough and a campaign to positively influence modal choices.

Within the Borough the Ards Peninsula is a unique location, much loved by residents and an attraction for visitors. In order to grow the local economy here by encouraging business growth and increasing visitor numbers, it will be important to ensure sustainable access can be maintained, so not to adversely impact upon the peninsula and its residents. Access to the Ards Peninsula is often hampered by congestion along its winding scenic coastal roads, a number of which are under pressure associated with coastal erosion. The transport strategy would allow for a detailed modelling and assessment of infrastructure capacity, including roads, parking and the ferry crossing, followed by the identification of measures to sustainably increase capacity.

Increasing the use of public transport and promoting active travel are important objectives for the Borough. Not only does this help to lessen traffic congestion on many routes, but reduces the environmental impact associated with reliance on the car, while also bringing benefits to public health. The proposed advocacy process will consist of two objectives. The first will be to energetically promote the use of public transport and active travel options, providing up-to-date and easily accessible information. The second is to work with public transport providers and government to seek increased investment in infrastructure, including more frequent services, new routes, park & ride and park & share facilities.
INTEGRATED STRATEGY FOR ARDS AND NORTH DOWN (2018 – 2030)
TOURISM – REGENERATION – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

KEY
- Greenways (Existing)
- Greenways (Proposed)
- Greenways (Improved cycle corridors)
- Coastal Roads
- Major public transport corridors
- Blueway access points
- Gateways
- Parkland & Estates
- Beaches
D. DIGITAL NETWORK

Accessibility to a strong and reliable digital network of broadband and mobile coverage is crucial for indigenous business growth and development and visitors expect this during their stay. It is also a fundamental requirement for the Borough to be able to attract investment and business activity from elsewhere. Improved connectivity will be a feature of tracking the outward flow of commuters, encouraging more people to work from home or relocate businesses locally.

It is therefore vitally important that work continues apace to improve the coverage and speeds of digital connections across the Borough, especially in more remote rural locations. This will require a strengthened working relationship with service providers and central government to plan and deliver upgrades in a manner of strategic benefit to the Borough. It should also include the exploration of other innovative means of upgrading connection, such as community broadband initiatives.

Positioning Ards and North Down to welcome the latest advances in communications technologies will also be important. As Full Fibre (FTTP) Broadband, LPWAN wireless connections and 5G Coverage is rolled out in Northern Ireland, the Borough must be ready to attract such investment for the benefit of its businesses, visitors and communities.

Investment in digital infrastructure will catalyse stronger networks and innovation, supporting sectors such as ICT and Creative Industries in particular.
E. COLLABORATIVE NETWORKS

It is proposed to establish and support a series of Collaborative Networks that encourage innovative practices and increased collaboration in target sectors across Ards and North Down.

This industry led activity would fulfil a number of purposes. Firstly, it would give a cohesive and influential voice to businesses operating in the key areas, well suited to the many small and medium enterprises that exist in the Borough. Secondly, it would help to identify and address specific growth needs relative to sectors of the economy and finally, it would provide the platform upon which to build new opportunities for enterprise and innovation through partnerships.

The collaborative networks would relate closely to the proposed Economic Development Forum, strengthening links between the private and public sectors.
INTEGRATED STRATEGY FOR ARDS AND NORTH DOWN (2018 – 2030)
TOURISM – REGENERATION – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
4.4 Equip with Skills and Spaces

To fulfil needs and avail of opportunities, people and organisations need to ensure the right skills and resources are in place. Education and training must be tailored to fit the needs of the Borough and its economy present and future. Space must be provided to allow for the economy to thrive and for the most effective delivery of services.
A. **BLUE GREEN ACCOMMODATION DEVELOPMENT**

As a Blue Green, Creatively Connected Borough, Ards and North Down has a unique offer for the visitor as well as an ambition to welcome more visitors and invite them to stay longer. As a result, it is important to grow an increasingly diverse and high quality range of visitor accommodation in the local area. This Integrated Action would seek to proactively support and advise, through the creation of a ‘prospectus for accommodation development’, those wishing to develop new and appealing concepts in sustainable accommodation provision which will showcase to best effect the attributes and assets of the destination whilst meeting the needs of Ards and North Down’s target segments. Such bespoke accommodation could range from boutique hotel development to small motorhome facilities. It should also help existing accommodation providers to grow their business and continually improve standards of service, business practice and environmental responsibility.

Ards and North Down LDP will play a key role in supporting this vision. Consideration may need to be given to funding initiatives to encourage and support development of appropriate tourism accommodation.

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<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Influence &amp; Impact</th>
<th>Delivery</th>
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<td><strong>Context</strong>&lt;br&gt;Zero carbon holiday accommodation, such as the Emerald in Cornwall, show how blue green credentials can add value to the visitor offer.</td>
<td><strong>Influence</strong>&lt;br&gt;1&lt;br&gt;2&lt;br&gt;3&lt;br&gt;<strong>MODERATE</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>HIGH</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>V.HIGH</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>IMPACT</strong>&lt;br&gt;</td>
<td><strong>Private Sector, NI, Tourism NI, DAERA</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Potential Partners</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Key Elements</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Informed by audit of provision&lt;br&gt;• Accommodation prospectus identifying opportunities</td>
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B. SKILLS, APPRENTICESHIP AND VOLUNTEERING PROGRAMME

As the local economy grows and diversifies, it is important to ensure that appropriate skills are being developed at the local level. The development of a Skills, Apprenticeship and Volunteering Programme would complement NI wide initiatives to provide a link between education providers and employers in the Borough, while also facilitating further opportunities for high quality voluntary activity. This programme will adopt an intergenerational approach to skills development and volunteering, ensuring that the productive and volunteering capacity of the local population is maximised where possible.

A key objective will be to address skills gaps by helping schools and colleges to fully understand the skills needs of local businesses, so that educational programmes and careers advice can be accurately targeted. This will involve the establishment of an Employability and Skills Forum, providing a structured link between key organisations. It would also support local businesses in developing their own skills base in Economic Development and Tourism. Such a mechanism would also present an excellent route for local apprenticeships to be established with partner organisations.

From Portaferry to Holywood, Ards and North Down also has many excellent examples of voluntary activity. These range from Citizens Advice and older people’s networks, to village regeneration groups and other individuals and groups who willingly give of their time and knowledge to promote the heritage experience for visitors at historic sites and at other places of interest. Working in close partnership with existing groups, it is proposed to provide additional support to the coordination of volunteers so that volunteering across the Borough is sustained, grown and enhanced through training and accreditation.
C. QUEEN’S PARADE AND INVESTMENT ZONES

In order to attract new investment into the Borough, it will be important to identify, prepare and incentivise sites in key locations. Ideally this should be taken forward through preparation of the LDP. This should include a major development opportunity at Queens Parade in Bangor, while also identifying other adequately sized investment locations elsewhere in the Borough.

Queen’s Parade is a major mixed use development planned for a prominent site in central Bangor. Current plans include a combination of leisure, retail, housing, entertainment and hospitality uses, set within a contemporary design and includes the opportunity for new civic spaces along the waterfront. It is strategically important for Bangor, its town centre and the wider Borough to ensure the redevelopment of Queen’s Parade is undertaken to an exceptionally high standard. Ards and North Down Borough Council will continue to play a central role in bringing about the scheme with its partners in central government and the private sector.

Access to investment sites will be key and specific investment areas or zones may be established at strategic locations within the Borough. Consideration may be given to a range of potential models, including fully recognised Enterprise Zones to more streamlined alternatives. The establishment of public private partnerships will also be explored in developing key sites. These purpose-built locations may offer incentives to potential investors. The locations would be equipped with necessary infrastructure, including high speed broadband, landscaping and car parking. Appropriate locations for such a development will require good transport connectivity and close proximity to existing urban centres.
D. TOWN AND VILLAGE FLEXIBLE SPACES

Many businesses and organisations are now able to operate more flexible working practices thanks to advances in technology and communications. In the context of Ards and North Down, where a large percentage of resident’s commute beyond the Borough to work, it is proposed to establish a network of flexible town and village centre work hubs. These would provide a range of small to medium sized, well-equipped flexible work spaces for affordable short term rent, so allow working closer to home.

The hubs will also be used to encourage new business start-ups to establish locally, providing entrepreneurs the flexible space and support they need in the most convenient locations. The hub network will link to larger business and innovation centres with the Borough, so that business growth can be supported locally wherever possible. While such spaces would be delivered by a range of parties, they may also provide a centralised point of contact with Ards and North Down Borough Council, at which to access information and services.

Another model, would be to encourage developments to take place in otherwise vacant town and village centre buildings, thereby adding to urban vitality and supporting local shops and other services.
EXCEL IN QUALITY & VALUE

4.5 Excel in Quality and Value

To prosper in a sustained manner, Ards and North Down must become a byword for quality and high standards. Furthermore, we must be a natural home for innovation and the implementation of new ideas and practices.
A. BLUE GREEN VISITOR EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT

Ards and North Down is fortunate to have a rich and varied natural landscape that underpins its attraction to visitors. It can also claim a long and deep history as well as a vibrant and contemporary creative scene. To further develop this unique offer, visitor experiences that reinforce the Blue Green, Creatively Connected ethos should be supported and facilitated. Key experiences will include the prospect of themed - water’s edge; time depth; creative and food – encounters which will celebrate and showcase Ards and North Down’s offer of value to best effect.

Each of these thematic experience development areas provides scope for existing businesses as well as newcomers to work together with strategic partners to develop the necessary product, services and facilities that will not only deliver on these experiences but will also ensure that they meet the needs of the target segments; are promotable directly to visitors and are purchasable. This action would also examine the accessibility of the activity aspect of experience development for all users from near and far, thereby ensuring the Blue Green experience is fully inclusive.
B. TOWN AND VILLAGE PUBLIC REALM AND PLACEMAKING

The centres of our towns and villages are vitally important locations for commercial and social activity. Across Northern Ireland such centres have faced challenges as they transition from places of necessity to places of choice, competing with out-of-town and online retail. However, by investing in the quality and vitality of the public realm (streets and spaces), it has been possible to underpin town and village centres as attractive places in which to visit, spend time and invest. It is therefore proposed to continue the process of public realm improvements across the Borough, while working to encourage greater activation through placemaking initiatives and town centre living pilots. Improvements to public realm must be appropriate to their context, enhancing the setting of shops and other buildings, while balancing the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and other road users.

Bringing life to our urban places is a key part of making them safe and attractive destinations for business and leisure. While shops, restaurants and other businesses are encouraged to extend their opening times, it is often town and village centre events and activities that help to generate further activity and footfall. It is therefore proposed to support Placemaking Activities that contribute to the animation of our town and village centres. These may include events, markets, town promotions or street dressing. Each activity should be assessed on an individual basis and encouraged to align with agreed criteria.

Another important means of reinvigorating our town and village centres is to ensure they sustain a residential population. Historically our centres would have had more people living in them, often in flats over shops and other businesses. However, this trend has declined over the years with an increase in greenfield and rural housing. By working with Department for Communities, DAERA, Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Housing Agencies, the potential of pilot developments should be investigated, demonstrating the viability of modern town and village centre living to the market and other potential investment and other potential investment schemes.
4.6 NURTURE OUR ASSETS

The natural and built assets of Ards and North Down form the strong basis for its prosperity and growth. Therefore, it is essential that they are safeguarded for future generations. This places the conservation and restoration of natural habitats (sea, lough and land) and historic built environments (monuments, villages and towns) at the heart of the Integrated Strategy. It also means working to reduce the negative impact of our actions upon the environment, which have local, as well as global implications.
A. BLUE GREEN ACTION INITIATIVE

The Integrated Strategy and its vision of Blue Green, Creatively Connected recognises the fundamental importance of the Borough’s natural environment. Continuing to protect and enhance our land and seascapes is not only an ethical responsibility, but also essential to underpinning sustainable economic growth and prosperity. One of the key factors in attracting people to live, work and visit the Borough, is access to its spectacular Blue Green environment.

This Integrated Action will provide everyone in the Borough with the opportunity to actively participate in caring for their environment. It will consist of a series of carefully devised wildlife habitat improvement projects located across the Borough. These will provide the opportunity for local residents, community groups, employees and business owners, as well as visitors, to get a hands-on experience of improving the natural landscape. By planting a tree, helping clean a beach, building nest boxes or creating a new wetland boardwalk, local pride and understanding of the Borough’s natural asset can be grown from within.

To maximise its value, the initiative must be informed by a detailed understanding of the Borough’s natural landscape. Continued delivery of the Biodiversity Action Plan should be prepared at the outset, so to accurately target interventions of real value to the Borough. Furthermore, the project will require an energetic process of engagement, and ensure that the widest possible cross section of people from the Borough are encouraged to participate. This initiative will carry with it many additional benefits, including opportunities for skills development, social cohesion and destination awareness.
B CARBON REDUCTION STRATEGY

We all share a responsibility to reduce the impact of harmful carbon emissions upon our environment. The United Nations has described climate change as one of the major challenges of our time, while in 2016 it was confirmed that Greenhouse Gas emissions in Northern Ireland had risen to 20 million tonnes. The impacts of global warming and low air quality are extensive, from threatening coastal communities with increased erosion and flooding, to damaging the cardiovascular and respiratory health of entire populations. To grow its economy sustainably, Ards and North Down must therefore ensure that it does so without cost to its valuable Blue Green environment, nor the livelihoods of its current and future residents.

It is proposed that Ards and North Down pursues an ambitious programme to reduce carbon emissions at the local level, contributing to wider regional and national efforts. This will involve the identification and implementation of measures that can demonstrably lower emissions within the Borough. Target areas are likely to include switching where possible to renewable energy sources while taking further steps to conserve energy through building insulation and updated technologies. Transportation is another area where change can be affected by encouraging increased walking and cycling, while promoting greater use of hybrid and electric vehicles.

Delivery of this action should involve everyone in the Borough, including residents, local businesses, government agencies and council departments. The Carbon Reduction Initiative will be guided by expert advice and monitored closely for effectiveness. While directly contributing to the health of the local, as well as global environment, this initiative will also increase local awareness and help attract environmentally conscious investors to Ards and North Down.
C  BUILT HERITAGE PROGRAMME

Historic buildings, historic sites and monuments, villages and towns play a significant role in contributing to our pride of place, quality of life and the experience of visitors. Built Heritage forms an intrinsic part of the identity of Ards and North Down from Scrabo Tower in Newtownards, Cockle Row Cottages in Groomsport to the Portico in Portaferry. While these examples are in excellent condition, there are over 50 buildings and structures in Ards and North Down that currently feature on the Built Heritage at Risk Northern Ireland register. Their continued deterioration, along with other buildings suffering from dereliction or vacancy, has a detrimental effect on their surroundings and wider perceptions of the Borough. It is essential therefore that efforts are upheld to restore historic buildings and to find sustainable uses for existing buildings, be they culturally significant or visually prominent. Working with other partners to encourage more built heritage programmes to enable investment from the private sector.

This Integrated Action will involve a vigorous programme to identify key buildings in the Borough that are no longer in use and impact adversely upon the quality of their surroundings. Working in partnership with owners and key agencies, it will seek to remedy visual blight through short term intervention, whilst also finding long term solutions to bring buildings back into sustainable use. Resultant actions will include the identification of viable ‘meanwhile uses’ that bring vacant buildings back into use.

While not without challenges, the successful restoration and rejuvenation of built heritage in Ards and North Down should be cause for celebration, helping safeguard assets for the future, attract further investment nearby and increase positive impressions of those who visit.
4.7 Understand our Progress & Potential

The better we know our Borough, its places, assets and economy, the more effectively we can work to improve it. We must keep ahead of the game in understanding key aspects of relevance to its social, economic and environmental wellbeing. Not only will this help shape policy and decision making, but also enhance the reputation of the Borough as a place for research and innovation.
A. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FORUM

In order to monitor and advance the local economy, it is necessary to ensure adequate levels of communication are taking place between decision makers in the private, public and third sectors. It is also important to provide the Borough’s many small companies with an opportunity to raise issues and make connections. A Local Economic Development Forum will be private sector led, acting in an advisory capacity and contribute ideas on feedback on requirements necessary to progress the local economy.

Working within the Forum will be a potential Horizon Scanning and Research Network. This would enable a regular review of best practice from around the world in the key, high value economic sectors identified in the Investment Proposition. Carefully disseminated to be of most relevance to the Borough, this process would help equip local businesses and entrepreneurs with the latest information, aimed at stimulating business development and innovation. This would also help better connect researchers from across the Borough, leading to the creation of research clusters and a potential research and innovation centre.

Another important activity of the forum will be the creation of a potential Data Observatory, where all data on Ards and North Down is pooled, analysed and shared. In line with best practice, this will help to ensure that policy decisions and business development are assisted by the most up-to-date intelligence and enable a more accurate measurement of the Borough’s economic performance. Equipping itself in this manner will enable Ards and North Down to take its first steps to becoming a ‘Smart Borough’, which as seen elsewhere, can help to make efficiencies in how services and facilities are run, while attracting investment in the digital economy.
INTEGRATED STRATEGY FOR ARDS AND NORTH DOWN 2018 - 2030

TOURISM – REGENERATION – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Blue:Green Creatively Connected

1. UNDERSTAND OUR PROGRESS & POTENTIAL
   - Economic Development Forum
   - Visitor & Community Experience Programme
   - Town & Village Public Realm & Placemaking

2. NURTURE OUR ASSETS
   - Blue-Green Action
   - Carbon Reduction
   - Built Heritage Programme

3. EXCEL IN VALUE & QUALITY
   - Accommodation Development
   - Skills, Apprenticeship & Volunteering Programme
   - Queen’s Parade & Investment Zones
   - Town & Village Flex Spaces

4. BLUE:GREEN
   - A natural asset of loughs, land and sea

5. CONNECT PLACES & PEOPLE
   - Continuous Coastal Route
   - Digital Network Strategy & Advocacy
   - Collaborative Networks

6. EQUIP WITH SKILLS & SPACES
   - Visitor Overnight Trips
   - Jobs Created
   - Economic Productivity
   - Visitor Expenditure

7. PROMOTE TO INVEST
   - Borough Marketing & Communications Strategy
   - Inward Investment & Diaspora Programme
   - Enterprise Promotion & Support
   - Borough Events Strategy

8. PLACE
   - Visitor
   - Investment

VISION

INTEGRATED STRATEGY FOR ARDS AND NORTH DOWN 2018 - 2030

TOURISM – REGENERATION – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
Integrated Actions – Steps to Delivery

1) Identify & agree partners & stakeholders
2) Establish baseline data
3) Develop detailed strategic approach
4) Agree, prioritise, resource & deliver Sub Actions
5) Monitor progress against baseline
5.0 Looking Ahead

5.1 In Summary

The Integrated Strategy for Tourism, Regeneration and Economic Development presents a coherent vision for the pursuit of prosperity in the Borough of Ards and North Down. It is built on a base of firm evidence (as detailed in the appendix) and shaped by a process of extensive consultation with local and regional stakeholders. The strategy’s 6 Thematic Priorities and 19 Integrated Actions now provide a tangible means by which the strategy outcomes will be realised.

This strategy and the targets it sets are ambitious. This reflects the vision and high degree of confidence placed in the Borough by Ards and North Down Borough Council and its many partner organisations, businesses and communities. We are fortunate to have many considerable assets and strengths across the Borough and it is these that form the building blocks for our future prosperity. Significant challenges undoubtedly lie ahead, not least those influenced by uncertainties of the current regional political and economic climate. It will therefore be incumbent upon all with an interest in the prosperity of the Borough to work together as closely as possible to realise these shared goals and to respond to new issues and opportunities as they arise.

5.2 Strategy Leadership & Oversight

Oversight of strategy implementation will be led by Ards and North Down Borough Council. Through strong and creative leadership, its elected members and senior officials will ensure that the Council’s resources and energies are directed most effectively towards the fulfilment of the strategy outcomes. Strategic relationships with key agencies and neighbouring councils will also be nurtured to best effect.

The Council will convene an oversight body comprised of representatives of the public, private and third sectors. Together this forum will monitor the implementation of the strategy and progress made towards achieving its outcomes. A detailed action plan for delivery will provide the central focus for this process, allowing for the prioritisation of actions and resources. Furthermore, formal agreements and memoranda of understanding will be sought with key partners to secure commitment to the fulfilment of key actions outlined in this document. New ways of working, thinking outside the box and the evaluation and taking of calculated risks will play a key role.
5.3 Monitoring and Review

This strategy is outcomes based and accordingly, sets in place a set of targets for realisation over its 12-year lifespan. Monitoring progress will therefore be an essential activity that takes place throughout this period. In commencing delivery of any Integrated Action it will be necessary to ensure that accurate baseline data is in place to enable measurement. Where existing data is unavailable, research may require commissioning to allow the action to progress in a measurable fashion.

The Integrated Strategy will be reviewed at regular 3 year intervals and necessary adjustments made accordingly. This process will provide the means by which changes to the wider economic and political context can be understood and addressed by the strategy.

5.4 Towards Greater Integration

A central ethos of this strategy is that by adopting an integrated approach, delivery is focussed around shared outcomes as opposed to separate objectives. This will place an onus on increased levels of partnership, of which there are many good examples taking place across the Borough. Yet there are also instances whereby boundaries between sectors, organisations or departments can inadvertently obstruct the ability to delivery efficiently. These will require to be robustly addressed through improved levels of communication and collaborative processes. Amongst key delivery agents, including Ards and North Down Borough Council, this may also necessitate structural changes to departments and sections.

5.5 Impact and Influence

The Integrated Strategy for Ards and North Down identifies Stakeholders against each of the Integrated Actions. This recognises that different organisations are best placed to lead tasks owing to their statutory responsibilities, expertise and capacity.

To understand the roles of such organisations, it is instructive to consider the potential impact of a project on fulfilling outcomes and the degree of influence that can be brought upon it by different parties.
5.6 Capacity and Skills

In delivering the Actions of this strategy, a realistic assessment of the capacity and skills of each relevant organisations will be required. This will inform the prioritisation and phasing of project delivery, as well as the allocation of resources.

It will be vital to ensure that the correct skills are in place to administer delivery of this strategy and to progress its constituent actions. This may require the upskilling of existing staff members and where appropriate, volunteers. It may also require recruitment of appropriately qualified individuals to lead delivery of specific actions.

Effective delivery of the strategy will require an in-depth review of resources available to both the Council and its key delivery partners and the development of structures to align with strategic priorities that will allow for effective implementation, integration and monitoring of the different elements of the strategy, both within the Council and with its external public and private sector partners.

Effective implementation of the Strategy will also require enhanced community and business engagement to tie into the outcomes and actions of the Big Plan. It will also be important to secure access to professional skills through the use of external consultants. Mechanisms for appointment, such as framework agreements, can help to reduce expense and delay often associated with procurement processes.
5.7 **FUTURE STRUCTURES / COLLABORATIVE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS**

The Strategy proposes the development of a number of new structures and delivery arrangements to support its implementation. These include:

- Potential Establishment of Economic Development Forum to oversee implementation of the Strategy;
- Establishment of a Horizon Scanning Group to identify emerging best practice from outside the Borough and to disseminate learning to collaborative networks and other stakeholder groupings;
- Creation of collaborative networks (e.g. Advanced Manufacturing, Agri-food and Tourism) to support: enhanced public and private sector engagement; horizon scanning of issues impacting on the sector/identification of sector specific issues; dissemination/diffusion of knowledge and information throughout supply chains; and improved co-ordination of support and supply chain activity;
- Formation of a potential skills forum to provide an effective process of engagement between businesses and education/skills development organisations to ensure improved co-ordination of supply and demand of skills;
- Establishment of ‘Task and Finish Groups’ to drive and oversee early stage implementation of key actions proposed by the Strategy; and
- Development of a Memorandum of Understanding between Council and all relevant stakeholders to govern improved information sharing and collaborative working to support the growth and development of local business.

5.8 **FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

As an ambitious vision to stimulate tourism, regeneration and economic development across Ards and North Down, this strategy will require adequate financial resourcing to fulfil its objectives. It is recognised that the limited availability of funding in both the public, private and third sectors, presents a challenge. Furthermore, significant political and economic uncertainty hampers an ability to accurately forecast future trends. However, the diverse nature of Integrated Actions, the alignment of this strategy with wider policy priorities and the integrated nature of proposed delivery routes should assist in the ability to attract funding from a wide range of sources. Potential sources of funding must be energetically explored, such as the Belfast Region City Deal. The Council should also give consideration to other finance raising models such as Business Improvement District and Tax Incremental Financing as well as partnerships with the private and third sector to deliver regeneration, tourism and economic development projects.
5.9 Future Policy Alignment

This Strategy sets out priorities for Ards and North Down over a 12-year period. It has been written to carefully align with existing policies and plans, most notably The Big Plan for Ards and North Down, as well as the Draft Programme for Government, the UK Industrial Strategy and the Ards and North Down Borough Council Corporate Plan. To be fully effective the Integrated Strategy must be complemented in a coordinated manner by all future policies, including Belfast Region City Deal, strategies and plans for the area. This will require proactive dissemination of the strategy through its lifetime to ensure buy in from all those with a potential role to play in its delivery.

A key document that will take account of this strategy is the proposed Ards and North Down Local Development Plan. This statutory plan will apply regional policies at the local level and inform the general public, statutory authorities, developers and other interested bodies of the policy framework and land use proposals that will guide development decisions.

Other documents, such as the Integrated Arts and Heritage Strategy and the Food Destination Strategy, will be key means by which the objectives of this strategy are amplified and furnished with greater detail.

5.10 Communication & Participation

To grow and sustain buy-in to the strategy, it will be important to maintain regular communication with stakeholders and the general public. In particular, sharing news on the progress of the strategy will help to build confidence across the Borough. Targeted communication with high level decision makers in both public and private sectors will also be key.

The close monitoring of project outcomes will enable accurate information on progress of the strategy to be shared with stakeholders. Not only will this help inform the investment decisions of others, but also provide the reference point for feedback on how delivery can be improved upon.

A hallmark of the process used to develop this strategy has been the extensive input of local stakeholders, demonstrating the value of harnessing local expertise and insight. Mechanisms are therefore required to ensure regular opportunities are provided for meaningful engagement and participation, helping to develop and deliver the strategy and its integrated actions in partnership.