

# **ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL**

30 September 2020

Dear Sir/Madam

You are hereby invited to attend a virtual meeting of the Regeneration and Development Committee of the Ards and North Down Borough Council which will be held on **Thursday, 8 October 2020** commencing at **7.00pm** via Zoom.

Yours faithfully

Stephen Reid  
Chief Executive  
Ards and North Down Borough Council

## **A G E N D A**

1. Apologies
2. Declarations of Interest
3. Annual Review of Ards and Bangor Visitor Information Centres 2019-2020 (Report attached)
- 4.1 Update on Notice of Motion regarding Strangford Lough Ferry (Report attached)
- 4.2 Update on Notice of Motion regarding the demise of Flybe and scrapping of Air Passenger Duty (Report attached)
5. Notices of Motion
- 5.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Alderman Irvine

That this Council recognises the positive impact that the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme has had in protecting and sustaining jobs during the pandemic across our borough and the nation. Whilst we note the recent announcement of its replacement with the Job Support Scheme, we recognise that there are still huge financial difficulties faced by many sectors across the borough. We therefore request that Council writes to the economy minister Diane Dodds MLA requesting a meeting to discuss interventions that can be put in place to minimise job losses and reskill those facing redundancy.

- 5.2 Notice of Motion submitted by Aldermen Wilson and McDowell

That this Council recognises the opportunities presented by the recent shift in working practices, and tasks officers with producing a report on how we can increase

efforts to encourage employers to set up satellite offices for their employees within the Borough. The report should include details of how we could work with owners of local vacant commercial properties to improve occupancy, and the potential impact this would have on the rates base, the environment, and town centre revitalisation.

Any Other Notified Business

**\*\*\*IN CONFIDENCE\*\*\***

6. Dfl response to ReefLive Planning application (Report attached)
7. Ards and North Down Rural Partnership (Report attached)
8. Belfast Region City Deal Update (Report attached)
9. Queen's Parade Update (Verbal report)

#### **MEMBERSHIP OF REGENERATION AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

Alderman Girvan	Councillor Brooks
Alderman Menagh	Councillor Cummings
Alderman McDowell	Councillor Dunlop
Alderman Smith	Councillor Gilmour (Chair)
Alderman Wilson	Councillor Kennedy
Councillor Adair	Councillor McClean
Councillor Armstrong-Cotter	Councillor McKimm
Councillor Blaney (Vice Chair)	Councillor Walker

**ITEM 3****Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Regeneration and Development
Date of Meeting	08 October 2020
Responsible Director	Director of Regeneration, Development and Planning
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Tourism
Date of Report	15 September 2020
File Reference	TO/VIC4
Legislation	N/A
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Subject	Annual Review of Ards and Bangor Visitor Information Centres 2019/20
Attachments	Ards and Bangor VIC individual statistics

**1. Background**

This report reviews the combined performance of Ards and Bangor Visitor Information Centres (VICs) for the financial year 2019/20. Data specific to each VIC can be found in Appendix 1. The Committee previously received end of year reports for the seasonal VICs at Groomsport and Portaferry in December 2019.

For note, this was the first full year of operations for Ards VIC no longer being in a shared facility with Ards Crafts; Ards Crafts having closed at the end of 2018/19.

**2. Introduction**

The Council has two permanent Visitor Information Centres (VICs). Both open daily, Monday–Saturday, with Bangor VIC also open on Sunday afternoons from June to August. The primary role of these centres is to highlight the Ards and North Down (AND) tourism offering to visitors, encouraging them to dwell longer and spend more here. This can be either visitors who call into the VICs in person, or those who contact them by phone or email prior to or during a visit. A secondary benefit is that residents also call in to avail of information on what is happening locally, from concerts to events, and use the box office for ticket purchases.

It should be noted that the final performance figures assume a full month in March 2020. In fact, due to Covid-19, the VICs closed mid-March.

### 3. Ards and Bangor Visitors and Enquiries

As has been the trend over recent times, visitors are increasingly accessing visitor information digitally, via mobile devices, with a subsequent impact on footfall to VICs nationally. This trend is reflected in a drop in footfall to both VICs in 2019/20 of 17.3% compared to the previous year. That said, Tourism NI's most recently published survey of consumer sentiment (August 2020) among domestic (NI) visitors planning a short trip, indicates that almost 1 in 5 (18%) intend to visit a visitor/heritage centre as part of their trip. This confirms that VICs still provide a valuable opportunity to engage with visitors.

Overall, approximately 88% of VIC visits took place in person. Classing each self-service visitor ("browser") as equating to one enquiry, in total 43,923 enquiries were processed via direct engagement with VIAs, telephone, post or email.

	APRIL 19 - MARCH 20	APRIL 18 - MARCH 19	VARIANCE YEAR ON YEAR	ANNUAL TARGET	% of TARGET ACHIEVED
VISITORS TO THE CENTRES	38,272	46,458	-17.6%		
<b>ENQUIRY TYPE</b>					
FACE TO FACE ENQUIRIES	36,595	44,274	-17.3%		
SELF-SERVICE VISITORS/BROWSERS	1,317	2,423	-45.6%		
ENQUIRIES Post/Email	1,357	1,243	+9.2%		
ENQUIRIES Phone	4,654	4,840	-3.8%		
<b>TOTAL ENQUIRIES</b>	<b>43,923</b>	<b>52,780</b>	<b>-18%</b>	<b>55,000</b>	<b>79%</b>

In terms of visitor origin, both VICs reflect the national trend, where most visitors are domestic. Together, the two VICs serviced 81% domestic and 19% out of state enquiries, with a higher proportion of out of state enquiries in Bangor compared to Ards, probably reflecting Bangor's train link and proximity to the marina.

ENQUIRIES BY ORIGIN (where known)	APRIL 19 – MARCH 20	% OF TOTAL
NORTHERN IRELAND	34,770	81.7%
UK & ROI	4,100	9.6%
REST OF WORLD	3,676	8.6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>42,546</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 4. Web and Digital Visitor Servicing

As highlighted earlier, online and digital platforms continue to grow in delivering visitor information and VIC staff are increasingly facilitating user demand for this as part of their role. Visitor Information Advisors are involved in delivery of content on the visitardsandnorthdown.com website, the production of regular consumer ezine and weekly "What's On" events email, as well as assisting with social media delivery, especially for the Visit Strangford Lough Facebook page. The VSL Facebook page now has over 5,630 followers, up 45% on last year. The number of Likes continues to grow organically, with daily posts scheduled by the VIC team.

**Websites:**

The importance of the visitardsandnorthdown website and its continual updating and refreshed content is clear from 2019/20 webmetrics, which show a significant increase in new users and page views since 2018/19.

**Users and Page Views**

Users 19/20	Users 18/19	% Increase	Page Views 19/20	Page Views 18/19	% Increase
253,911	179,799	41%	1,190,172	933,771	27%

**Page Views by Site Area**

Page	Page Views	Unique Page Views*
Events	50,216	17,158
Things to do	20,499	7,406
Where to Stay	5,263	1,929
VIC Contact Us Page	2,708	1,196
Experiences	2,798	1,102
Resources	176	74
Resources – Downloadable Guides	1,241	176

\*Unique page views discount multiple views of the same page within a single session. If a user views the same page more than once, this will count as one unique page view only.

The VIC staff are also the primary contributors to updated listings on Tourism NI's website, discoverni.com, and the popular whatsonni.com website. As well as working with Visit Belfast for including AND information on their website and social media. This ensures AND is represented fully on these key, third party visitor platforms which have a much larger reach than could be achieved through visitardsandnorthdown alone.

**Social Media:**

VIC staff provide tourism content through Ards and North Down's Corporate Communications team for social media posts featured on the corporate Facebook and Instagram channels. The Borough Marketing team within the Tourism service also launched visitardsandnorthdown social media (Facebook and Instagram) in September 2020, and VIC staff will play an integral role in developing content for and facilitating user enquiries through these channels.

**Ezines:**

Throughout the year the impact of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) has continued in a reduction of the number of users "opted in" to receive ezines. The overall number on the consumer ezine database fell from 3,380 to 1,679 and on the trade database from 414 to 329. An upside of this is, however, that those on the current databases are proactively engaged and open to receiving the ezines, as reflected in very favourable "open rates" compared to the industry average rate of 15.7% (Source: Campaign Monitor):

**E-zines 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020**

Ezines	e-zines sent	Open Rate Average
Food consumer list - ANDBC Food Tourism	6	37.32%
ANDBC Tourism Trade - trade information	3	23.02%

## Unclassified

Ards & North Down Food & Drink Network – trade info	4	76.85%
Food producers – trade info	2	33.34%
Golf Quality Assurance Scheme - info to golf clubs	1	50.00%
Milkshake Attendee Survey – post event survey	1	45.49%
Sea Bangor Sign Ups - Summer tourism activity	2	50.46%
GTGDPR Cleansed Trade List – Local event and tourism information	29	32.83%
Visit Ards and North Down Website Subscribers – generic tourism info	9	45.41%
Visit Ards and North Down Weekly What's On* subscriber list – What's On entertainment etc.	51	34.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>108</b>	
Industry average open rate*		15.70%

\*The weekly "What's On" email is compiled and distributed by VIC staff.

### 5. Income

While visitor information provision is the core function of the VICs, both also have a retail offering comprising souvenirs, books gifts and some local crafts. Sales of these in 2019/20 fell in Bangor but were well up (12%) in Ards VIC, which was rewarding as there had been some concern that loss of footfall previously attributable to Ards Crafts might hit VIC sales. This was clearly balanced out by the income generated by selling remaining Ards Craft stock.

The VICs also actively advertise the ticket agent service for events in AND, including third party events. Income from commission on tickets dropped slightly compared to the previous year, reflecting event cancellations in March due to Covid 19, but still significantly exceeded target.

SALES & COMMISSION £	APRIL 19 - MARCH 20	APRIL 18 - MARCH 19	2019/20 TARGET	% of TARGET ACHIEVED
Retail sales	£34,180	£34,114	£27,400	+25%
Ticket sales commission	£2,490	£2,629	£1,900	+31%
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£36,670</b>	<b>£36,785</b>	<b>£29,300</b>	<b>125%</b>
<b>Total income ex vat</b>	<b>£30,558</b>	<b>£31,576</b>		

### 6. Visitor Literature Distribution

The VIC service distributed more than 90,000 pieces of AND visitor literature to approximately 50 sites across NI, including within AND, during the year. These sites included Belfast City Airport, local restaurants, bars and attractions, Translink bus and rail stations, the Local Information Office (Pier 36 in Donaghadee), the two seasonal VICs at Cockle Row and Portaferry and VICs across the national network. Visitor literature was also used for packs compiled for incoming group visits such as media FAMs and at trade shows.

### 7. Outreach Activity

During the year VIC staff serviced the mobile Visitor Information Unit at major Council events and those third-party events supported by Council tourism grants.

There was a VIC presence at Easter and on May Day, and at the Sea Bangor, Comber Earlies and Portavogie Seafood festivals, to mention but a few. In addition, there was a mobile VIC presence at a number of major events outside the borough including:

- Hillsborough Food Festival
- Balmoral Show
- Holiday World Dublin.

In total the VIC Team took the visitor servicing provision to 14 different events/locations over 22 days during 2019/20, attracting over 6,700 enquiries.

### **8. The Future**

Council agreed the strategic direction of Visitor Servicing Provision, following the VIC review in 2018. This included a move toward: online content and engagement, LIO's and Pop Up VICs and repositioning of the static VICs (both permanent and seasonal), with Council agreeing a move for Portaferry VIC and Newtownards VIC, with Cockle Row and Bangor still under review. The next report on annual VIC performance will reflect the developing new model and will be brought to Council in late 2021/22.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Council notes this report.

## Appendix 1

### Ards Visitor Information Centre

#### VIC Enquiries/Visitors Ards

Ards VIC serviced 31,735 customers.

	APRIL 19 – MARCH 20	APRIL 18 – MARCH 19	% change	ANNUAL TARGET	% of Target Achieved
VISITORS TO THE CENTRES	28,354	31,669	-10%		
<b>ENQUIRY TYPE</b>					
VISITORS FACE TO FACE ENQUIRIES	26,791	29,700	-9%		
SELF-SERVICE VISITORS/"BROWSERS"	1,203	2,208	-45%		
ENQUIRIES Post/Fax/Email	1,091	901	+21%		
ENQUIRIES Phone	2,650	2,455	+8%		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>31,735</b>	<b>35,264</b>	<b>-10%</b>	<b>35000</b>	<b>90%</b>

#### Visitor Nationality Breakdown

ENQUIRER ORIGIN (where known)	APRIL 19 – MARCH 20	% OF TOTAL (rounded)
NORTHERN IRELAND	25,948	86%
UK & ROI	2,386	8%
REST OF WORLD	2,146	7%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30,480</b>	<b>100%</b>

#### Income

SALES & COMMISSIONS	APRIL 19 - MARCH 20	APRIL 18 - MARCH 19	VARIANCE YEAR ON YEAR	TOTAL YEAR TARGET	% of TARGET ACHIEVED
RETAIL SALES	£20,022	£17,865	+12%	£14,000	
TICKET SALES COMMISSION	£478	£342	39%	£500	
ACCOMMODATION BOOKING FEE	-	£17	-	0	
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>£20,500</b>	<b>£18,224</b>	<b>+12%</b>	<b>£14,500</b>	<b>141%</b>
<b>TOTAL INCOME EX VAT</b>	<b>£17,083</b>	<b>£15,203</b>			

NB: total income excludes March 2020.



## Bangor Visitor Information Centre

### VIC Enquiries/Visitors Bangor

Bangor VIC serviced 12,188 customers.

	APRIL 18 - MARCH 19	APRIL 18 - MARCH 19	VARIANCE YEAR ON YEAR	ANNUAL TARGET	% of TARGET ACHIEVED
VISITORS TO THE CENTRE	9,918	14,789	-32%		
<b>ENQUIRY TYPE</b>					
VISITORS FACE TO FACE ENQUIRIES	9,804	14,574	-32%		
SELF-SERVICE VISITORS/"BROWSERS"	114	215	-46%		
ENQUIRIES Post/Fax/Email	266	342	-33%		
ENQUIRIES Phone	2,004	2385	-16%		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12,188</b>	<b>17,516</b>	<b>-30%</b>	<b>20,000</b>	<b>-61%</b>

### Visitor Nationality Breakdown

ENQUIRER ORIGIN (where known)	APRIL 19 - MARCH 20	% OF TOTAL (rounded)
NORTHERN IRELAND	8,822	73%
UK & ROI	1,714	14%
REST OF WORLD	1,530	13%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12,066</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Income

SALES & COMMISSIONS £	APRIL 19 - MARCH 20	APRIL 18 - MARCH 19	VARIANCE YEAR ON YEAR	TOTAL YEAR TARGET	% of TARGET ACHIEVED
RETAIL SALES	£14,158	£16,250	-13%	£13,400	
ACCOMMODATION BOOKING FEES	£6	£24	-	0	
TICKET SALES COMMISSION	£2,012	£2,287	-12%	£1,400	
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>£16,170</b>	<b>£18,561</b>	<b>-13%</b>	<b>£14,800</b>	<b>108%</b>
<b>TOTAL INCOME EX VAT</b>	<b>£13,475</b>	<b>£15,467</b>	<b>-</b>		

NB: total income excludes March 2020.

**ITEM 4****Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Regeneration and Development
Date of Meeting	08 October 2020
Responsible Director	Director of Regeneration, Development and Planning
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Regeneration
Date of Report	16 September 2020
File Reference	RDP14
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Update on Notice of Motion regarding Strangford Lough Ferry
Attachments	Appendix One - Response on behalf of the Minister

The Council previously agreed the following Notice of Motion:

*“That this Council writes to Katrina Godfrey, Permanent Secretary, Department for Infrastructure, requesting an urgent meeting involving representation of elected members and stakeholders, reference to replacing the first morning crossing time of the Strangford Ferry Service from Portaferry, currently 7.45 am to that of 7.15 am, further to also discuss general operational improvements to the Strangford Ferry Service.”*

Correspondence was sent to Ms Godfrey seeking a meeting and the attached response was received. In the letter from Dr Murray, it was indicated that a review was being undertaken. To date no further correspondence has been received.

Note that when the Notice of Motion was agreed in October 2019, the NI Assembly was suspended and thus there was no Minister for Infrastructure in post. Given that a Minister has now been appointed and given the lack of progress in securing a meeting with the Permanent Secretary, it is recommended that Council writes to the Minister to request a meeting.

Unclassified

**RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Council agrees the above.



Department for

**Infrastructure**

An Roinn

**Bonneagair**

[www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk](http://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk)

## Roads and Rivers

Mr Brian Dorrian  
Head of Regeneration  
Ards and North Down Borough Council  
Town Hall  
The Castle  
BANGOR  
BT20 4BT

[enquiries@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk)

Clarence Court  
10-18 Adelaide Street  
Belfast  
BT2 8GB

Your reference:  
Our reference: TOF-1114-2020  
Date: 17 February 2020

Dear Mr Dorrian

### **STRANGFORD LOUGH FERRY SERVICE**

Thank you for your letter dated 24 January 2020 requesting a meeting with Katrina Godfrey, Permanent Secretary, to discuss adjusting the first morning crossing time from Portaferry and general operational improvements to the Strangford Lough Ferry Service. The Permanent Secretary has asked me to respond on her behalf.

I recognise that there is a demand for an additional early morning weekday sailing from Portaferry. As indicated in the Permanent Secretary's letter, dated 3 May 2019, to Stephen Reid, Chief Executive of Ards and North Down Borough Council, the Department is continuing to explore how the introduction of an earlier sailing might be brought to fruition bearing in mind the need to ensure affordability in an exceptionally tight public expenditure climate.

As work is still ongoing, it might be best to meet when we are clearer on how the proposal might work and how it can be funded and we will be in touch again at the appropriate time.

With regard to general improvements to the ferry service your officers may wish to contact Mr David McCaw (email [david.mccaw@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk](mailto:david.mccaw@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk)), to arrange a meeting.

Yours sincerely

**ANDREW McC MURRAY (DR)**

**ITEM 4.2****Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Regeneration and Development
Date of Meeting	08 October 2020
Responsible Director	Director of Regeneration, Development and Planning
Responsible Head of Service	
Date of Report	02 October 2020
File Reference	RDP14
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Update on Notice of Motion regarding the demise of Flybe and scrapping of Air Passenger Duty
Attachments	Appendix One - Response on behalf of the Chancellor of the Exchequer

The Council previously agreed the following Notice of Motion:

*“That this Council expresses concern at the collapse of the airline Flybe which has resulted in a negative impact on the local economy through job losses and lack of regional connectivity. The Council urges the Chancellor of the Exchequer to scrap Air Passenger Duty which disadvantages regions such as Northern Ireland and calls on HM Government to step up measures to support regional connectivity across the United Kingdom.”*

Correspondence was duly sent to The Chancellor, seeking his consideration. In response the attached correspondence has been received.

**RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Council notes the above.

MC2020/34015



HM Treasury, 1 Horse Guards Road, London, SW1A 2HQ

Stephen Reid  
Chief Executive  
Ards and North Down Borough Council  
Town Hall  
The Castle  
Bangor  
BT20 4BT

01 October 2020  
Your ref: RDP14

Dear Mr Reid,

Thank you for your letter of 21 September to the Chancellor of the Exchequer about Air Passenger Duty (APD). I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

As you will be aware, Flybe ceased trading on 5 March 2020. Prior to this, the Government explored multiple options with Flybe's shareholders on how the airline could keep operating, making clear that any support would need to be on commercial terms. The company also sought to use Time to Pay arrangements, which are open to all businesses. Ultimately, the directors of Flybe decided it was not viable to keep Flybe operating.

At the March Budget, the Government committed to consult on aviation tax reform. As part of the consultation, the Government will consider the case for changing the APD treatment of domestic flights, such as reintroducing the return leg exemption. While the consultation has been delayed because of Covid-19, the Government remains committed to delivering it, and will update on timing in due course. We are keen to engage widely as part of this consultation, and would welcome input from businesses, individuals, trade and professional bodies and other interested parties, once it has been published.

Thank you for taking the trouble to make us aware of these concerns.

Yours sincerely,

KEMI BADENOCH MP