

**ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL**

28 August 2025

Dear Sir/Madam

You are hereby invited to attend a hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of the Place and Prosperity Committee of the Ards and North Down Borough Council which will be held in the Council Chamber, 2 Church Street, Newtownards, on **Thursday 4 September 2025** commencing at **7.00pm**.

Yours faithfully

Susie McCullough  
Chief Executive  
Ards and North Down Borough Council

**A G E N D A**

1. Apologies
2. Declarations of Interest
3. Presentation on Labour Market Partnership (LMP) (copy enclosed)

**Reports delegated for Decision/Approval**

4. Response to the DfC Shaping Sustainable Places Consultation (Report attached)

**Reports for Approval**

5. Visit Belfast 12 Month Overview 24/25 and Three year partnership proposal (Report attached)
6. Update on Kircubbin Harbour (Report attached)
7. Regeneration Working up Projects 2025/26 (Report attached)
8. The Creative Cabinet Canvas Project (NoM 650) (Report attached)

**Reports for Noting**

9. Bangor Art Sculptures Update (Report attached)
10. Updated Feasibility Study report for Comber Enterprise Hub (report attached)

11. Participation in DSIT Regulators Pioneer Fund (RPF4) – National Mobile Coverage Mapping Report (Report attached)
12. Annual Tourism Events Programme 24/25 Evaluation Report (Report attached)
13. Tour Operator/Trade Show Engagement 24/25 Update Report (Report attached)
14. Heritage Cross Trails Peaceplus Project Update Report (Report attached)
15. Place Directorate Budgetary Control Report – March 2025 (Report attached)
16. Place Directorate Budgetary Control Report – July 2025 (Report attached)
17. Prosperity Directorate Budgetary Control Report – March 2025 (Report attached)
18. Prosperity Directorate Budgetary Control Report – July 2025 (Report attached)
19. Economic Scoping Study on the Future of Economic Development Sectors in Ards and North Down (2025) (Report attached)
20. Notices of Motion referred to Committee by Council on 25 June 2025
- 20.1 Notice of Motion Number from Councillor McCracken and Councillor Harbinson

“That this Council agrees that:

1. Bangor Marine should be invited to the next meeting of the Bangor CAG to update stakeholders on Marine Gardens and confirm a guaranteed start date.
2. Should it prove necessary, Council will liaise with the Department of Communities to consider alternative options for the delivery of the project, including the potential for an arms-length regeneration agency, that is publicly owned but with commercial freedom.
3. Council should work with the developer to create a commercial marketing plan to deliver at least £50m of investment for the rest of Queen’s Parade. The initial plan should be brought to Committee before the end of 2025 and should dovetail with other critical developments in the area, helping to provide a catalyst for wider regeneration.

Amendment Received to Notice of Motion from Councillor McCracken and Councillor Harbinson as follows:

*“This Council welcomes the update on Marine Gardens provided by Bangor Marine on 13 August 2025 and agrees that:*

1. *Council officers should work alongside Bangor Marine to support public communication around this project. This includes inviting Bangor Marine to the next meeting of the Bangor CAG to update stakeholders, supporting the*

*proposed public consultation hub led by Bangor Marine, and by holding regular meetings with Bangor Marine to ensure accurate and complementary messaging on respective websites, newsletters and social media.*

2. *Council should also work with Bangor Marine to support a commercial marketing plan with the aim of attracting investment for the further phases of Queen's Parade along with complementary investment that will support the ambitions of the wider City Deal. An initial outline should be brought to Committee in Q1 2026 with a view to approve draft marketing collateral that can be used at future property investment conferences in the UK and abroad."*

## 21. Any Other Notified Business

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

### **Reports for Approval (In Confidence)**

22. Belfast Region City Deal Annual Report (Report attached)

23. Go Succeed Service Level Agreement between Belfast City Council and Ards and North Down Borough Council and Enterprise Northern Ireland Ltd (Report attached)

### **Reports for Noting (In Confidence)**

24. Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme Update (Report attached)

## **MEMBERSHIP OF PLACE AND PROSPERITY COMMITTEE (16 MEMBERS)**

Alderman Adair (Vice-Chair)	Councillor Hollywood
Alderman Armstrong-Cotter	Councillor Kennedy
Alderman McDowell	Councillor McCollum
Councillor Blaney	Councillor McCracken (Chair)
Councillor Brady	Councillor McLaren
Councillor Edmund	Councillor Morgan
Councillor Gilmour	Councillor Smart
Councillor Hennessy	Councillor Thompson

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN

**Labour Market Partnership**  
**Working Together**



## Place and Prosperity Committee

4<sup>th</sup> September 2025



Department for  
**Communities**  
[www.communities-ni.gov.uk](http://www.communities-ni.gov.uk)

An Roinn  
**Pobal**

Department for  
**Communities**



**Ards and  
North Down**  
Borough Council



# LMP Team



- **Nicola Webster-Pickett**

Ards and North Down Labour Market Partnership Manager

- **Sasha Mawhinney**

Labour Market Partnership Administrative Officer

- **Karine McGuckin**

Economic Development Manager, Ards and North Down Borough Council

# Themes Identified

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN

Labour Market Partnership

Working Together



The aim of the Labour Market Partnership (LMP) is to address the employability needs in the Ards and North Down Borough Council area. The following themes were identified as local priorities for 2025-26:

Disability

Skilled Labour Supply

Economic Inactivity- not SPF

Unemployment (all ages)

# LMP 2025-2026 Projects

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ARDS AND NORTH DOWN

Labour Market Partnership

Working Together





# LMP Academies 2025-2026

- **Classroom Assistant Employability Academy**
- **Transport Academy (HGV and Driving Licences)**
- **Academy for People with Disabilities**
- **Catering Academy**
- **Health and Social Care Academy**
- **Admin/ Business Services Academy**
- **Work Ready Programme (2<sup>nd</sup> Cohort)**
- **Greentech Academy**
- **Childminding Academy (to be confirmed)**



# LMP Grant Programme

## Employer Led Upskilling Programme:

- Launching mid September- the aim of the programme is to upskill staff, to enable them to work additional hours or gain higher paid employment and therefore create entry level positions. This programme is not available to the public sector.
- Grants up to £500 per employee to contribute to the costs of an accredited qualification or a recognised certificate. Available up to a maximum of 4 employees per company including subsidiaries
- Grants available towards specific job-related qualifications for example: Forklift Training, First Aid Training, CSR Card etc.



# LMP Events:

## Outreach Events:

- **Skills and Employment Support Clinics:**
  - 10<sup>th</sup> September- West Winds Primary School
  - 17<sup>th</sup> September- Donaghadee Primary School
  - TBC- Millisle Primary School
- **Disability Employment and Support Days:**
  - 25<sup>th</sup> November- Portavogie Community Centre
  - 26<sup>th</sup> February 2026- Aurora Aquatic Centre, Bangor
- **Job, Support and Training Fair with a dedicated Health and Social Care Area:** TBC in Aurora Aquatic Centre, Bangor
- **Job Fair-** 19<sup>th</sup> March 2026- Ards Blair Mayne and Wellbeing Leisure Complex in Ards



# LMP Projects

## Theme- Increased Awareness

- **Employability and Skills Registers:**
  - To assist businesses and individuals the LMP have created two Employability and Skills Registers – one for businesses and one specifically for individuals looking support.
  - The business Employability and Skills Register gives all the details of support programmes and contact details available in the Borough to assist your business. This is available to download on our website:
  - <https://www.andbusiness.co.uk/andlmp>

# LMP Outcomes

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ARDS AND NORTH DOWNS

Labour Market Partnership

Working Together





# LMP Outcomes- HGV/ Transport Academy:



- Since 2022 AND LMP has funded 155 participants through the Transport Academy.
- 122 have moved into employment with earnings estimated around £2.3 million.

# LMP Outcomes-

## Academy for People with Disabilities:



- Since 2022 AND LMP has funded 107 participants through the Academy for People with Disabilities.
- 33 have moved into employment, like Martin (in picture), with earnings estimated around £245k.
- 30 participants are in placements

# LMP Outcomes- Classroom Assistants:



- Since 2023 AND LMP has funded 68 participants through the Classroom Assistant Employability Academy.
- 30 have moved into employment with earnings estimated around £582k .
- In 2024 AND LMP funded the upskilling of 24 Classroom assistants – currently 23 have completed the training.

# LMP Outcomes- Other Jobs:



- Since 2022 AND LMP has filled 77 other jobs from the Job Fairs, Careers Convention, Reskilling Programme, Enterprise Skills Programme, Childcare Academy, Work Ready Programme and SIA Academy .



# LMP Outcomes: Jobs



- Since 2022 – 262 jobs have been filled by AND LMP.
- In 2023-2024 – 99% of those who gained employment through an AND LMP academy were still in employment post 6 months .

# LMP Outcomes-

## Employer Led Upskilling Programme:



- Since 2022 AND LMP has assisted 110 Employers in the Borough to upskill 255 employees through the Employer Led Upskilling Programme.



# LMP Outcomes- Outreach Events:



19



- Since 2023 AND LMP has hosted 19 events with 1,633 people attending.

Unclassified

20

## ITEM 4

### Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	04 September 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Regeneration
Date of Report	12 August 2025
File Reference	RDP43
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Response to DFC Shaping Sustainable Places public consultation
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Consultation on Shaping Sustainable Places  Appendix 2 - Draft response from the Council to the consultation

### Background

Members may be aware that the Department for Communities (DfC) in collaboration with the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) and Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) have been developing the Shaping Sustainable Places Programme.

The programme aims to create a range of focused and strategic interventions that maximise the available budgets for regeneration projects in an effort to address the elements of decline in rural and urban areas. The programme aims to engage communities at the earliest opportunity and will seek to use the regeneration projects as a catalyst to encourage private sector investment to add sustainability to the projects and areas.



Not Applicable

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This is a significant Programme that the three departments will co-fund over a 10-year period, contributing a minimum of £5m each per year for investment in capital projects. A further minimum contribution of 10% (£15m) will be requested from Local Councils, creating an initial fund of £165m. However, the Programme would be scalable, and able to utilise additional funds for regeneration if they became available.

On 23 June 2025 DfC Minister Gordon Lyons, DAERA Minister Andrew Muir, and Infrastructure Minister Liz Kimmins announced a public consultation seeking views on the programme. Appendix 1 provides the consultation documents.

The Regeneration Service, in collaboration with the Council's Heads of Service Team (HoST) have compiled a draft response to the consultation, provided in Appendix 2. The response to each question is aligned to the Council's Corporate Plan 2024 -2028, The Big Plan 2017 – 2032, the Regeneration Service Plan 2025 – 2026, and has synergies with priorities identified in the Masterplans and Village Plans. Additionally, the feedback from ongoing communications with the various Village Partnership Groups and C/TAGs have informed the responses to the consultation. The draft response to each of the multiple-choice questions is highlighted, and comments in any text box are provided by the Council to supplement the rationale of the response.

To encourage as much input from residents and businesses from the Borough the Regeneration Service has undertaken the following engagement actions:

- Emailed the consultation notification and link to C/Tags
- Emailed the consultation notification and link to Village Partnerships groups
- Completed letter drops in businesses in each urban area?
- Shared the consultation link internally to all staff requesting it be forwarded to any key stakeholders not identified through Regeneration

## RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council approves (delegated authority has been granted) the draft response to the consultation to enable officers to issue a formal response before the consultation completion deadline of 21 September 2025.



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# Consultation on Shaping Sustainable Places

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# 1. Joint Ministerial Foreword

In an era of uncertainty and change, the sustainability of our village, town and city centres has never mattered more. We understand the power of place, not just as a location, but as the living heart of our communities, giving us a sense of belonging, meeting local needs, and providing jobs and services.

Yet many places are under pressure from the rapid changes in retail, the rise of online commerce and the legacy of the Covid pandemic. The result has been an increase in vacancy, dereliction and neglected places that once thrived as centres of community life.

We cannot afford to let our village, town and city centres become symbols of decline. This is not just an economic issue; it is also about local identity, social cohesion and opportunity. When high streets are hollowed out, so too are the spaces where people connect, local businesses grow, and public life unfolds.

We are proposing Shaping Sustainable Places as a joined-up and strategic response to these trends. We want to put communities

at the centre of reimagining their place for living, learning, working, culture and play.

We want to tackle vacancy and dereliction head-on through interventions that promote adaptive reuse. We want to give places back to people by creating spaces where they can gather and spend time. We want to deliver practical solutions that make communities stronger, safer and better prepared for the future. Our departments have been working closely because we understand the scale of the challenges faced and we know that by working together, we can maximise the impact of our collective investment.

The future of our communities depends on how we nurture, shape and invest in our villages, towns and cities. This consultation document seeks your views on a community-focused approach to re-creating and sustaining vibrant and resilient villages, towns and cities.

We are committed to creating places that work for everyone – alive with purpose, pride of place and rooted in the communities they serve. We encourage you to play your part by completing this consultation to help us guide and shape the future.



Gordon Lyons MLA  
Minister for Communities



Liz Kimmins MLA  
Minister for Infrastructure



Andrew Muir MLA  
Minister of Agriculture,  
Environment and  
Rural Affairs

## 2. Executive Summary

Whilst no two places are the same, many are dealing with similar problems, including lower occupancy rates and footfall due to economic headwinds and changing consumer preferences.<sup>1</sup> Longer term trends of development away from town centres have removed many village, town and city centre activities and reduced reasons to visit and dwell.<sup>2</sup>

Shaping Sustainable Places aims to create a flagship programme of interventions to arrest the decline in our valued village, town and city centres. Through more strategic interventions lead by communities we hope to stimulate places and catalyse private sector activity to further protect them.<sup>3</sup>

Shaping Sustainable Places lays the foundation for new ways of delivering regeneration outcomes. We aim to engage communities at the earliest stages of planning for change, developing solutions to specific place-based challenges through funding local physical and infrastructure interventions.

The Programme has been developed by the Department for Communities working in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, and the Department for Infrastructure.

We are building on the successes and

learning from our collaborative delivery of two recent regeneration programmes. The Capital Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Scheme<sup>4</sup> funded Local Councils to deliver measures to help provide a safe environment for visitors, shoppers and workers within town and city centres. The Covid Recovery Small Settlements Regeneration Programme,<sup>5</sup> supported projects in small settlements with a population of less than 5,000 people.

It is proposed that the three departments will co-fund the Programme over a 10-year period, contributing a minimum of £5m each per year for investment in capital projects. A further minimum contribution of 10% (£15m) will be requested from Local Councils, creating an initial fund of £165m. However, the Programme would be scalable, and able to utilise additional funds for regeneration if they became available.

The Northern Ireland Executive is operating in an acutely constrained financial environment; by pooling our limited resources, we hope to maximise the impact of the interventions that can be made, and demonstrate that by working in partnership, we can provide a mechanism to deliver for other funders and partners in future.

We will also seek over the life of the programme to drawdown alternative, non-Executive funding sources, through

<sup>1</sup> The Government Response to the House of Lords Built Environment Committee Report on High Streets: Life beyond retail? at pg. 1.

<sup>2</sup> A New Future for Scotland's Town Centres

<sup>3</sup> The existential crisis of traditional shopping streets the sun model and the place attraction paradigm at pg. 30.

<sup>4</sup> Capital Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Scheme | Department for Communities

<sup>5</sup> Covid Recovery Small Settlements Regeneration Programme

leveraging private sector investment and working with other non-Executive funders on established and new approaches.

It is recognised that the available funding will fall far short of the need of all village, town and city centres. This means it will be important to focus interventions and prioritise places to achieve the transformative impact we wish to see. Whilst it is envisaged there will be core allocations made to each Local Council area, this consultation also explores the use of competitive funding streams for particular types of intervention. We hope to develop opportunities for funding to tackle defined themes or specific challenges and select those proposals that offer the greatest potential benefits.

**Our first objective is to improve the places we love by ensuring they are sustainable into the future; to create places where people want to live, work, invest and visit.<sup>6</sup>** We recognise that for places to thrive, they also need strong local leadership and decision-making. This consultation will ask for your views on how to deliver participative, collaborative development of plans in which communities are at the heart of decisions made about their places.

**Our second key objective is to prioritise the safety, health and wellbeing of people through regeneration and creation of people-centred accessible and inclusive places.** We recognise

that addressing dereliction or vacancy to stimulate local economies cannot be just about retail consolidation.<sup>7</sup> Creating economically sustainable places will depend on increasing the number of people for whom village, town and city centres are safe and attractive gathering points,<sup>8</sup> as well as commercial centres.

**Our third objective is to shape places to become more resilient to the risks and impacts of climate change.** Across many built environments, there are well understood susceptibilities to extreme weather which can be mitigated and adapted through design and innovation, to protect people, businesses, homes and livelihoods, and to invest in long-term sustainable solutions for the future.

**The final objective is that by working collaboratively across departments and through Local Councils, we will be able to deliver a programme that is greater than the sum of its parts.** Through Shaping Sustainable Places, we aim to coordinate more strategic and transformative capital investments, focussed on delivering outcomes and positive change. We will deliver flexibly, learn from best practice and adapt to changes in the market and operating environment.

If we succeed, the interventions delivered through Shaping Sustainable Places should be key to sustaining places economically, socially and environmentally for people long into the future.

<sup>6</sup> Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most – at pg. 7

<sup>7</sup> High Street: How our town centres can bounce back from the retail crisis: Rudlin, Payne and Montague at pg 211.

<sup>8</sup> Draft ISNI Strategy - 2050

## 3. Introduction

This document sets out draft proposals for Shaping Sustainable Places, a long-term programme of regeneration interventions that aims to reshape village, town and city centres. We are carrying out a public consultation on the draft proposals to test our new approach and to invite fresh insights and perspectives. We aim to develop a final programme for Ministerial and Executive Committee consideration by the end of 2025.

### Impact assessments

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality between all Section 75 groups. Without prejudice to these obligations, the Department is also required, in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

Equality screening of the proposed Shaping Sustainable Places Programme has identified no adverse impacts, and the screening documentation has been published alongside this consultation document. On this basis, the

decision is that the Programme should not be subject to a full equality impact assessment.

The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 introduced a duty on Northern Ireland departments, Local Councils and other public authorities to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans, or when designing and delivering public services. There is also a requirement to monitor and report on how the due regard duty has been exercised.

A Rural Needs Impact Assessment recording these considerations has been published alongside this consultation document.

In line with The Data Protection Act (DPA) and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), the Department for Communities is committed to building trust and confidence in our ability to process your personal information and protect your privacy. Our Privacy Notice at Annex C of this document outlines how we process your data. A Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) screening exercise was carried out, which determined that a full DPIA is not required for this consultation.

## 4. Strategic Context

### Regeneration and Placemaking

The existing Department for Communities Urban Regeneration Policy Framework defines regeneration as “activities that reverse economic, social and physical decline in areas where market forces will not do this without the support of government.”<sup>9</sup>

Shaping Sustainable Places proposes to build on this framework to fund strategic interventions that deliver wider benefits.

Placemaking is impacted both directly and incidentally by many policies and actions across government, the private and the Voluntary and Community sector. Each place is different, has different characteristics, needs and strengths that are understood best by the people who live in and use that place.

Our approach in developing Shaping Sustainable Places has been to reflect and build on the three sponsoring Departments’ organisational goals, existing arrangements and business needs, and to combine this with emerging best practice around the role of communities in placemaking and regeneration.

The Department for Communities’ current programme of urban regeneration

interventions is delivered in the 41 urban towns and cities across Northern Ireland.<sup>10</sup> Until 2020, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, on behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive, administered the European Union Rural Development Programme.

In leading the delivery of the Capital Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Scheme<sup>11</sup> and the Covid Recovery Small Settlements Regeneration Programme<sup>12</sup>, the Department for Communities stepped outside of its core policy focus on urban settlements. This was enabled by working in partnership with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and the Department for Infrastructure.

An additional 24 intermediate settlements and 69 villages with populations of over 1000 people were eligible for funding through the two partnership programmes.<sup>13</sup> The programmes also delivered active and sustainable travel interventions and enablers.

### Spatial and Planning Policy Context

Shaping Sustainable Places will be delivered within the context of regional planning policy and Local Councils’ Local Development Plans. All Local Councils are preparing

<sup>9</sup> Urban Regeneration and Community Development Policy Framework at pg.5.

<sup>10</sup> An urban town or city is defined as one located within a settlement with a population of 5,000 or more The Northern Ireland Town Centre Database Background Paper

<sup>11</sup> Capital Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Scheme | Department for Communities

<sup>12</sup> Covid Recovery Small Settlements Regeneration Programme

<sup>13</sup> An intermediate settlement has a population of 2,500 - 4,999 and a village has a population of 1,000 - 2,499. For the full list of NI villages, intermediate settlements, towns and cities see Review of the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency



Local Development Plans for their areas which set out a clear vision, typically over a 15-year period, for the type, scale and location of development that should be encouraged. It is within this context that initiatives that provide support to Local Councils can be considered to enable them to deliver local solutions to local issues.

The Strategic Planning Policy Statement<sup>14</sup> sets out regional planning policies for Northern Ireland on town centres and retailing, economic development and development in rural areas, and the Programme for Government commits to the continued implementation of a planning improvement programme to make our planning system work for businesses, people, and the environment.<sup>15</sup> Improving health and wellbeing is one of the five Core Planning Principles set out in the Strategic Planning Policy Statement.

## Community Planning

Each Local Council also has a Community Planning Partnership which brings together a range of partners including public bodies, government departments, agencies, businesses and community and voluntary organisations.<sup>16</sup>

Community Planning Partnerships work together to identify long-term objectives to improve the social, economic and environmental well-being of the area. Each Partnership develops a Community Plan.

A Community Plan is a document telling people the outcome or shared vision of each Community Planning Partnership.

The Plan describes how the partners will work together to deliver interventions and actions locally. Community Planning involves all aspects of public services—from education, health, housing and the environment to arts, culture and heritage. The partners also work with residents and community groups directly.

The Shaping Sustainable Places interventions proposed by Local Councils should align with local Community Plans.

## Revenue Generation

Regeneration, where it is successful in catalysing increased tenancy or commercial activity in the locality, can help to sustain the local rates taxbase. Revenue generated from the rates system comprises 78% of local government revenue<sup>17</sup> and supplements around 4%<sup>18</sup> of the Northern Ireland Executive's spending power. This demonstrates the direct link between the sustainability of places and the funding of local services.

## Programme for Government Framework: Key Priorities

The Programme for Government Framework sets out three key missions related to People, the Planet and Prosperity.<sup>19</sup> These missions are underpinned by a number of key priorities which Shaping Sustainable Places will support:

<sup>14</sup> Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS)

<sup>15</sup> Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most – at pg. 10

<sup>16</sup> Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014

<sup>17</sup> Local government facts and figures: Northern Ireland - LGIU – NILGA 2021

<sup>18</sup> The Public Finance in Northern Ireland: a comprehensive guide – Northern Ireland Fiscal Council

<sup>19</sup> Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most – at pg. 67.

## **Grow a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy**

Shaping Sustainable Places aims to create the right interventions which will create the foundations for a more productive and prosperous economy; for better rural and urban communities; and for healthier and greener lives.<sup>20</sup>

## **Provide More Social, Affordable and Sustainable Housing**

Shaping Sustainable Places recognises the importance of housing as essential to health and wellbeing and the wider Programme for Government aim of enabling access to affordable, sustainable and quality housing.<sup>21</sup> Through regeneration and placemaking we hope to create more attractive places both to live and invest in housing.

## **Safer Communities**

Shaping Sustainable Places will ensure that safety is at the forefront of design consideration and all interventions will enable people to have the confidence they need to live productively and engage fully in society.<sup>22</sup>

## **Reform and Transformation of Public Services**

Shaping Sustainable Places offers opportunities for cross Departmental transformative approaches to deliver the public services people rely on.<sup>23</sup>

Since 2021, Northern Ireland has set a new ambition to decarbonise our economy.

This included the adoption of the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 which sets a legal requirement to reduce emissions by 48% by 2030, as well as 100% reduction in net emission by 2050.<sup>24</sup> Activities to achieve this are already underway, but huge challenges remain.<sup>25</sup>

The Act also includes a Just Transition principle to ensure that the benefits of moving to a green economy are shared widely. We believe that Shaping Sustainable Places can help contribute to a Just Transition through having due regard to the desirability of using and supporting nature-based interventions.<sup>26</sup>

## **High Street Taskforce Report and Recommendations**

An independent High Street Task Force appointed by Executive Ministers in 2020 carried out a call for evidence<sup>27</sup> and delivered a report<sup>28</sup> and recommendations on the future of high streets in Northern Ireland. Although the report has not been formally adopted by the Executive Committee, Shaping Sustainable Places could deliver on elements of two of the 14 recommendations; Recommendations 2 and 5.

<sup>20</sup> Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most – at pg. 15.

<sup>21</sup> Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most – at pg. 42.

<sup>22</sup> Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most – at pg. 46.

<sup>23</sup> Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most – at pg. 55.

<sup>24</sup> Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 at sections 2-4 and 7 (1).

<sup>25</sup> Professor Dave Reay Skills and Net Zero at page 4

<sup>26</sup> Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 at section 30 (2) (b).

<sup>27</sup> High Street Task Force Call for Evidence Report 2022

<sup>28</sup> High Street task Force - Delivering a 21st Century High Street

**Recommendation 2** endorses the Living High Streets Craft Kit<sup>29</sup> and recommends that it is rolled out with the necessary support for implementation in each high street, village, town and city centre that is prioritised for action by the relevant Local Council. The Department for Communities undertook to carry out pilots of the Living High Streets Craft Kit to test this Recommendation. The first pilot was conducted in Downpatrick and resulted in the launch of the Downpatrick Living High Streets Framework in September 2023.<sup>30</sup>

The second pilot project, to create the Shankill Living High Streets Framework, commenced in September 2024. To date it has delivered an intense series of community ‘Place’ and ‘Imagining’ workshops; seeking to understand the positive and negative aspects of the Greater Shankill area and how it can be improved. It is expected that the process will conclude in June 2025, when all findings will shape a Physical Development Framework and Action Plan. These ‘living’ documents will be ‘owned’ by the community who will oversee the implementation of the recommendations in the years to come.

This consultation will ask for your views on using the Living High Streets Craft Kit through Shaping Sustainable Places, where possible and appropriate, to develop community-led plans. Initial pilots have reported that the approach requires an intensive period of engagement, resourcing to support the process and the willingness of effective community leaders equipped to encourage participation and take ownership.

There are further insights included on the Living High Streets Initiative **website**.

**Recommendation 5** urges the Executive to prioritise the delivery of placemaking by developing and implementing an investment programme for blue-green infrastructure, cleaner and greener public realm and sustainable transport, and would require a significant capital budget to allow for implementation.

Whilst the Recommendations have not been adopted, or any budget allocated to this, Shaping Sustainable Places could go some way to delivering on Recommendation 5, and this consultation asks for your views on the proposals for a cross-departmental regeneration programme.

### Types of Intervention

The Department for Communities has at its disposal a range of interventions which it deploys to improve the attractiveness and competitiveness of environments and to stimulate private sector investment.<sup>31</sup>

- Revitalisation Projects
- Public Realm Improvements
- Environmental Improvement Schemes
- Comprehensive Development Schemes
- Creation of Business Improvement Districts
- Urban Development Grants

29 MAG - Living High Streets initiative | Department for Communities

30 Downpatrick Living High Streets Framework

31 Urban Regeneration and Community Development Policy Framework at pg.43.

It is proposed that Shaping Sustainable places interventions could include, but not be limited to, those that:

- Improve the quality and accessibility of footpaths and streetscapes
- Change streetscapes to create more room for pedestrians
- Improve streetlighting
- Improve signage
- Create or grow green spaces
- Provide shop front grants to local businesses
- Provide grants to bring buildings back into use
- Provide to create village, town or city-centre housing in mixed-use developments
- Deliver public art
- Provide grants which enable third party or private sector investment
- Building infrastructure that is more resilient to the effects of climate change
- Restore heritage assets

### Further Strategic Context

Other government policies that have impacted on the development of Shaping Sustainable Places, include Vital and Viable,<sup>32</sup> Living Places Urban Stewardship and Design Guide, the Regional Development Strategy,<sup>33</sup> Air Pollution in Northern Ireland 2022, the Housing Supply Strategy<sup>34</sup> and <sup>35</sup> the Department for Infrastructure's Strategic Framework.<sup>36</sup>

We have also sought to incorporate the Adapting to climate change – Progress in Northern Ireland,<sup>37</sup> the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework,<sup>38</sup> Tackling Rural Poverty & Social Isolation,<sup>39</sup> the draft Green Growth Strategy for Northern Ireland,<sup>40</sup> the Sub-Regional Economic Plan 2024,<sup>41</sup> Planning for the Future of Transport – Time for Change<sup>42</sup> and Heritage Enabled Regeneration in Towns<sup>43</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> Vital and Viable

<sup>33</sup> Regional Development Strategy 2035

<sup>34</sup> Housing Supply Strategy - A Home for Everyone

<sup>35</sup> Air Pollution in Northern Ireland 2022

<sup>36</sup> DfI Strategic Framework

<sup>37</sup> Adapting to climate change – Progress in Northern Ireland - Climate Change Committee

<sup>38</sup> EVAWG Strategic Framework

<sup>39</sup> Tackling Rural Poverty & Social Isolation – A New Framework

<sup>40</sup> A Green Growth Strategy for Northern Ireland

<sup>41</sup> Sub-Regional Economic Plan

<sup>42</sup> Planning for the future of Transport

<sup>43</sup> Heritage Enabled Regeneration in Towns

# 5. Data Protection

## Privacy, Confidentiality and Access to Consultation Responses

For this consultation, we may publish all responses except for those where the respondent indicates that they are an individual acting in a private capacity (e.g. a member of the public). All responses from organisations and individuals responding in a professional capacity may be published in full, however we will remove email addresses and telephone numbers.

For more information about what we do with personal data please see our consultation privacy notice. Your response, and all other responses to this consultation, may also be disclosed on request in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. However, all disclosures will be in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (UK) 2016/679.

If you wish your response to be treated as confidential it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential, so that this may be considered if the Department should receive a request for the information under

the Freedom of Information Act 2000 or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

No personal data is asked for or required during the survey. While we do not ask survey respondents to personally identify themselves; it may be possible, in a small number of cases, for individuals to be identifiable from a combination of responses. There is the potential that responders may in error disclose personal data in the free text boxes. For this reason, the Department for Communities will treat this data as personal data to be disregarded. The consultation will ask consultees if they are responding on behalf of an organisation and request the name of this organisation.

The answers submitted will be collated by Department for Communities employees to form a report which will be used to inform decisions on the shape and remit of the proposed Shaping Sustainable Places programme. It is intended that Consultation responses made will be published or made publicly available as part of a wider report unless a responder identifies themselves as responding as an individual acting in a private capacity.

## 6. Who are you?

**Q1: Please tell us if you are responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation. If you are responding on behalf of a business or organisation, please tell us the name of the organisation.**

- Individual
- Organisation

# 7. Vision and Principles

## Vision

Shaping Sustainable Places will contribute to Executive commitments to grow a globally competitive and sustainable economy, provide more housing, create safer communities and reform and transform public services.

Our vision is:

**To work with communities to address local challenges through funding interventions that deliver sustainable, people-centred places providing economic, social and environmental outcomes.**

**Q2: To what extent do you agree with the proposed vision for Shaping Sustainable Places?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q3: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ at Q2 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would expect to see in the vision statement?**

## Principles

These principles will support our vision and guide the interventions that will help transform places.

Strategic	Ensure interventions delivered through Shaping Sustainable Places focus on long-term impact rather than short-term fixes.
Sustainable	Respond to the changing needs of places by delivering interventions that address the economic, social and environmental sustainability of a place.
Integrated	Building partnerships, collaboration across and outside government to deliver the best possible interventions.
Participative	Empowering people and communities to be part of the regeneration of their place.

**Q4: To what extent do you agree with the proposed principles for Shaping Sustainable Places?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q5: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ at Q4 above, please tell us why and/ or what principles you would expect to guide interventions to help transform places?**

**Timeframe**

We believe that Shaping Sustainable Places needs to give a sufficiently long-

term commitment to enable partners, stakeholders and communities to engage, plan and invest in interventions to realise our vision. We have proposed an initial 10-year budget commitment to the Programme, with a midpoint review after 5 years.

**Q6: Do you agree with the timeframe proposed for Shaping Sustainable Places?**

- Yes
- No, it should be shorter
- No, it should be longer

**Q7: If you did not select ‘yes’ above, please tell us why you think the timeframe should be shorter or longer?**



## 8. Placemaking

Shaping Sustainable Places would require Local Councils, in partnership with local communities, to develop detailed plans for its prioritised places. These plans would be required to take a placemaking approach.

An effective placemaking process capitalises on a local community's assets, inspiration, and potential, and should result in the creation of quality public spaces that contribute to people's health, happiness, and well-being.<sup>44</sup>

**Q8: To what extent do you agree that Shaping Sustainable Places plans should be developed through a placemaking process?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q9: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q8 above, please tell us why and/ or how do you think plans should be developed?**

The Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment for Northern Ireland has co-designed a community-led approach to placemaking. This participatory approach brings people together to consider their local high streets, tackle common issues and enable places and communities to thrive.

The **Living High Streets Craft Kit** has two

parts: Part 1 which sets out the approach and Part 2 which has the tools to use this community-led approach. There are different ways to tailor using the Craft Kit to address variables such as: what stage you are at in making a plan, local capacity, and the scale and complexity of the place. The Ministerial Advisory Group can provide guidance and training to those using the Craft Kit. There is also other guidance available on the **Living High Streets Initiative webpage**.

**Q10: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Living High Streets Craft Kit would be a good approach to use to plan sustainable places?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q11: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q10 above, how do you think plans should be developed?**

A Placemaking approach will try to involve the Local Council, residents, representatives of statutory bodies, elected representatives, local business organisation representatives, local charity representatives, business owners and residents, in developing the plan for a place. It will also try to engage with a wide range of people in terms of their age, level of interest and perspectives.

<sup>44</sup> What is Placemaking? – Project for Public Spaces

Most of this activity is done on a voluntary basis, and can take several months, or longer, to complete. Initial pilots have reported that the approach requires an intensive period of engagement, resourcing to support the process and the willingness of effective community leaders equipped to encourage participation and take ownership. There are further insights included on the Living High Streets Initiative **website**.

**Q12: If your Local Council or community has already developed a plan for your place, to what extent do you agree or disagree that this existing plan should be used instead of developing a new plan using a placemaking approach?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q13: If your Local Council wanted to assess the level of community support for a plan or intervention for your local place, how would you expect them to engage with you? Pick as many options as apply.**

- Leaflet campaign to invite survey response
- Townhall style meeting
- Focus group of residents
- Online consultation and promotion
- Newspaper advertisement and promotion
- Drop-in clinic
- I would not want to be consulted
- Other

## 9. Ambitions and Objectives

Shaping Sustainable Places is focussed on Place, People, Planet and Partnership.

### Place

The Strategic Planning Policy Statement<sup>45</sup> sets out regional planning policies for Northern Ireland on town centres and retailing, economic development and development in rural areas.

Improving the places we love and ensuring they are sustainable into the future is the first and primary objective of the programme; to create places where people want to live, work, invest and visit.<sup>46</sup>

Addressing dereliction or vacancy can help to stimulate local economies and regenerate places for other uses. We recognise that renewal cannot be just about retail consolidation.<sup>47</sup> Creating economically sustainable places will depend on increasing the number of people for whom village, town and city centres are safe and attractive gathering points,<sup>48</sup> as well as commercial centres and safe neighbourhoods.

Our ambition is to make places more attractive by working with local communities to create people-centred, shared spaces through sustainable development, refurbishment and reuse of underutilised or unused assets, creating places that people want to live, work visit and invest.

We hope to achieve our ambition for Place through:

- Investing in public realm in village, town and city centres
- Increasing occupancy levels by vacant buildings or derelict sites coming back into use
- Creating more productive local economies

**Q14: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Investing in public realm in village, town and city centres” as an objective when focussing on Place?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q15: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Increasing occupancy levels by vacant buildings or derelict sites coming back into use” as an objective when focussing on Place?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

<sup>45</sup> Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS)

<sup>46</sup> Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most – at pg. 7

<sup>47</sup> High Street: How our town centres can bounce back from the retail crisis: Rudlin, Payne and Montague at pg 211.

<sup>48</sup> Draft ISNI Strategy - 2050

**Q16: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Creating more productive local economies” as an objective when focussing on Place?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q17: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ to Questions 14-16 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as alternatives for objectives for Place?**

**People**

Our second key objective is to prioritise the safety, health and wellbeing of people through regeneration and creation of people-centred accessible and inclusive places. Fundamentally we believe places are for people.

Our ambition is to shape places for human interaction making them accessible to more people, delivering safer streets, improving connections and enabling healthier habits and lives.

We hope to achieve our ambition for People through:

- Improving safety in village, town and city centres
- Creating more active and sustainable infrastructure and facilities
- Reducing car dominance

**Q18: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Improving safety in village, town and city centres” as an objective when focussing on People?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q19: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Creating more active and sustainable infrastructure and facilities” as an objective when focussing on People?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q20: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Reducing car dominance” as an objective when focussing on People?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q21: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ to Questions 18-20 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as alternatives for objectives for People?**

## Planet

Our third objective is to shape places to become more resilient to the risks and impacts of climate change. Across many built environments, there are well understood susceptibilities to extreme weather which can be mitigated and adapted through design and innovation, to protect people, businesses, homes and livelihoods, and to invest in long-term sustainable solutions for the future.

Our ambition is to shape sustainable and secure village, town and city centres and communities by investing in regeneration projects that mitigate against and adapt places to the impacts of climate change.

We hope to achieve our ambition for Planet through:

- Creating or growing existing green spaces
- Building infrastructure that is more resilient to the effects of climate change
- Ensuring buildings brought back into use are more energy efficient

### **Q22: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Creating or growing existing green spaces” as an objective when focussing on Planet?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

### **Q23: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Building infrastructure that is more resilient to the effects of climate change” as an objective when focussing on Planet?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

### **Q24: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Ensuring buildings brought back into use are more energy efficient” as an objective when focussing on Planet?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

### **Q25: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ to Questions 22-24 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as alternatives for objectives for Planet?**

## Partnership

Our fourth objective is that by working collaboratively across departments and through Local Councils, we will be able deliver a programme that is greater than the sum of its parts.

The Department for Communities (DfC), the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) have worked collaboratively to develop Shaping Sustainable Places. Since 2020, these three departments have worked in partnership with Local Councils to deliver two other major regeneration programmes:

- Capital Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Scheme<sup>49</sup>
- Covid Recovery Small Settlements Regeneration Programme<sup>50</sup>

**Q26: Do you feel the partnership working to deliver these previous regeneration schemes was successful?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

**Q27: What, if any, are your views on how these three departments worked collaboratively in partnership with Local Councils to deliver the previous regeneration schemes outlined above?**

Through Shaping Sustainable Places, we hope to coordinate more strategic and transformative capital investments, focussed on delivering outcomes and change. We hope to deliver flexibly, to learn from best practice and adapt to changes in the market and operating environment. If we succeed, the interventions delivered through Shaping Sustainable Places should be key to sustaining places economically, socially, environmentally and for people long into the future.

Our ambition is to work in partnership with Local Councils, other Departments, the voluntary and community sector, local communities and the private sector to deliver improved outcomes and share and benchmark best practices, funding, risks, responsibilities and opportunities.

**Q28: Do you think other partners should be involved in delivering Shaping Sustainable Places?**

- Yes
- No

**Q29: If you answered yes to Q28 above, please tell us which other partners do you think should be involved in delivering Shaping Sustainable Places?**

<sup>49</sup> Capital Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Scheme | Department for Communities

<sup>50</sup> Covid Recovery Small Settlements Regeneration Programme

# 10.Funding and Prioritisation

If approved, Shaping Sustainable Places would deliver a minimum of £150m of Executive funding over 10 years, £50m from each contributing department, i.e. DfC, DAERA and DfI. This would be allocated across all 11 Local Councils to deliver individual in partnership with the Department for Communities acting as the lead department. Local Councils will be asked to contribute a minimum of an additional 10% of the funding they receive.

Shaping Sustainable Places is intended to be scalable, so that if additional capital funding became available for regeneration, Local Councils could be asked to take forward additional plans to draw this funding down. We also hope to pursue opportunities to secure funding from non-Executive funders and will require match funding for some types of interventions from the private sector.

Feedback from Local Councils has indicated that more strategic regeneration interventions would be achievable if Executive departments could give security on indicative budget allocations in advance.

This contrasts with current arrangements, where it can be difficult to guarantee funding for specific projects into future years when annual budgets are uncertain.

**Q30: To what extent do you agree that the regeneration of villages, towns and city centres should be a long-term strategic priority, with security of funding, for the Northern Ireland Executive and Local Councils?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q31: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ at Q30 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as an alternative proposal for investing the limited funds available for regeneration?**

In addition to the core funding provided to all Local Councils to deliver Shaping Sustainable Places interventions, it is also proposed that there could be separate, complementary funding opportunities developed to tackle specific regeneration issues.

Local Councils would then bid to a specific fund through an application process, and the applications would be assessed, with the highest scoring applications funded. The ambition for a competitive funding approach is that it would encourage the development of creative and innovative solutions to the challenges faced.

One example could be a competitive fund to support regeneration initiatives for built-heritage assets in town and city centres.

**Q32: To what extent would you support the establishment of competitive funding opportunities to tackle specific regeneration issues?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q33: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ at Q32 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as an alternative proposal to drive innovation in regeneration?**

**Q34: Are there any specific regeneration issues or themes in your local area you feel could be tackled most effectively by the establishment of a competitive funding opportunity?**

It is recognised that the proposed funding for Shaping Sustainable Places will fall far short of the need of all villages, towns and city centres. It is proposed that Local Councils should be asked to consider the need across their areas in collaboration with local communities, and prioritise settlements for focused, strategic interventions in line with Shaping Sustainable Places ambitions and objectives.

**Q35: Please select from the list below your top 5 preferences that you consider to be the most important criteria when prioritising places for intervention through Shaping Sustainable Places?**

- Length of time since previous capital investment in public space
- Levels of vacancy
- Road safety
- Economic activity data
- Addressing economic market failure
- Access to services for residents of surrounding areas
- Potential to attract visitors and tourism
- Potential to leverage private sector investment
- Potential for people to meet and spend time
- Potential for increasing pedestrian areas
- Population size
- Air quality
- Impacts of extreme weather (eg flooding)
- Other



# 11.Centre First for Public Services

In relation to Town Centres and Retailing, the Strategic Planning Policy Statement notes its aim to support and sustain vibrant town centres across Northern Ireland through the promotion of established town centres as the appropriate first choice location of retailing and other complementary functions.<sup>51</sup>

Regeneration, where it is successful in catalysing increased tenancy or commercial activity in the locality, can help to sustain the local rates taxbase. Revenue generated from the rates system comprises 78% of local government revenue<sup>52</sup> and supplements around 4%<sup>53</sup> of the Northern Ireland Executive's spending power. This demonstrates the direct link between the sustainability of places and the funding of local services.

The High Street Task Force<sup>54</sup> strongly supported proposals to put important public services and amenities on the high street which are accessible by sustainable forms of transport. Whether these are libraries, healthcare facilities, places for education and community use, or simply more and better housing, these investment choices could help to create vibrant, people-focused places.

It has been stated that the withdrawal of public sector organisations and businesses has contributed to the decline

of high streets and centres.<sup>55</sup> Changes in retail behaviours and the use of office accommodation require us to think about how to use our centres differently to support and sustain remaining occupiers.

The Northern Ireland Executive departments and their delivery bodies and partners have a significant footprint of buildings and facilities across Northern Ireland, where people travel to for employment, services and support. At present, there is no requirement to consider the potential regeneration impacts on a place when making decisions about where to (re)locate public services outside of normal planning requirements.

DfC is interested in promoting the adoption of a Centre First Policy for the location of public sector jobs and services. The strategic location of these in centres could generate increased footfall and economic activity, whilst also creating better access to public transport for commuting employees and customers. This in turn may support a more resilient retail sector as well as creating demand for other services and restarting cycles of inward investment to existing and new businesses.<sup>56</sup>

The adoption of a Centre First for Public Service policy for the location of public services does not need to feature as an essential component of the Shaping

51 Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS)

52 Local government facts and figures: Northern Ireland - LGIU - NILGA 2021

53 The Public Finance in Northern Ireland: a comprehensive guide - Northern Ireland Fiscal Council

54 High Street task Force - Delivering a 21st Century High Street

55 Town centres: Position Statement, Welsh Government

56 Town centres: Position Statement, Welsh Government

Sustainable Places proposals. The concept is being included as part of this consultation due to its potential to deliver significant complementary regeneration benefits alongside Shaping Sustainable Places.

Questions 36 and 37 relate to a policy in development which is not central to the Shaping Sustainable Places Programme.

**Q36: To what extent would you support the adoption of a Centre First policy for the location of public sector jobs and services in Northern Ireland?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q37: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q36 above, please tell us why.**

# Annex A – Summary of questions

**Q1: Please tell us if you are responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation. If you are responding on behalf of a business or organisation, please tell us the name of the organisation.**

- Individual
- Organisation

**Q2: To what extent do you agree with the proposed vision for Shaping Sustainable Places?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q3: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ at Q2 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would expect to see in the vision statement?**

**Q4: To what extent do you agree with the proposed principles for Shaping Sustainable Places?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q5: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ at Q4 above, please tell us why and/ or what principles you would expect to guide interventions to help transform places?**

**Q6: Do you agree with the timeframe proposed for Shaping Sustainable Places?**

- Yes
- No, it should be shorter
- No, it should be longer

**Q7: If you did not select ‘yes’ above, please tell us why you think the timeframe should be shorter or longer?**

**Q8: To what extent do you agree that Shaping Sustainable Places plans should be developed through a placemaking process?**

Strongly Agree

- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q9: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q8 above, please tell us why and/ or how do you think plans should be developed?**

**Q10: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Living High Streets Craft Kit would be a good approach to use to plan sustainable places?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q11: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q10 above, how do you think plans should be developed?**

**Q12: If your Local Council or community has already developed a plan for your place, to what extent do you agree or disagree that this existing plan should be used instead of developing a new plan using a placemaking approach?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q13: If your Local Council wanted to assess the level of community support for a plan or a project for your local place, how would you expect them to engage with you? Pick as many options as apply.**

- Leaflet campaign to invite survey response
- Townhall style meeting
- Focus group of residents
- Online consultation and promotion
- Newspaper advertisement and promotion
- Drop-in clinic
- I would not want to be consulted
- Other

**Q14: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Investing in public realm in village, town and city centres” as an objective when focussing on Place?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q15: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Increasing occupancy levels by vacant buildings or derelict sites coming back into use” as an objective when focussing on Place?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q16: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Creating more productive local economies” as an objective when focussing on Place?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q17: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ to Questions 14-16 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as alternatives for objectives for Place?**

**Q18: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Improving safety in village, town and city centres” as an objective when focussing on People?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q19: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Creating more active and sustainable infrastructure and facilities” as an objective when focussing on People?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q20: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Reducing car dominance” as an objective when focussing on People?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q21: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ to Questions 18-20 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as alternatives for objectives for People?**

**Q22: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Creating or growing existing green spaces” as an objective when focussing on Planet?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q23: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Building infrastructure that is more resilient to the effects of climate change” as an objective when focussing on Planet?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q24: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Ensuring buildings brought back into use are more energy efficient” as an objective when focussing on Planet?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q25: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ to Questions 22-24 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as alternatives for objectives for Planet?**

**Q26: Do you feel the partnership working to deliver these previous regeneration schemes was successful?**

- Yes
- No
- Don’t Know

**Q27: What, if any, are your views on how these three departments worked collaboratively in partnership with Local Councils to deliver the previous regeneration schemes outlined above?**

**Q28: Do you think other partners should be involved in delivering Shaping Sustainable Places?**

- Yes
- No

**Q29: If you answered yes to Q28 above, please tell us which other partners do you think should be involved in delivering Shaping Sustainable Places?**

**Q30: To what extent do you agree that the regeneration of villages, towns and city centres should be a long-term strategic priority, with security of funding, for the Northern Ireland Executive and Local Councils?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q31: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q30 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as an alternative proposal for investing the limited funds available for regeneration?**

**Q32: To what extent would you support the establishment of competitive funding opportunities to tackle specific regeneration issues?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q33: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q32 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as an alternative proposal to drive innovation in regeneration?**

**Q34: Are there any specific regeneration issues or themes in your local area you feel could be tackled most effectively by the establishment of a competitive funding opportunity?**



**Q35: Please select from the list below your top 5 preferences that you consider to be the most important criterion when prioritising places for intervention through Shaping Sustainable Places?**

- Length of time since previous capital investment in public space
- Levels of vacancy
- Road safety
- Economic activity data
- Addressing economic market failure
- Access to services for residents of surrounding areas
- Potential to attract visitors and tourism
- Potential to leverage private sector investment
- Potential for people to meet and spend time
- Potential for increasing pedestrian areas
- Population size
- Air quality
- Impacts of extreme weather (eg flooding)
- Other

**Q36: To what extent would you support the adoption of a Centre First policy for the location of public sector jobs and services in Northern Ireland?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**Q37: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q36 above, please tell us why.**

# Annex B - Landing Page Text

## How to respond

This consultation will be hosted online at the following website: **<https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/dfc/shaping-sustainable-places-public-consultation>**. The Citizen Space website has been specially designed to be as user-friendly and welcoming as possible for those who wish to complete the consultation. It also allows DfC to rapidly collate results. For this reason, we would encourage anyone who is interested in responding to this consultation to utilise Citizen Space as the method of their response.

If this is not possible, you can however respond to this consultation via email to **[ssp@communities-ni.gov.uk](mailto:ssp@communities-ni.gov.uk)** or you can respond in writing to the following address:

Shaping Sustainable Places Programme Team

Regional Development Office

Department for Communities

8<sup>th</sup> Floor, Causeway Exchange

1-7 Bedford Street

Belfast

BT2 7EG

When responding via email or in writing, please state whether you are responding as an individual, or representing the views of an organisation (please state the name of the organisation). Please also quote the following reference in your response: “Shaping Sustainable Places Consultation”.

Responses must be received by 23.59 on Sunday 21 September 2025.

# Annex C – Privacy Notice

Data Controller Name: Department for Communities (DfC)

Address: Causeway Exchange, 1-7 Bedford Street, BELFAST, BT2 7EG

Email: **prs@communities-ni.gov.uk**

Telephone:

02890829129

Data Protection Officer Name: Karen McMullan

Telephone: 02890829200

Email: **DPO@Communities-ni.gov.uk**

Being transparent and providing accessible information to individuals about how we may use personal data is a key element of the **Data Protection Act (DPA)** and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR). The Department for Communities (DfC) is committed to building trust and confidence in our ability to process your personal information and protect your privacy.

## Purpose for processing

The Department is publishing an Equality Impact Assessment for consultation. The aim of the consultation is to seek evidence to inform the drafting of Regulations on circumstances where longer notice to quit periods would not apply (also referred to as exceptions).

We will process personal data provided in response to consultations for the purpose of informing the development of our policy, guidance, or other regulatory work in the subject area of the request for views. We will publish a summary of the consultation responses and, in some cases, the responses themselves but these will not contain any personal data. We will not publish the names, email addresses or contact details of respondents but will include the names of organisations responding.

If you have indicated that you would be interested in contributing to further Department work on the subject matter covered by the consultation, then we might process your contact details to get in touch with you.

## Lawful basis for processing

The lawful basis we are relying on to process your personal data is Article 6(1)(e) of the UK GDPR, which allows us to process personal data when this is necessary for the performance of our public tasks in our capacity as a Government Department.

We will only process any special category personal data you provide, which reveals racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious belief, health or sexual life/orientation when it is necessary for reasons of substantial public interest under Article 9(2)(g) of the UK GDPR, in the exercise of the function of the department, and to monitor equality.

## How will your information be used and shared

We process the information internally for the above stated purpose. We don't intend to share your personal data with any third party. Any specific requests from a third party for us to share your personal data with them will be dealt with in accordance the provisions of the data protection laws.

## How long will we keep your information

We will retain consultation response information until our work on the subject matter of the consultation is complete, and in line with the Department's approved Retention and Disposal Schedule (which can be accessed through: <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/dfc-disposal-records-schedule>

## What are your rights?

- You have the right to obtain confirmation that your data is being **processed, and access to your personal data**
- You are entitled to have personal data **rectified if it is inaccurate or incomplete**
- You have a right to have personal data **erased and to prevent processing**, in specific circumstances
- You have the right **to 'block' or suppress processing** of personal data, in specific circumstances
- You have the right to **data portability**, in specific circumstances
- You have the right to **object to the processing**, in specific circumstances
- You have rights in relation to **automated decision making and profiling**.

## How to complain if you are not happy with how we process your personal information

If you wish to request access, object or raise a complaint about how we have handled your data, you can contact our Data Protection Officer using the details above.

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If you are not satisfied with our response or believe we are not processing your personal data in accordance with the law, you can complain to the Information Commissioner at:

Information Commissioner's Office

Wycliffe House

Water Lane

Wilmslow

Cheshire SK9 5AF

**[casework@ico.org.uk](mailto:casework@ico.org.uk)**

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## Consultation on Shaping Sustainable Places

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**Ards and North Down Borough Council****Response to Shaping Sustainable Places Programme Consultation**

The Department for Communities, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and the Department for Infrastructure are proposing to co-fund a new regeneration programme - **Shaping Sustainable Places**

**Shaping Sustainable Places** aims to create a flagship programme of interventions to arrest the decline in our valued villages, towns, and city centre. Through more strategic interventions lead by communities the Departments hope to stimulate places and catalyse private sector activity to further protect them.

This is a significant Programme that the three departments will co-fund over a 10-year period, contributing a minimum of £5M each per year for investment in capital projects. A further minimum contribution of 10% (£15M) will be requested from Local Councils, creating an initial fund of £165M. However, the Programme would be scalable, and able to utilise additional funds for regeneration if they became available.

**Shaping Sustainable Places** lays the foundation for new ways of delivering regeneration outcomes, with the aim to engage communities at the earliest stages of planning for change, developing solutions to specific place-based challenges through funding local physical and infrastructure interventions.

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**Q1: Please tell us if you are responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation. If you are responding on behalf of a business or organisation, please tell us the name of the organisation.**

• Individual • **Organisation – Ards and North Down Borough Council**

## Vision and Principles

### Vision

Shaping Sustainable Places will contribute to Executive commitments to grow a globally competitive and sustainable economy, provide more housing, create safer communities and reform and transform public services.

Our vision is: To work with communities to address local challenges through funding interventions that deliver sustainable, people-centred places providing economic, social and environmental outcomes.

**Q2: To what extent do you agree with the proposed vision for Shaping Sustainable Places?**

• **Strongly Agree** • Agree • Neither Agree or Disagree • Disagree • Strongly Disagree

**Q3: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q2 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would expect to see in the vision statement?**

N/A

### Principles

These principles will support our vision and guide the interventions that will help transform places.

- Strategic - Ensure interventions delivered through Shaping Sustainable Places focus on long-term impact rather than short-term fixes.
- Sustainable - Respond to the changing needs of places by delivering interventions that address the economic, social and environmental sustainability of a place.
- Integrated - Building partnerships, collaboration across and outside government to deliver the best possible interventions.
- Participative - Empowering people and communities to be part of the regeneration of their place. Consultation on Shaping Sustainable Places



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**Q4: To what extent do you agree with the proposed principles for Shaping Sustainable Places?**

• **Strongly Agree** • Agree • Neither Agree or Disagree • Disagree • Strongly Disagree

**Q5: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q4 above, please tell us why and/ or what principles you would expect to guide interventions to help transform places?**

N/A

### Timeframe

We believe that Shaping Sustainable Places needs to give a sufficiently long-term commitment to enable partners, stakeholders and communities to engage, plan and invest in interventions to realise our vision. We have proposed an initial 10-year budget commitment to the Programme, with a midpoint review after 5 years.

**Q6: Do you agree with the timeframe proposed for Shaping Sustainable Places?**

• **Yes** • No, it should be shorter • No, it should be longer

**Q7: If you did not select 'yes' above, please tell us why you think the timeframe should be shorter or longer?**

N/A

### Placemaking

Shaping Sustainable Places would require Local Councils, in partnership with local communities, to develop detailed plans for its prioritised places. These plans would be required to take a placemaking approach. An effective placemaking process capitalises on a local community's assets, inspiration, and potential, and should result in the creation of quality public spaces that contribute to people's health, happiness, and well-being.

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**Q8: To what extent do you agree that Shaping Sustainable Places plans should be developed through a placemaking process?**

• Strongly Agree • Agree • Neither Agree or Disagree • Disagree • Strongly Disagree

**Q9: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q8 above, please tell us why and/ or how do you think plans should be developed?**

N/A

The Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment for Northern Ireland has co-designed a community-led approach to placemaking. This participatory approach brings people together to consider their local high streets, tackle common issues and enable places and communities to thrive. The Living High Streets Craft Kit has two parts: Part 1 which sets out the approach and Part 2 which has the tools to use this community-led approach. There are different ways to tailor using the Craft Kit to address variables such as: what stage you are at in making a plan, local capacity, and the scale and complexity of the place. The Ministerial Advisory Group can provide guidance and training to those using the Craft Kit. There is also other guidance available on the Living High Streets Initiative webpage.

**Q10: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Living High Streets Craft Kit would be a good approach to use to plan sustainable places?**

• Strongly Agree • Agree • Neither Agree or Disagree • Disagree • Strongly Disagree

**Q11: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q10 above, how do you think plans should be developed?**

N/A

A Placemaking approach will try to involve the Local Council, residents, representatives of statutory bodies, elected representatives, local business organisation representatives, local charity representatives, business owners and residents, in developing the plan for a place. It will also try to engage with a wide range of people in terms of their age, level of interest and perspectives. Consultation on Shaping Sustainable Places 17 Most of this activity is done on a voluntary basis, and can take several months, or longer, to complete. Initial pilots have reported that the approach requires an intensive period of engagement,

## Consultation on Shaping Sustainable Places

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resourcing to support the process and the willingness of effective community leaders equipped to encourage participation and take ownership. There are further insights included on the Living High Streets Initiative website.

**Q12: If your Local Council or community has already developed a plan for your place, to what extent do you agree or disagree that this existing plan should be used instead of developing a new plan using a placemaking approach?**

• **Strongly Agree** • Agree • Neither Agree or Disagree • Disagree • Strongly Disagree

**Q13: If your Local Council wanted to assess the level of community support for a plan or intervention for your local place, how would you expect them to engage with you?**

**Pick as many options as apply.**

• Leaflet campaign to invite survey response • Townhall style meeting • Focus group of residents • Online consultation and promotion • Newspaper advertisement and promotion • Drop-in clinic • I would not want to be consulted • Other

N/A

## Ambitions and Objectives

Shaping Sustainable Places is focussed on Place, People, Planet and Partnership.

### Place

The Strategic Planning Policy Statement<sup>45</sup> sets out regional planning policies for Northern Ireland on town centres and retailing, economic development and development in rural areas. Improving the places we love and ensuring they are sustainable into the future is the first and primary objective of the programme; to create places where people want to live, work, invest and visit.<sup>46</sup> Addressing dereliction or vacancy can help to stimulate local economies and regenerate places for other uses. We recognise that renewal cannot be just about retail consolidation.<sup>47</sup> Creating economically sustainable places will depend on increasing the number of people for whom village, town and city centres are safe and attractive gathering points,<sup>48</sup> as well as commercial centres and safe neighbourhoods. Our ambition is to make places more attractive by working with local communities to create people-centred, shared spaces through sustainable development, refurbishment and reuse of underutilised or unused assets, creating places that people want to live, work visit and invest. We hope to achieve our ambition for Place through:

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- Investing in public realm in village, town and city centres
- Increasing occupancy levels by vacant buildings or derelict sites coming back into use
- Creating more productive local economies

**Q14: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Investing in public realm in village, town and city centres” as an objective when focussing on Place?**

• Strongly Agree • Agree • Neither Agree or Disagree • Disagree • Strongly Disagree

**Q15: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Increasing occupancy levels by vacant buildings or derelict sites coming back into use” as an objective when focussing on Place?**

• Strongly Agree • Agree • Neither Agree or Disagree • Disagree • Strongly Disagree

**Q16: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Creating more productive local economies” as an objective when focussing on Place?**

• Strongly Agree • Agree • Neither Agree or Disagree • Disagree • Strongly Disagree

**Q17: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ to Questions 14-16 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as alternatives for objectives for Place?**

N/A

## People

Our second key objective is to prioritise the safety, health and wellbeing of people through regeneration and creation of people-centred accessible and inclusive places. Fundamentally we believe places are for people. Our ambition is to shape places for human interaction making them accessible to more people, delivering safer streets, improving connections and enabling healthier habits and lives. We hope to achieve our ambition for People through:

- Improving safety in village, town and city centres
- Creating more active and sustainable infrastructure and facilities
- Reducing car dominance

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**Q18: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Improving safety in village, town and city centres” as an objective when focussing on People?**

• **Strongly Agree** • Agree • Neither Agree or Disagree • Disagree • Strongly Disagree

**Q19: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Creating more active and sustainable infrastructure and facilities” as an objective when focussing on People?**

• **Strongly Agree** • Agree • Neither Agree or Disagree • Disagree • Strongly Disagree

**Q20: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Reducing car dominance” as an objective when focussing on People?**

• **Strongly Agree** • Agree • Neither Agree or Disagree • Disagree • Strongly Disagree

**Q21: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ to Questions 18-20 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as alternatives for objectives for People?**

N/A

## Planet

Our third objective is to shape places to become more resilient to the risks and impacts of climate change. Across many built environments, there are well understood susceptibilities to extreme weather which can be mitigated and adapted through design and innovation, to protect people, businesses, homes and livelihoods, and to invest in long-term sustainable solutions for the future. Our ambition is to shape sustainable and secure village, town and city centres and communities by investing in regeneration projects that mitigate against and adapt places to the impacts of climate change. We hope to achieve our ambition for Planet through:

- Creating or growing existing green spaces
- Building infrastructure that is more resilient to the effects of climate change
- Ensuring buildings brought back into use are more energy efficient

**Q22: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Creating or growing existing green spaces” as an objective when focussing on Planet?**

• **Strongly Agree** • Agree • Neither Agree or Disagree • Disagree • Strongly Disagree

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**Q23: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Building infrastructure that is more resilient to the effects of climate change” as an objective when focussing on Planet?**

• **Strongly Agree** • Agree • Neither Agree or Disagree • Disagree • Strongly Disagree

**Q24: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Ensuring buildings brought back into use are more energy efficient” as an objective when focussing on Planet?**

• **Strongly Agree** • Agree • Neither Agree or Disagree • Disagree • Strongly Disagree

**Q25: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ to Questions 22-24 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as alternatives for objectives for Planet?**

N/A

### Partnership

Our fourth objective is that by working collaboratively across departments and through Local Councils, we will be able deliver a programme that is greater than the sum of its parts. Consultation on Shaping Sustainable Places 21 The Department for Communities (DfC), the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) have worked collaboratively to develop Shaping Sustainable Places. Since 2020, these three departments have worked in partnership with Local Councils to deliver two other major regeneration programmes:

- Capital Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Scheme
- Covid Recovery Small Settlements Regeneration Programme

**Q26: Do you feel the partnership working to deliver these previous regeneration schemes was successful?**

• **Yes** • No • Don't Know

**Q27: What, if any, are your views on how these three departments worked collaboratively in partnership with Local Councils to deliver the previous regeneration schemes outlined above?**

The close collaboration and partnership between the various departments and the Council in delivering the COVID-19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme was instrumental in its success.

## Consultation on Shaping Sustainable Places

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The partnership model demonstrated numerous benefits such as increased efficiency in programme delivery and effectiveness in managing project issues.

The department's proactive approach and involvement demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting our towns, city and villages.

Working together allowed partners to leverage each other's strengths, share responsibilities and achieve the programme's objectives more effectively. Additionally, the partnership approach has built trust and mutual understanding, leading to better outcomes.

The tangible benefits and outcomes these programmes continue to deliver are evidenced through the positive post project evaluation processes supported by favourable public feedback.

Through Shaping Sustainable Places, we hope to coordinate more strategic and long-term transformative capital investments, focussed on delivering outcomes and change. We hope to deliver flexibly, to learn from best practice and adapt to changes in the market and operating environment. If we succeed, the interventions delivered through Shaping Sustainable Places should be key to sustaining places economically, socially, environmentally and for people long into the future. Our ambition is to work in partnership with Local Councils, other Departments, the voluntary and community sector, local communities and the private sector to deliver improved outcomes and share and benchmark best practices, funding, risks, responsibilities and opportunities.

**Q28: Do you think other partners should be involved in delivering Shaping Sustainable Places?**

• Yes • No

**Q29: If you answered yes to Q28 above, please tell us which other partners do you think should be involved in delivering Shaping Sustainable Places?**

- Partners listed above with an emphasis on youth engagement
- Department for Economy (Invest NI specifically)
- Tourism NI – Regional Hubs
- Heritage dimension
- Collaboration with housing providers
- Use of urban development grants
- Use of challenge funds
- Use of refurbishment and relocation grants
- Town Centre first policy for public services

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### Funding and Prioritisation

If approved, Shaping Sustainable Places would deliver a minimum of £150m of Executive funding over 10 years, £50m from each contributing department, i.e. DfC, DAERA and DfI. This would be allocated across all 11 Local Councils to deliver individual in partnership with the Department for Communities acting as the lead department. Local Councils will be asked to contribute a minimum of an additional 10% of the funding they receive. Shaping Sustainable Places is intended to be scalable, so that if additional capital funding became available for regeneration, Local Councils could be asked to take forward additional plans to draw this funding down. We also hope to pursue opportunities to secure funding from non-Executive funders and will require match funding for some types of interventions from the private sector. Feedback from Local Councils has indicated that more strategic regeneration interventions would be achievable if Executive departments could give security on indicative budget allocations in advance. This contrasts with current arrangements, where it can be difficult to guarantee funding for specific projects into future years when annual budgets are uncertain.

**Q30: To what extent do you agree that the regeneration of villages, towns and city centres should be a long term strategic priority, with security of funding, for the Northern Ireland Executive and Local Councils?**

• Strongly Agree • Agree • Neither Agree or Disagree • Disagree • Strongly Disagree

**Q31: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q30 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as an alternative proposal for investing the limited funds available for regeneration?**

N/A

In addition to the core funding provided to all Local Councils to deliver Shaping Sustainable Places interventions, it is also proposed that there could be separate, complementary funding opportunities developed to tackle specific regeneration issues. Local Councils would then bid to a specific fund through an application process, and the applications would be assessed, with the highest scoring applications funded. The ambition for a competitive funding approach is that it would encourage the development of creative and innovative solutions to the challenges faced. One example could be a competitive fund to support regeneration initiatives for built heritage assets in town and city centres.



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**Q32: To what extent would you support the establishment of competitive funding opportunities to tackle specific regeneration issues?**

• Strongly Agree • Agree • Neither Agree or Disagree • **Disagree** • Strongly Disagree

**Q33: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q32 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as an alternative proposal to drive innovation in regeneration?**

In our opinion, a competitive funding model risks undermining the principle of equitable regeneration opportunities.

We would suggest that funding opportunities, applications, and their assessment should be an equitable process which includes consideration to the alignment between the application rationale, needs of the Borough, and correlation to evidenced based feedback from residents (Town Advisory Groups or Rural Partnership Groups for example).

There is also a risk that a competitive funding process favours well resourced Council districts or areas, therefore potentially widening the gap of funding opportunities and deliverables between districts or areas.

Consideration may be given to a proportionate funding model based on population size and need, aligned with our Borough's Community Plan (The Big Plan), and Council's Corporate Plan, commitment to reducing inequality and supporting inclusive growth.

**Q34: Are there any specific regeneration issues or themes in your local area you feel could be tackled most effectively by the establishment of a competitive funding opportunity?**

N/A

It is recognised that the proposed funding for Shaping Sustainable Places will fall far short of the need of all villages, towns and city centres. It is proposed that Local Councils should be asked to consider the need across their areas in collaboration with local communities, and prioritise settlements for focused, strategic interventions in line with Shaping Sustainable Places ambitions and objectives.

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**Q35: Please select from the list below your top 5 preferences that you consider to be the most important criteria when prioritising places for intervention through Shaping Sustainable Places?**

- Length of time since previous capital investment in public space
- Levels of vacancy
- Road safety
- Economic activity data
- Addressing economic market failure
- Access to services for residents of surrounding areas
- Potential to attract visitors and tourism
- Potential to leverage private sector investment
- Potential for people to meet and spend time
- Potential for increasing pedestrian areas
- Population size
- Air quality
- Impacts of extreme weather (eg flooding)
- Other

- 1 – Potential to attract visitors and tourism
- 2 – Potential for people to meet and spend time
- 3 – Levels of vacancy
- 4 – Potential for increasing pedestrian areas
- 5 – Other - Infrastructure deterioration

### Centre First for Public Services

In relation to Town Centres and Retailing, the Strategic Planning Policy Statement notes its aim to support and sustain vibrant town centres across Northern Ireland through the promotion of established town centres as the appropriate first choice location of retailing and other complementary functions.

Regeneration, where it is successful in catalysing increased tenancy or commercial activity in the locality, can help to sustain the local rates taxbase. Revenue generated from the rates system comprises 78% of local government revenue and supplements around 4% of the Northern Ireland Executive's spending power. This demonstrates the direct link between the sustainability of places and the funding of local services. The High Street Task Force strongly supported proposals to put important public services and amenities on the high street which are accessible by sustainable forms of transport. Whether these are libraries, healthcare facilities, places for education and community use, or simply more and better housing, these investment choices could help to create vibrant, people-focused places. It has been stated that the withdrawal of public sector organisations and businesses has contributed to the decline of high streets and centres. Changes in retail behaviours and the use of office accommodation require us to think about how to use our centres differently to support and sustain remaining occupiers. The Northern Ireland Executive departments and their delivery bodies and partners have a

## Consultation on Shaping Sustainable Places

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significant footprint of buildings and facilities across Northern Ireland, where people travel to for employment, services and support. At present, there is no requirement to consider the potential regeneration impacts on a place when making decisions about where to (re)locate public services outside of normal planning requirements. DfC is interested in promoting the adoption of a Centre First Policy for the location of public sector jobs and services. The strategic location of these in centres could generate increased footfall and economic activity, whilst also creating better access to public transport for commuting employees and customers. This in turn may support a more resilient retail sector as well as creating demand for other services and restarting cycles of inward investment to existing and new businesses.

The adoption of a Centre First for Public Service policy for the location of public services does not need to feature as an essential component of the Shaping Sustainable Places proposals. The concept is being included as part of this consultation due to its potential to deliver significant complementary regeneration benefits alongside Shaping Sustainable Places.

Questions 36 and 37 relate to a policy in development which is not central to the Shaping Sustainable Places Programme.

**Q36: To what extent would you support the adoption of a Centre First policy for the location of public sector jobs and services in Northern Ireland?**

• Strongly Agree • **Agree** • Neither Agree or Disagree • Disagree • Strongly Disagree

**Q37: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q36 above, please tell us why.**

N/A

*End.*

Unclassified

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## ITEM 5

### Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	04 September 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Tourism
Date of Report	06 August 2025
File Reference	170871
Legislation	n/a
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Visit Belfast 12 Month Overview 2024/25 and 3 Year Partnership Proposal
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Overview Visual Examples of Visit Belfast 2024/25 Service Level Agreement Activity

### Background

Ards and North Down Borough Council (ANDBC) maintains an annual Regional Tourism Partnership (RTP) with Visit Belfast (VB) through a Service Level Agreement (SLA).

This partnership serves two primary purposes:

1. To facilitate collaboration between ANDBC, Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council, and Belfast City Council on tourism development and integrated working.
2. To deliver effective, value-for-money marketing and visitor servicing platforms tailored to each council area.

Through this SLA, ANDBC leverages Visit Belfast's significant audience reach and prominent presence at key visitor gateways, ensuring strong, year-round visibility of

Not Applicable

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the Borough's tourism offering to both international and domestic audiences. As one of only two partner councils (alongside Belfast), ANDBC benefits from a competitive advantage in showcasing the Borough's appeal as a short-break destination, just one hour from Belfast.

### Key Promotional and Servicing Benefits

- **Year-Round Promotion:** Ards and North Down content is consistently featured across Visit Belfast's digital and traditional platforms, including experiences, events, itineraries, and themed guides.
- **Visitor Servicing:** Support is provided at the Visit Belfast Welcome Centre and across 20+ transport hubs, with staff trained to present the ANDBC tourism offering.
- **Collaborative Campaigns:** Visit Belfast works closely with Council officers to amplify Borough messaging using its trade networks, consumer databases, and branded channels under the *Belfast Plus* brand.

A detailed report on activity is produced each year. Visual examples from the 2024/25 SLA are included in **Appendix 1**.

### Summary of SLA 2024/25 activity

#### Digital marketing

Ards and North Down content featured prominently on visitbelfast.com (2.3M annual visits), with 23 Borough locations showcased. More than 100k page views were generated from blog content featuring local staycations, walks and foodie guides.

#### Targeted Email Marketing

AND was included in 94 ezines reaching 1.28M consumers (30% open rate) and 10,228 trade contacts (44% open rate).

#### Leveraging VB's Social Reach

Over 100 posts promoting AND to VB's 465,000+ social media followers, including inspiring video content.

#### Promotional Literature

AND featured in the Belfast City and Region Guide (3 seasonal editions), visitor maps, and student guides (120,000 print run). 24,525 printed materials were distributed across VB sites

#### Presence at Visitor Gateways

Information displayed at VB Welcome Centre (VBWC), both NI airports, Lanyon Place and York Street stations, Titanic Belfast, motorway Appletree hubs, ferry terminals, and more dedicated campaign placements at the VBWC, including a 16-screen video wall, self-serve screens, and an 8-week promotional Event Island.

#### Industry Engagement

- Visit Belfast led familiarisation trips including a group of Canadian agents.
- Borough presence at quarterly briefings attended by 200+ tourism professionals.

Not Applicable

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- VB representation of AND at key trade events in the UK, Rol, Europe, and the USA; Council officers joined the VB team at World Travel Market.

### Visitor Servicing

- VB handled 13,379 AND specific visitor enquiries.
- As a partner Council had access to visitor servicing training webinars.
- Visitor servicing (in person/digital) is available 365 days a year.

### Strategic Tourism Partner

Visit Belfast remains a critical strategic partner, offering 24/7 promotion and visitor servicing. It strongly positions the Borough as an appealing visitor destination adjacent to Belfast City reaching a vast international audience and its significant investment digital in-house resources and infrastructure (including a new website launching in 2025) will further strengthen the reach it currently offers to partners:

- 2.3M+ annual website visits
- 465K+ social media followers
- 89K ezine subscribers
- 49M social media impressions

Visit Belfast is also a key delivery agent for major events such as Fleadh 2026–27, offering additional exposure and integrated working opportunities for RTP partners.

### Value for Money

The Council cannot independently match Visit Belfast's visitor reach through alternative marketing or trade channels. The partnership ensures sustained visibility in key markets, particularly the Republic of Ireland and international audiences.

Key points:

- Annual membership cost of £30,000 has remained unchanged since 2015, despite inflation-adjusted value now exceeding £51,000.
- Additional promotional space within the VB Welcome Centre secured for £6,500.
- A 2024 cost analysis showed that equivalent promotional activity would cost £60,000–£65,000 per year, at least 50% higher than current RTP investment.

With destination competition ever increasing, this partnership is an important way to keep Ards and North Down front of mind for potential visitors. To further elevate this, Visit Belfast is now proposing a more strategic 3-year model.

### Visit Belfast – Regional Tourism Partner Proposal Enhanced 3-Year Strategic Plan

In September 2024, it was reported that meetings were scheduled for the incoming year to discuss likely increased delivery costs for the RTP membership. In June and July 2025 officers met with Visit Belfast colleagues to discuss how the Council could best benefit from new opportunities and increased activity going forward. A proposal was further presented by VB to officers with a new enhanced RTP model that delivers all the current benefits of the existing SLA (promotional and visitor servicing model), but with a more brand-led, digitally driven strategic approach and featuring

Not Applicable

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an additional Grand Central Visitor Hub presence to further elevate the Borough's profile.

## Key Enhancements

### 1. New strategic marketing approach

Repositioning of the Belfast Region will ensure additional promotion of AND as a unique short-break destination that complements Belfast with additional presence across all VB platforms.

### 2. Digital-Driven Marketing Partnership

Visit Belfast has significantly enhanced its digital capabilities by doubling its marketing team and launching a new web platform. This allows RTP partners to benefit from additional digital campaigns that will run across social media, email, and web – further boosting Ards and North Down's online profile as a visitor destination.

### 3. Enhanced presence for AND based tourism providers including extra support for new/ emerging tourism businesses

Council will support up to five startup or micro tourism businesses with funded Visit Belfast partnership listings (local criteria to be determined). A further new membership initiative will encourage wider participation from AND-based providers.

### 4. Targeted business development activity for travel trade to maximise potential

- Engagement events for with 15 high-potential trade contacts
- Dedicated familiarisation trip for key buyers
- New annual Meet the Trade event (6–8 tourism buyers) for RTP members
- Dedicated trade ezine to over 2k contacts

### 5. New High-Impact Welcome Hub at Grand Central Station

- The offer includes exclusive access for partners to the dedicated Welcome Hub at Belfast's Grand Central Station featuring:
- Four digital displays and a large LED screen
- Staffed by Visit Belfast and Translink with strong knowledge of AND
- Four Borough promotional animations annually
- Grand Central sees 20M journeys per year and 15 daily Dublin trains
- RoI visitor numbers grew 46% in 2023
- Equivalent display advertising value estimated at £102,000/year

This hub delivers exceptional value for money giving the Council prime, continuous visibility and an opportunity to inspire visitors arriving from RoI to explore and stay in the Borough.

## Budget

In September 2023, the Council approved £30,000 per annum RTP funding for 2024/25 and 2025/26 with an additional £6,000 per annum for Belfast Welcome

Not Applicable

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Centre space. To continue with the local authority membership the new proposed investment is as follows:

- £81,500 per annum
- 3-year term: 2026/27, 2027/28, and 2028/29

The equivalent independent cost is estimated at £162,000 per year.

*(Estimated independent costs based on independent purchase of Visit Belfast marketing opportunities and equivalent in station advertising options at Grand Central Station)*

The same proposal has been issued to Lisburn City and Castlereagh Council.

### **Conclusion**

Visit Belfast continues to be a high-performing, high value, strategic tourism partner for ANDBC. In 2024/25, the SLA delivered strong, multi-channel exposure and robust visitor servicing that would be unachievable by the Council alone. The promotional value exceeds the cost, with proven results in audience reach, campaign engagement, and trade development.

The proposed enhanced 3-year RTP offers a timely opportunity to build further on the success of a 20-year partnership. With improved strategic positioning, digital visibility, and travel trade engagement, as well as exclusive year-round presence at a key visitor gateway, the new model represents strong value for money to ensure that Ards and North Down is front of mind to potential visitors from international markets.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Council approves the enhanced Visit Belfast RTP proposal and the development of an associated Service Level Agreement at £81,500 per annum for years 2026/27, 2027/2028 and 2028/29, subject to the rates setting process.



Sept 2025



Ards and  
North Down  
Borough Council

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# Appendix 1

Visit Belfast Regional Tourism Partnership  
(RTP) Promotional Activity

Overview Visual Examples Summary 2024/5 SLA



# Visit Belfast RTP

## Key Digital Channels Promotional Activity

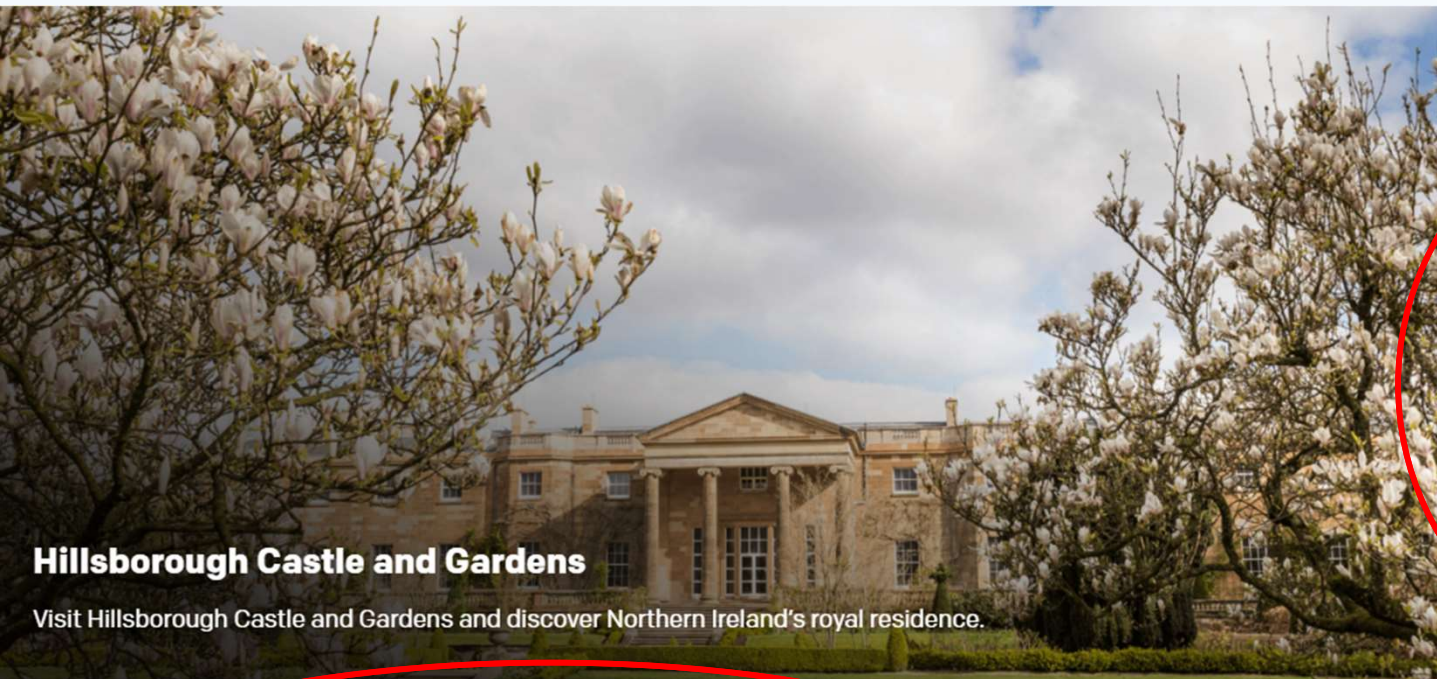
Ards and North Down Borough Council  
[www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk](http://www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk)



# Web Dedicated City Region Promotion

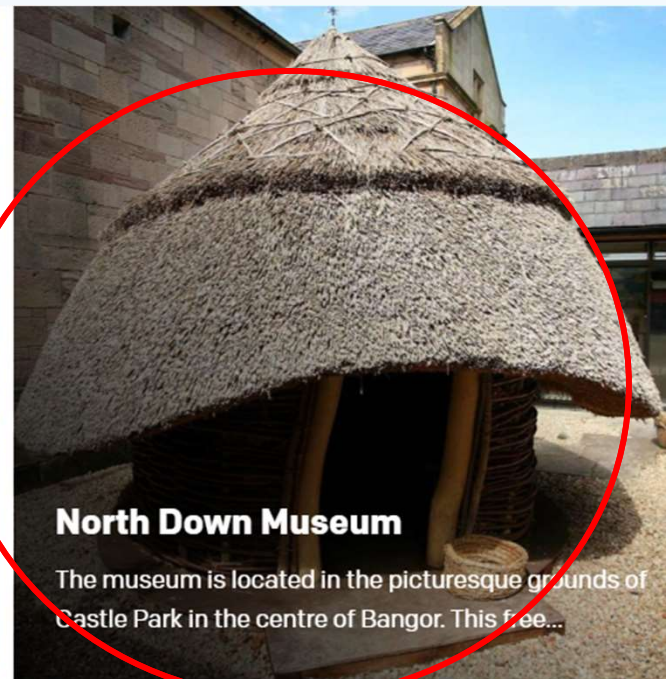
**2.3 million** visits Visit Belfast website per year

23 Borough locations featured, 102,564 blog page views



**Hillsborough Castle and Gardens**

Visit Hillsborough Castle and Gardens and discover Northern Ireland's royal residence.



**North Down Museum**

The museum is located in the picturesque grounds of Castle Park in the centre of Bangor. This free...



**Mount Stewart**



**Ulster Folk Museum**



**Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum**



**Hinch Distillery Tours**



Ards and North Down Borough Council  
www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk



# Web Dedicated City Region Promotion

Dedicated Ards and North Down itineraries in Belfast Plus – City Region section

## Day Trip to North Down, Strangford Lough & Ards Peninsula

Explore everything this area has to offer.

[READ MORE](#)



[visitBelfast](#)

- WHAT'S ON
- SEE & DO
- EAT & DRINK
- IDEAS
- STAY
- PLAN
- OFFERS
- NEIGHBOURHOODS
- GAME OF THRONES

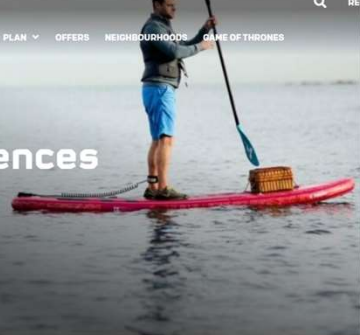
[Home](#) > [Ideas and Inspiration](#) > [Blog](#) >
 

## Ards & North Down Experiences

Discover the unique and fun experiences taking place in Ards and North Down.

SHARE: [f](#) [t](#) [in](#)

LAST UPDATED  
28 April 2022



Take in the natural beauty of Ards and North Down's countryside, encounter water's edge wonders, fun activities, beautiful walks and new experiences.



BLOG - BELFAST PLUS

### Summer Walks

With warmer days and longer evenings, it's a great time to step outside and enjoy beautiful parks and...



BLOG - BELFAST PLUS

### Amazing Outdoor Spaces

Take a day trip and discover the stunning parks, enchanting woodland and coastal scenery in Belfast and



BLOG - BELFAST PLUS

### Summer Hotel Escapes

Book a Giant Summer Escape. With unbeatable offers on hotels and spa's in Belfast and further afield, find...



BLOG - BELFAST PLUS

### Autumn Half-Term Break

Looking for things to see and do with the kids this autumn half-term? We've rounded up the top...



Ards and North Down Borough Council  
www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk



# Visit Belfast E-zines Featuring AND

- AND was included in 94 ezines reaching 1.28M consumers (30% open rate) and 10,22 trade contacts (44% open rate)
- Included in weekly concierge e-zines (as appropriate) sent to 313 hospitality/ accommodation trade contacts across NI

Inbox

What's On This Weekend

**Comber Earlies Food Festival**  
Saturday 22 June  
**Comber Leisure Centre Carpark**  
Enjoy a wonderful day out filled with family fun, cookery demos in the Festival Kitchen and activities that celebrate the Comber Earlies potato which holds PGI Status.

Read More

Inbox

What's On This Weekend

**Your What's On Guide**

Here's the latest on what you can see and do in the Belfast City Region this weekend. For more information on what's on this weekend, visit the 'What's On' section on our website.

Read More

**Weekend Highlights**

**Ards International Guitar Festival**  
Until Sunday 21 April

Day Trip to North Down, Strangford Lough & Ards Peninsula

**The Echlinville Distillery**  
Ireland's first farm distillery, crafting award winning whiskey, gin and poitin from the ground up, with excellence Instilled in every drop.

Read More

**Ulster Folk Museum**  
Step back one hundred years and discover the traditions and heritage of Ulster's past at Ulster Folk Museum.

Read More

**Exploris Aquarium & Seal**

**Strangford Lough Activity Centre**

**Family Fun Activities Beyond Belfast**



Ards and North Down Borough Council

[www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk](http://www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk)



## Visit Belfast Social Media Content Featuring AND

- Over 100 posts promoting AND to VB's 465,000+ social media followers
- VB social media team created engaging video content featuring AND locations
- Strong engagement between @VisitBelfast and @VisitAND channels

**Visit Belfast**
9h · 🌐

Are you planning to visit a pumpkin patch this year? 🍂

Halloween Pumpkin patch at [The Ark Open Farm](#)  
Pumpkin Forest & Gruffalo Walk at [Colin Glen](#)  
Haunted pumpkin patch at [Montalto Estate](#)  
Pumpkin patch at [BallyBurren](#)

Soak up the autumn vibes and find the perfect pumpkin for carving! 🍂 Find a pumpkin patch near you >> [vstbelfast.com/pumpkin-patches-in-belfast](http://vstbelfast.com/pumpkin-patches-in-belfast)

**Visit Belfast**
11h · 🌐

Exciting adventures await this half-term in Belfast! 🌟 👨‍👩‍👧‍👦

Looking for fun-filled activities to keep the little ones entertained? From Mudfest at [WWT Castle Espie](#) [Wetland Centre](#) to Multiverse Mayhem at [W5 Belfast](#) & lots more, we've rounded up the best family-friendly events happening this half-term! ✨

Plan your perfect day out now ➡️ [vstbelfast.com/whats-on-this-half-term](http://vstbelfast.com/whats-on-this-half-term)

#VisitBelfast

**Visit Belfast**
Reels · 5h · 🌐

The perfect spring day activity for the whole family 🌟 🐑  
... See more



# Visit Belfast AND RTP

## Key Traditional Channels of Marketing Activity



# Promotional Literature

# Visitor Maps

120,000 total VB print run

PLUS 24,525 printed materials were distributed across VB sites







# Visit Belfast RTP

Ards and North Down year-round promotion at key visitor touchpoints including Belfast City Centre Welcome Centre and airports.

Key campaigns gain prominent promotion

Ards and North Down Borough Council  
www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk



## Prominent Displays and Info at 20 Visitor Gateways

**Prime Year – round visibility for Ards and North Down**

### City Centre VB Welcome Centre (opp.City Hall)

- digital window screens, promotional display area, in-store digital screens
- 8 key council-led campaigns promoted
- 8-week focussed council event promotion

### RTP partner information available at interactive digital displays:-

Including both NI airports, Lanyon Place and York Street stations, motorway Appletree hubs, ferry terminals, Titanic Belfast and more.





## Key Highlights 2024/5 Regional Tourism Partnership

### **2.3 million visits Visit Belfast website per year**

23 Borough locations featured, 102,564 blog page views

### **VB Ezines – AND included in 94 ezines**

- 1.28M consumers (30% open rate) and 10,228 trade contacts (44% open rate)
- Included in weekly concierge e-zines to 313 trade contacts across NI

### **Large social audience reached**

- Over 100 posts promoting AND to VB's 465,000+ social media followers

### **Promotional literature featuring AND**

- 120,000 total VB print run
- All available in digital and print formats

**Out of home - AND promoted in prime prominence locations at 20 visitor gateways**



# Ards and North Down Borough Council

Unclassified

89

## ITEM 6

### Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	04 September 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Regeneration
Date of Report	14 August 2025
File Reference	160121
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Update on Kircubbin Harbour
Attachments	N/A

#### Background

Members may recall a deputation by the Kircubbin and District Community Association to Committee on 13 June 2024, in which a request was made of the Council to consider purchasing Kircubbin Harbour.

Subsequently, an update report was provided at the Committee meeting in September 2024 that outlined the following four key points for consideration, those points are summarised below.

#### 1. Ownership

The harbour is privately owned and therefore the Council has no remit, responsibility, or influence on its use or state of repair. Additionally, the seabed is owned by the Crown Estate and therefore any potential work completed on the harbour by the Council would firstly be dependent on a willingness by the owner to sell the harbour to the Council, and a potential agreement between Crown Estates and Council if the seabed was included in the works.

Not Applicable

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**2. Current state of repair**

The harbour's current state of repair is widely accepted as being of a poor standard. This is evidenced in a Structural Report completed on 16 December 2015 by Mann Williams Consulting Civil and Structural Engineers on behalf of the DoE NI. The report details sections of the harbour that had collapsed or were unstable at the time of the report. Additionally, multiple sites of erosion, voids of large sections of the walls, and a collapsed section of the parapet wall were some of the noted required remedial works in four locations within the harbour. Estimated costs of repair at that time were £177,351.

A full structural engineer's report would be required to enable the Council to give consideration for a potential purchase of the harbour inclusive of estimated costs to repair the harbour to a safe standard.

**3. Potential demand for harbour usage**

As part of the decision-making process an assessment of the potential operational and strategic use, and demand, of the harbour should be completed. For example, it is anticipated that nearby access points to the water and established sailing clubs (Kircubbin, Portaferry and Newtownards) provide opportunities for residents and visitors to enjoy water-based activities. A potential challenge for usage capabilities of the harbour is noted in the Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland Accessibility Report 2018. Details are provided of the tidal nature of Kircubbin bay and the significant number of mud flats at low tide, indicating that full time use of the harbour, unlike other harbours within the Borough, would be unfeasible.

**4. Rationale**

As with any Outline Business Case or Full Business Case (OBC or FBC) informed consideration and evidence of clear rationale on the expenditure must be provided. Additionally, an alignment to the Council's objectives should be evidenced, for example the Corporate Plan 2024 – 2028 or Big Plan 2017 – 2032. Budget would be required to undertake an OBC/FBC. Furthermore, any future capital expenditure will also need to be reviewed in line with the Council's Capital Expenditure process.

The following was agreed at September's Committee meeting:

1. Officers contact the owner, via their legal representative, to make enquires on the current ownership status of the harbour and to advise that for the Council to consider the request further a structural engineer's report as outlined is required.
2. Writes or meets with representatives of Kircubbin and District Community Association to advise of the Council's decision and the process for going forward.

**Update**

1. As agreed, communications were sent to the named owner of the harbour's solicitor asking for confirmation if their client was the registered and sole owner of Kircubbin harbour. A combination of emails and letters were sent on:

Not Applicable

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- 15 October 2024
- 30 October 2024
- 4 December 2024
- 21 January 2025

However, following an initial reply from the solicitor on 21 October 2024 asking for a clarification of the request, no further response was received from the solicitor.

After communications with Kircubbin and District Community Association on ownership status a letter was received on 22 February 2025 stating it was from the owner and that they were the legal owner of the harbour and remained willing to dispose of the harbour for a nominal consideration.

A letter of reply was subsequently sent to the owner stating that in order for the Council to make an informed decision on any potential purchase of the harbour, a structural engineers report detailing the current state of repair of the harbour, including estimated costs of repair, should be commissioned and then submitted to the Council.

The owner contacted an officer by telephone stating that he would be unlikely to submit a structural engineers report.

2. Communications have been ongoing between Regeneration and Kircubbin and District Community Association. The Association contacted the owner and confirmed that sufficient funds had been raised from within the community to pay for the survey costs in full.

Structural Engineers were appointed by the Association to conduct a full survey on the harbour. The same company completed the previous survey in 2015 and supplied the itemised costs of repairs (£177,350 correct as of March 2016).

As far as officers are aware, the survey process is ongoing at the harbour and the Association will provide the owner with the survey once received.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Council notes this update and agrees for this matter to be paused until the full structural engineers report inclusive of anticipated repair costs is submitted by the owner of the harbour, as per the Council's decision, with an assurance of the report's findings.

Unclassified

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## ITEM 7

**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	04 September 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Regeneration
Date of Report	12 August 2025
File Reference	REG12
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Regeneration Working Up Projects 2025/26
Attachments	N/A

**Background**

Members may be aware that the Regeneration Service has an annual allocation of £200K for the development of 'working up' projects (£100K urban and £100K rural).

With the recent announcement of the proposed 'Shaping Sustainable Places' Programme, officers have carefully selected projects for the 2025/26 period that align with the programme objectives to effectively prepare the urban and rural areas for this funding programme. The Shaping Sustainable Places Programme aims to create a flagship programme of interventions to arrest the decline in our valued village, town and city centres. Through more strategic interventions led by communities the programme hopes to stimulate place making and catalyse private sector activity.

In addition, the proposed projects support the delivery of the town and city masterplans and village plans, whilst recognising and supporting relevant Council priorities, outcomes, and strategies. Furthermore, the proposed projects are in addition to the 2025/26 Urban Regeneration Programme and in addition to the Strategic



Not Applicable

93

Development's projects planned for Bangor and Newtownards as was previously reported and agreed.

### Project Plan 2025/26

Project	Location	Strategic Alignment	Approx. Value	Delivery Method/ Timescale
Study to identify the level of vacancy and dereliction within the commercial areas/ Main Streets of each Village.	Rural – all villages	<b>Corporate Plan</b> Economic Priority – increase economic growth  Outcome 4 – a vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors  <b>Village Plans Priority</b> Address Vacancy and Dereliction  <b>The Big Plan</b> Outcome 4 - All people in Ards and North Down benefit from a prosperous economy.	£30,000	Tender Appointment in January 2026  Completion 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2026
Concept design for a Ballyhalbert Environmental Improvement Scheme	Rural - Ballyhalbert	<b>Corporate Plan</b> Economic Priority – increase economic growth  Outcome 4 – a vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors  <b>Village Plans</b> Theme – Connectivity  Priority – Pedestrian Routes, Access and Safety   Public Realm  <b>The Big Plan</b> Outcome 5 - All people in Ards and North Down feel pride as they have access to a well-managed sustainable environment.	£25,000	Quotation Appointment in November 2025  Public Engagement early 2026  Completion 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2026
Completion of the Concept Design for Ballywalter Environmental Improvement Scheme	Rural – Ballywalter	<b>Corporate Plan</b> Economic Priority – increase economic growth  Outcome 4 – a vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors	£10,000  (£5,000 under 2024/25 budgets)	Ongoing – Public Engagement September 2025

Not Applicable

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		<b>Village Plans</b> Theme – Safe and Accessible Streets  <b>The Big Plan</b> Outcome 5 - All people in Ards and North Down feel pride as they have access to a well-managed sustainable environment.		Completion expected December 2025
Completion of the Concept Design for Helen's Bay Environmental Improvement Scheme	Rural – Helen's Bay	<b>Corporate Plan</b> Economic Priority – increase economic growth  Outcome 4 – a vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors  <b>Village Plans</b> Theme – Safe Streets  <b>The Big Plan</b> Outcome 5 - All people in Ards and North Down feel pride as they have access to a well-managed sustainable environment.	£10,000  (£5,000 under 2024/25 budgets)	Ongoing Public Engagement September 2025  Completion expected December 2025
Concept Design for a Lighting Scheme in Groomsport	Rural – Groomsport	<b>Corporate Plan</b> Outcome 5 – safe, welcoming and inclusive communities that are flourishing   opportunities for people to be active and healthy  <b>Village Plans</b> Theme – Promote and Protect Priority, Infrastructure Improvements  <b>The Big Plan</b> Outcome 5 – All people in Ards and North Down feel pride as they have access to a well-managed sustainable environment.	£10,000	Quotation Appointment November  Public Engagement early 2026  Completion 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2026
Study to look at possible options for Electrical Vehicle	Rural – all villages	<b>Corporate Plan</b>	£15,000	Quotation Appointment

Not Applicable

95

Charging Points in the rural communities		<p>Environmental Priority – reduce carbon emissions as we transition to net zero</p> <p>Outcome 2 - an environmentally sustainable Council and Borough</p> <p><b>The Big Plan</b> Outcome 5 – All people in Ards and North Down feel pride as they have access to a well-managed sustainable environment.</p>		<p>November 2025</p> <p>Completion 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026</p>
Study to identify the level of vacancy and dereliction within the town centre boundary of Donaghadee, Comber and Holywood	Urban – Donaghadee, Comber and Holywood	<p><b>Corporate Plan</b> Economic Priority – increase economic growth</p> <p>Outcome 4 – a vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors</p> <p><b>The Big Plan</b> Outcome 4 - All people in Ards and North Down benefit from a prosperous economy.</p>	£20,000	<p>Tender Appointment January 2026</p> <p>Completion 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026</p> <p>(include within the Rural Study tender package)</p>
Study to identify opportunities to develop the night-time economy in Newtownards Town Centre	Urban – Newtownards	<p><b>Corporate Plan</b> Economic Priority – increase economic growth</p> <p>Outcome 4 – a vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors</p> <p><b>Masterplan</b> Priority – Streets for All</p> <p><b>The Big Plan</b> Outcome 4 – All people in Ards and North Down benefit from a prosperous economy.</p>	£25,000	<p>Quotation Appointment November</p> <p>Public Engagement early 2026</p> <p>Completion 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026</p>
Study to identify opportunities to further develop the tourism offering of Donaghadee (experiences, attractions and accommodation)	Urban – Donaghadee	<p><b>Corporate Plan</b> Economic Priority – increase economic growth</p> <p>Outcome 4 – a vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors</p>	£25,000	<p>Quotation Appointment November</p> <p>Public Engagement early 2026</p>

Not Applicable

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		<b>Masterplan</b> Priority – Destination Donaghadee  <b>The Big Plan</b> Outcome 4 – All people in Ards and North Down benefit from a prosperous economy.		Completion 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2026
Creation of a Database for each town/city that will provide an up-to-date Business Directory and contact details for the purposes of communicating directly to the businesses on regeneration matters	Urban – All towns and city	<b>Corporate Plan</b> Outcome 1 – an engaged Borough with citizens and businesses who have opportunities to influence the delivery of services, plans and investment	£20,000	Quotation Appointment November  Completion 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2026

Total investment: £190,000 (£10,000 contingency)

## RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council approves the delivery of the projects outlined above.

Unclassified

97

## ITEM 8

### Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	04 September 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Regeneration
Date of Report	13 August 2025
File Reference	RDP14
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	The Creative Cabinet Canvas Project
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Council owned Cabinet Boxes

#### Background

As Members may recall, Notice of Motion 650 submitted by Councillor Ashe and Councillor McCollum tasked officers with returning a report on a proposed 'Utility Canvas' project which:

- Identifies suitable utility cabinets which could be prospective 'canvas sites' for local art,
- Identifies prospective local artists who could participate in the project, with the input of the Council Arts Officer; and
- Identifying any external sources of funding.

#### The Creative Cabinet Canvas

It is proposed to deliver a pilot 'Creative Cabinet Canvas' Project throughout the city and town centres which will transform utility cabinets into creative and vibrant expressions that reflect local history and heritage.

The project seeks to achieve the following objectives:

Not Applicable

98

- Enhance the environment / streetscape of our towns and city
- Engage and upskill local artists
- Celebrate local history and heritage
- Assist to reduce graffiti turning utility cabinets into vibrant and visually appealing artwork
- Community engagement

Members will be aware that funding of £10,045 has been secured from the Department for Communities (DfC) under the Urban Regeneration Programme for the delivery of this project.

Officers have conducted a review to identify the quantity and locations of utility cabinets within each town and city. As expected, there is a high quantity of utility cabinets in each location, both Council owned, and utility company owned.

It is proposed the project will initially be delivered as a pilot programme focused on Council owned utility cabinets in urban centres, utilising the DfC funding stream to demonstrate the concept and impact as outlined in Appendix 1.

Following the successful implementation, it is proposed the Council apply to the Openreach Cabinet Art Scheme when it reopens for applications, aiming to expand the initiative throughout both urban and rural areas, incorporating a broader range of utility cabinets.

### **The Belfast Canvas Project**

The Belfast Canvas Project delivered by Belfast City Council, in conjunction with the Department for Communities and Virgin Media, demonstrates the successful outcomes in transforming utility cabinets. The initiative was based on a Dublin model, Dublin Canvas, which saw the transformation of utility boxes across Dublin City.

The Belfast Canvas Project commenced in 2019. Belfast City Council partnered with Cathedral Quarter BID and Belfast One BID to commission Seedhead Arts as the leading organisation. Daisy Chain Inc took over the project in 2022. The project recently completed its fifth phase in 2024 with over 100 utility cabinets completed to date. The project provided an opportunity for established artists along with less experienced artists to showcase their talents. Street art workshops were held to upskill less experienced artists. The initiative has brought vibrancy and animation to the city and is supported by an interactive map for visitors.

### **Project Delivery**

Officers propose implementing the Belfast City Council model by inviting interested art organisations to submit a proposal to deliver the Creative Cabinet Canvas Project.

The selected organisation will be responsible for overseeing the project implementation and delivery, utilising both established and less experienced local artists, and ensuring alignment with the initiative's objectives. This approach aims to harness and upskill local talent whilst ensuring creative quality.

The selected organisation will be required to:

1. Artist Call Out (prioritisation of artists within the Borough)

Not Applicable

99

2. Artist Design and Selection (include panel assessment of submitted designs)
3. Delivery (to include all preparation works)

In addition to the above, the selected organisation will be required to –

- Demonstrate community engagement
- Engage in any organised publicity coverage

It is suggested that the project includes a variety of styles such as abstract, graffiti inspired, monochrome, minimalistic, and contemporary with the aim to create curiosity and stimulate public engagement with thought-provoking pieces. This will create a dynamic visual landscape that encourages the public to explore.

The project will be overseen by the Regeneration Service with representation from Arts and Tourism on the assessment panel.

It is proposed to open for expressions of interest from Monday 6th October 2025, closing for responses on Friday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2025, with assessment and appointment week beginning 20<sup>th</sup> October 2025.

The completion date will be no later than 1<sup>st</sup> March 2026 (in line with the funding requirements).

## RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council approves the proposed 'Creative Cabinet Canvas' Project.

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## APPENDIX 1

### The Creative Cabinet Canvas Project

#### Council owned cabinet boxes



Main Street, Bangor



Main Street, Bangor





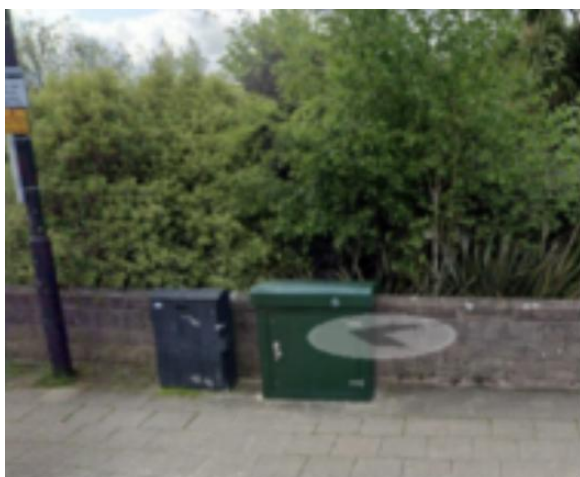
Lower Main Street, Bangor



Lower Main Street, Bangor



High Street, Bangor



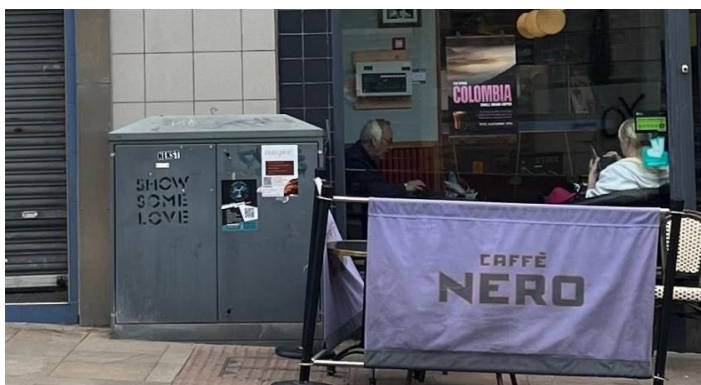
Entrance to McKee Clock Arena, Bangor



North Pier Gate, Bangor



Lower Main Street, Bangor



Lower Main Street, Bangor



Upper Main Street, Bangor



Conway Square, Newtownards





Hibernia Street, Holywood



Redburn Square, Holywood



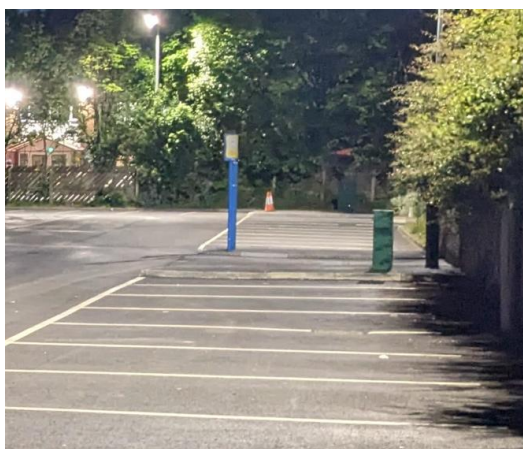
Subway entrance (green cabinet), Holywood



Shore Street, Donaghadee



Lemon's Wharf, Donaghadee



Comber Leisure Centre car park/ event space x2



The Square, Comber

Unclassified

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## ITEM 9

**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	04 September 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Regeneration
Date of Report	14 August 2025
File Reference	RDP245
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Bangor Art Sculptures update
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Proposed and approximate locations of the Art Sculptures

**Background**

Members will be aware that renowned local artist Colin Davidson is in the process of completing three major art sculptures for the Bangor waterfront area. These bespoke pieces of artwork will be a significant art regeneration project but moreover, these will be a fitting complement to the wider Queens Parade and Bangor Waterfront redevelopment projects.

Each of the three bronze hand sculptures will have standalone lighting columns nearby to produce directional lighting towards the sculpture, therefore creating different shadow shapes on to an adjacent wall or on the ground. The type of lighting, and their directional positioning, will maximise the amount of light cast on to the ground or adjacent wall, and additionally avoid interference with biodiversity (i.e. bats).

Not Applicable

108

A brief summary of each art piece is as follows:

1. The Dove - hands positioned to produce a dove shaped shadow onto the ground creating a focal point of the Marine Gardens.
2. The Swan – to the west of the existing Queens Parade car park. This hands sculpture will be positioned to produce a swan shaped shadow on to an adjacent wall.
3. The Crab – on the Eisenhower Pier. This sculpture of hands will produce a crab shaped shadow onto an adjacent wall.

The preferred locations of The Dove and The Swan sculptures have been confirmed. Council officers and external stakeholders are working collaboratively with the Council's Disability Forum on the location of The Crab sculpture on Eisenhower Pier.

The proposed and approximate locations of each Art Sculpture, subject to Planning approval, are illustrated in Appendix 1.

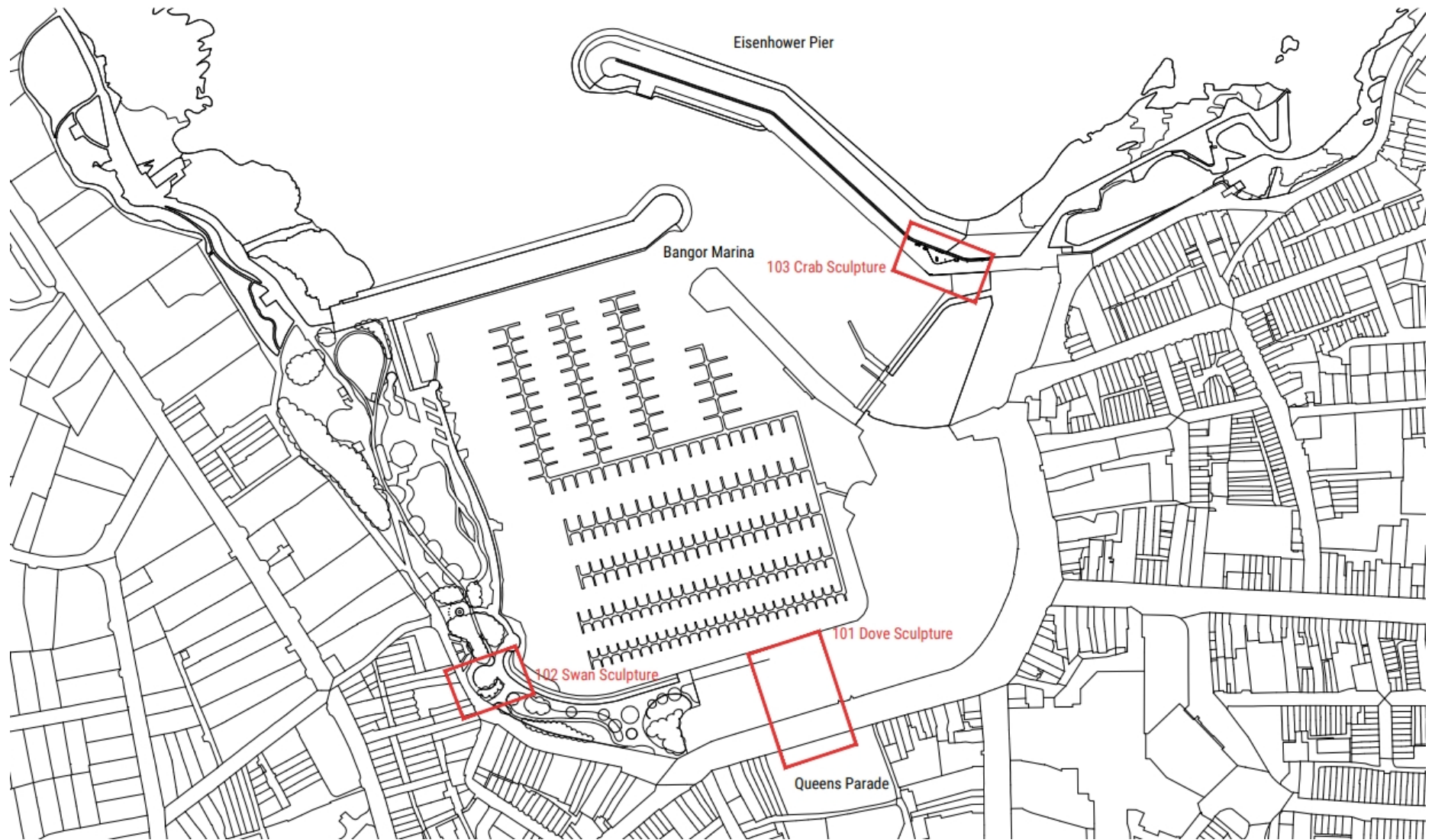
In June 2025 three separate Pre Application discussions (PADs) were submitted to the Council's Planning section and colleagues have been assisting with this process. Once the PADs process is complete it is anticipated that three separate planning applications will be submitted.

As this project progresses a further report will be brought to this Committee.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Council notes this report.





Unclassified

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**ITEM 10****Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	04 September 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Regeneration
Date of Report	13 August 2025
File Reference	RDP11
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Updated Feasibility Study report for Comber Enterprise Hub
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Comber Enterprise Hub Feasability Study Appendix 2 - Comber Enterprise Hub Feasability Study Survey Results

**Background**

Members may recall that it was agreed at the Place and Prosperity Committee on 12 June 2025 to seek further details on the report presenting the findings of Feasibility Study for a potential Enterprise Hub located in Comber.

The purpose of the deferment was to enable officers to present the methodology for the Feasibility Study and to re-present the report with the actual study attached (Appendix 1). For additional information, the questionnaire results summary report is attached as Appendix 2, a respondent's personal information has been redacted on page 12.

The Study

The Feasibility Study was part of the Regeneration Working Up Projects for 2024/25. McGarry Consulting was appointed in December 2024 to carry out the Feasibility Study to gather research to determine the following information:

- Market Demand and Community Support
- Existing provision
- Potential suitable locations

Report Methodology

The Committee requested further details of the research methodology carried out by the consultants and in particular to provide further details on the number of respondents received to the consultant’s survey which was considered very low (16).

The Feasibility Study was commissioned and managed by Strategic Development Officers. The consultants met with officers on a fortnightly basis or more frequently when required.

The consultants carried out desktop research, in person site analysis, and in person and online stakeholder engagements supported by Comber Chamber of Commerce and Comber Town Advisory Group (TAG).

The consultants met with the Comber Chamber of Commerce, who are also members of the Comber TAG, to discuss a potential Enterprise Hub in February 2025. The consultant also met with representatives of Ards Business Hub and Inspire Business Centre to understand the Enterprise Park model, as well as additional identified businesses in the proximity of Comber that may offer a similar service that an Enterprise Hub may offer. The consultant also met with the Council’s Economic Development officers in February 2025 to discuss the ‘Mini Digi-hub’ project in Comber and any potential impact, benefit, or synergies it would have on an Enterprise Hub.

A questionnaire was drafted by the consultant in collaboration with Regeneration Officers to determine the interest in a potential Enterprise Hub in Comber. The survey was distributed to the Chair of the Comber Chamber of Commerce to distribute among the members of the Comber Chamber of Commerce and reminder emails sent to encourage responses. The survey was also distributed to the Comber Community Association as well as the Comber Community Residents Association.

The final report was distributed to the Comber TAG on 27 May 2025, no queries were received. The report was also included as an agenda item and presented at a meeting of Comber TAG on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2025, no queries or comments were noted.

Comber Chamber of Commerce members consist of:

Category	Description	Number
Retail	Butchers, pharmacy, bakeries, crafts	35
Taxi Services	Single taxi provider	1
Hospitality	Bars, restaurants, hot food outlets	13
Professional Services	Solicitors, medical services, etc.	12

Not Applicable

112

Art	Galleries, studios, or art-related establishments	7
-----	---	---

### Comber TAG Profile of Members:

Comber TAG profile of members	
Elected Members	Comber DEA (5)
Chamber rep	1
Comber Regeneration	1
Community rep	1
Faith representative	1
DFI Official	1
DFC Official	1

### Summary of Findings (Previously Reported)

#### Market demand and Community Support

Community support for an Enterprise Hub was high, however, survey feedback indicated an anticipated low usage percentage of Hubs of various sizes. The number of respondents received to the consultant's survey was very low (16) which might speak to the low interest for a potential Enterprise Hub in Comber. Responses included:

- 8% of respondents said they would consider using a small sized office space on a weekly basis
- 9% of respondents said they would consider using a 'hot desk' on a weekly basis
- 42% of respondents said they would consider using a medium sized office space on a full-time basis
- 36% of respondents said they would consider using a small sized meeting room a few times a year
- 38% of respondents stated they would consider using a medium sized meeting room a few times a year

#### Existing Provision

The Feasibility Study reported that there are five Hubs within a ten-minute drive from Comber town centre, three of which are in Newtownards. Office and meeting room spaces range from 100 sq. ft. to 4,000 sq. ft. 24-hour access is available at some of the Hubs and all have access to ample parking, kitchen facilities, high speed internet, computer equipment, and operate on a contract basis.

#### Potential suitable locations

Four commercial premises in Comber town centre were available at the time of the study ranging from 315 sq. ft. to 12,300 sq. ft. A number of these potential sites were located on upper floors and therefore presented potential access and other issues. Some were vacant properties requiring modernisation and the smaller premises would

Not Applicable

113

limit their suitability and financial return. Each premises had very limited parking provision given their location close to the town centre.

Two potential locations outside the town centre have been identified. Comber Community Centre and Enler Mill. Comber Community Centre, owned by the Council, is due to receive £500,000 in external funding to be transformed into a 'Mini Digi Hub'. Once complete the facility will offer modern facilities for meetings, hybrid events, mentoring, and co-working. It's close to the town square, has ample parking, and will feature advanced technology.

Enler Mill is a newly constructed commercial site on the periphery of the town. The premises has planning permission limited to Class B1 uses (Call Centre or R&D). It requires a full fit-out and offers significantly larger units, which may not suit the scale or purpose of an Enterprise Hub.

### **Conclusion**

The Feasibility Study concluded that there is currently no market demand or identified need for an Enterprise Hub in Comber, with a lack of suitable site locations also noted. Enler Mill remains a potential location, contingent on planning permissions and suitability for SME use. Should future demand arise Enler Mill could provide a larger Enterprise Hub to be considered by Council, subject to a Business Case. It is hoped that the Council through the 'Mini Digi Hub' located within Comber Community Centre will be able to provide modern facilities, co-working space and space for meetings to support local enterprise activity.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Council notes the findings of the study.





# Comber Community Enterprise Hub - Feasibility Study



May 2025

# Contents

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4. Stakeholder Feedback	23
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6. Site Review	33
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8. Conclusion	42





# Introduction



# Background

Ards and North Down Borough Council (the Council) has commissioned McGarry Consulting to undertake a feasibility study for a community enterprise hub in Comber.

The project is derived from the Review of Comber Masterplan 2022/23, which indicated interest in such a hub. There is currently no particular group or entity pushing this, with no specific sites mentioned, and with only a few potential sites openly on the market (as at 19Dec24).

McGarry Consulting therefore have prepared this feasibility study using: the need/demand derived from Review of Masterplan; strategic context; market demand; case studies; stakeholder feedback from the TAG; and an online public consultation.



▼ Fig 1A: Comber Aerial Photograph. Source: Comber Masterplan Review



# Introduction

▼ Fig 1B: Comber location map



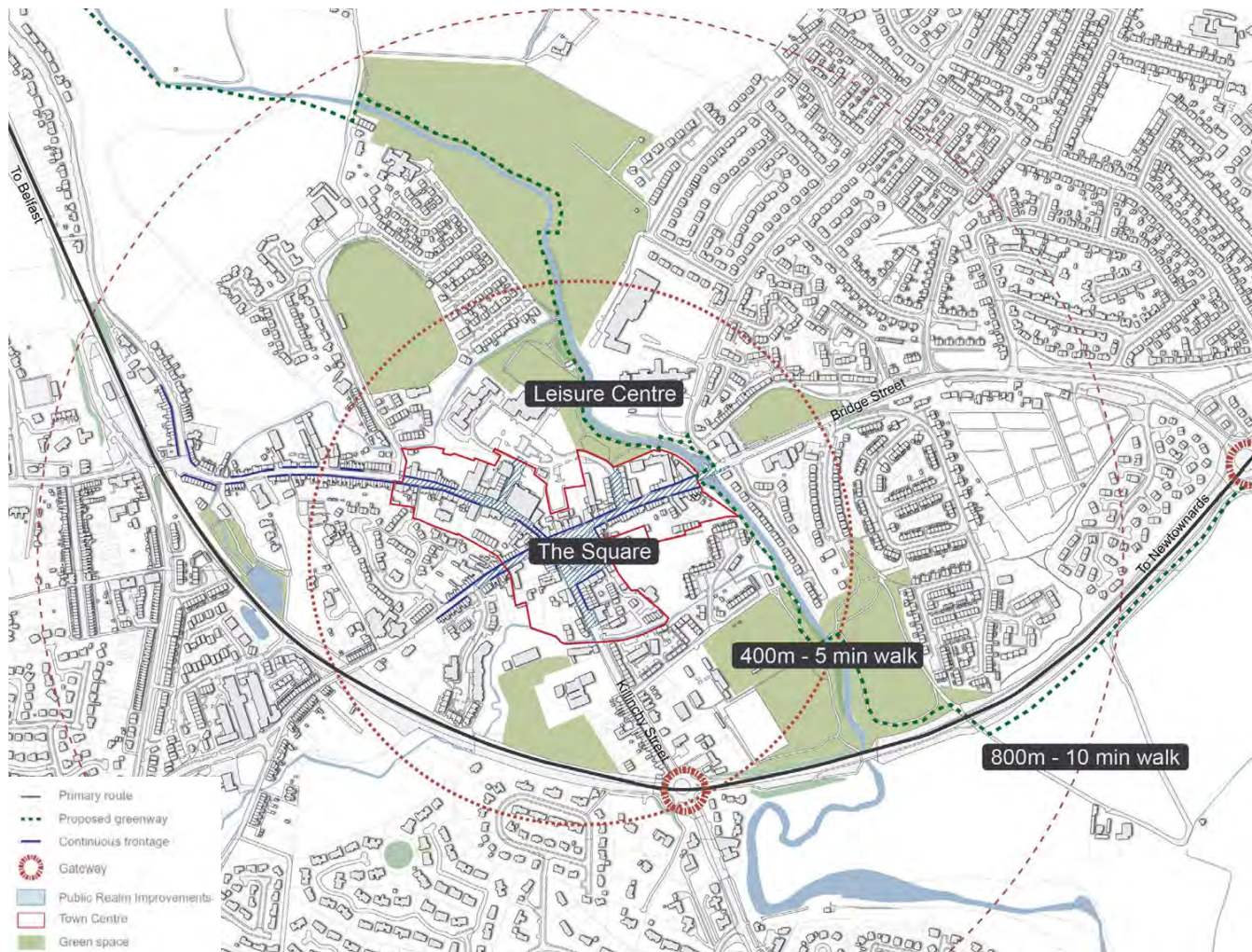
Comber has a rich industrial history, and grew in regional significance in the 18th Century through linen, grain and whiskey production. The town, with a population of 9,529 (2021 Census), extends outwards from a historic central square, through growing residential suburbs onwards to a large, mainly rural hinterland to the south and east.

The town lies to the north of Stranford Lough and is five miles from Newtownards, 10 miles from Belfast, although close to Dundonald and East Belfast (through which the Comber Greenway travels). It's proximity to these urban centres has led to becoming a commuter town, with peripheral housing boom becoming more disconnected from the town centre.

Comber's world famous potatoes, known locally as "Comber Earlies" enjoy protected status and are part of the wider high-quality agri-food offer in the area. Additionally, Comber is known for its café-culture, being cycle-friendly, and independent unique retail shops. The town has an active Chamber of Commerce with over 80 members, who face challenges of reduced footfall.



# Comber Masterplan and Review



The Comber Masterplan was originally produced in 2015. In the interim period, Comber experienced significant changes including the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit, and working from home, amongst others.

Therefore, in 2022 the Council sought to review the town centre Masterplan and ensure they were up to date and reflected public feedback. The new plans were produced by The Paul Hogarth Company in partnership with McGarry Consulting in September 2023. The new plan reaffirmed the original vision, and set out key themes and targets, which form the background to this report. This is set out on the next page.

◀ Fig 1C: Movement Map, Comber Masterplan Review

# Comber Masterplan and Review

## VISION

(Comber Masterplan 2015)

### **Masterplan Vision (2015):**

*"In 2030 – Comber is a thriving market town supported by its local community. The town centre is accessible and enticing, attracting people from far and wide for its superior quality and niche retail offer. The extended greenway through the town, linking to Newtownards and on to the coast has made Comber the focus for recreation and has established the town as the 'Gateway to Strangford'. Comber has also built upon its rich cultural heritage with The Square providing the focal point for activity."*

## OBJECTIVES

(Comber Masterplan 2015)



## PRIORITIES

(Comber Masterplan Review 2023)



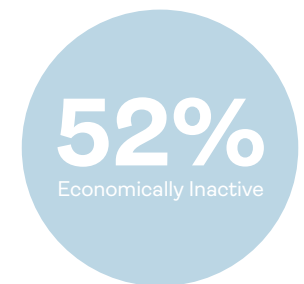
▲ Fig 1D: Diagram to explain Masterplan and Masterplan Review background to this study. Sources: Comber Masterplan 2015; Comber Masterplan Review 2023.

### PROPOSED ACTIONS

- B.i Identify key properties within the Town Centre
- B.ii Engage with TAG and wider community to establish appetite and key groups looking for space
- B.iii Undertake feasibility study to establish demand for Community Enterprise Hub
- B.iv Dialogue with potential occupiers
- B.v Promotion of space
- B.vi Assessment of similar case studies / funding streams and delivery models

# Town Centre Profile

Comber town centre has a population of 1,658 and grew by 9.1% between 2010 and 2020, significantly above the NI (5.0%) and borough (2.7%) averages. Town centre residents have low levels of qualifications with 19% at Level 4 or above, while half are economically inactive. Only 12% work from home (v NI 19%, ANDBC 23%), with 21% travelling less than 5km to work (v ANDBC 21%). 'Comber East' is considered among the 40% most deprived areas (super output areas) in NI, and amongst the 14% most deprived areas in NI in terms of 'Crime and Disorder'. However, it ranks among the 25% least deprived for 'Access to Services'.



Comber East_1 SOA, Comber		
Domain	Rank (890)	as a %
<b>Multiple Deprivation Measure</b>	<b>325</b>	<b>36.5%</b>
Income	260	29.2%
Employment	330	37.1%
Health and Disability	294	33.0%
Education, Skills and Training	271	30.4%
Access to Services	698	78.4%
Living Environment	646	72.6%
Crime & Disorder	121	13.6%

▲ Fig 1E: Multiple Deprivation Measure Domain Table for Comber East\_1 SOA, Comber.

Town Profile	Comber B SDZ*	Comber DEA**	A&ND	NI
<b>Population aged over 40</b>	53%	58%	56%	49%
<b>Population aged 15-39</b>	28%	27%	27%	31%
<b>Population aged under 14</b>	19%	16%	17%	19%
<b>Households with 1-2 persons</b>	72%	65%	66%	61%
<b>Qualification Level 4+</b>	17%	35%	34%	32%
<b>Economically Inactive</b>	52%	41%	43%	41%
<b>Professional Occupations</b>	11%	21%	20%	20%
<b>Travelling &lt;5km to work</b>	21%	11%	21%	28%
<b>Travelling 5-20km to work</b>	47%	46%	34%	27%
<b>Travelling &gt;20km to work</b>	5%	6%	10%	12%
<b>Work from Home</b>	12%	23%	23%	19%

▲ Fig 1F: Town Profile Table. \* Comber B SDZ is Comber B Super Data Zone.  
\*\*Comber DEA is Comber District Electoral Area



# Town Centre Profile

## Urban Overview

Comber town centre is compact and walkable, centred around The Square, which serves as its civic and cultural heart.

Recent urban regeneration projects have enhanced the public realm, with improvements to Bridge Street, The Square, and High Street contributing to a more attractive and accessible environment. Despite these developments, traffic congestion during peak times remains a challenge, as the town centre serves as a key route for vehicles travelling through the area.

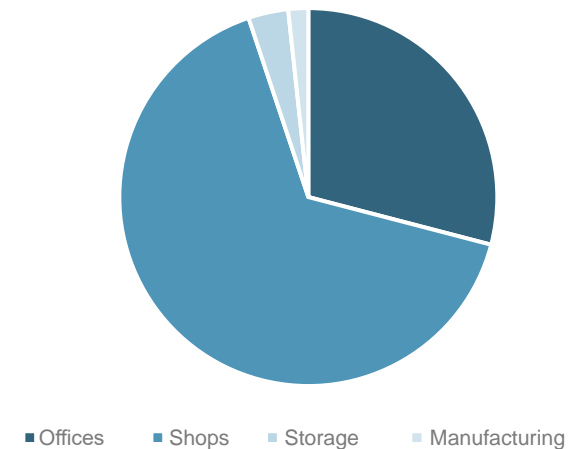
Fig 1G: Towncentre Boundary Comber ▼



▼ Fig 1H: Refurbishment work by the Square



▼ Fig 1I: Breakdown of Non-Domestic Building Uses in Comber in 2024



## Building Use

Its business landscape is dominated by retail, hospitality, and professional services. However, community feedback highlights a lack of affordable commercial units and start-up spaces for new businesses.





# Strategic Context

# NI Strategies



▲ Fig 2A: NI Strategies

The new Programme for Government (PfG), sets out nine priorities including growing a sustainable and competitive economy; providing more affordable and accessible housing and safer communities. Town centres can help meet these goals through supporting businesses (who can sell locally and globally); transforming unused space into housing and giving people more reasons to come into town and feel safe while they are there.

The Regional Development Strategy (RDS), although preceding the PfG, it stressed NI's economic ambitions and how place making, transport connections and housing can contribute to these ambitions. Future town centres will be mixed use, more accessible, more navigable, more experiential and more connected with outlying areas.

NI's new Economic Plan, seeks to provide better jobs, more investment outside of Belfast and give local partners more power in this area. Allied with DfC's Communities Strategy which seeks the common purpose of supporting people, building communities and shaping places, the policies chime with town centres being places that more people live, work and visit; with closer community ties.



# Council Strategies

Ards and North Down Borough Council's strategies are centred around the **Corporate Plan 2024–2028**, which aims to foster a sustainable borough; balancing economic, environmental, and social wellbeing. The plan highlights three priorities: economic growth, environmental resilience through carbon reduction, and social inclusion to enhance community wellbeing.

The Council's **Integrated Strategy for Tourism, Regeneration and Economic Development 2018–2030** promotes local economic growth, attracting visitors, and improving urban and rural areas.

**The Big Plan for Ards and North Down 2017–2032** complements these efforts with five key outcomes, including fostering lifelong potential, improving health and wellbeing, and enhancing economic prosperity. These initiatives underline the Council's commitment to revitalising its city, towns and villages.



▲ Fig 2B: Council Strategies





# Market Demand

# Market Trends

## Northern Ireland Market Trends

Since 2019, NI's serviced office and co-working sector has experienced notable growth, primarily driven by the shift towards hybrid working models following the pandemic. Before 2020, homeworking was uncommon, but the pandemic significantly increased demand for flexible arrangements.

Providers in Belfast report strong occupancy levels and continued high demand for quality, adaptable spaces. Companies increasingly utilise these offices not just for flexibility but to foster collaboration and company culture. This trend reflects a broader UK pattern where businesses prioritise adaptable, high-quality workspaces that support employee wellbeing to attract and retain talent in the evolving work landscape.

## Benefits of Serviced Offices and Co-Working Hubs

Serviced offices are fully furnished, equipped workspaces available for rent on flexible terms. Managed by an operator, the monthly rent typically includes utilities, reception, IT, and shared amenities. They appeal to people and businesses as they have no upfront costs and allow people to start immediately in kitted out offices with access to meeting rooms and/or event space.

Businesses usually have the option to hire space on licences or short-term rolling contracts (e.g. 1-3 months), which provide businesses with flexibility. Hub can have a variety of open desks, fixed desks and offices (of different sizes) which accommodates a range of users and allows businesses to scale up or down within the same hub.

Additionally, they usually have access to meeting rooms (of various sizes) and/or training rooms equipped with audio-visual equipment; and printers. These are features that many individuals or small businesses do not have access to and only need limited access to. Some have small pods, to allow privacy for phone or online calls.



▲ Fig 3A: International Workplace Group, Coleraine. Source: <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/business/northern-ireland/international-firm-opens-flexible-workspace-in-important-ni-business-hub/a1181525551.html>



# Market Trends



▲ Fig 3B: Ludgate digital hub in West Cork. Source: <https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2020/0831/1162280-digital-hubs-ireland-remote-working-office-working-from-home/>

## 360

Hubs supported in  
the Connected Hubs  
Network

## UK Market Trends

The UK co-working space market is projected to grow steadily with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7% between 2025 and 2030 (Mordor Intelligence). This expansion is driven by increasing demand for flexible workspaces, particularly among startups and SMEs, and is spreading beyond regional cities, supported by hybrid work trends and decentralisation. (RightMove).

The market's evolution is further supported by technological advancements and the emergence of specialised coworking ventures.

On a GB level, mirroring the wider office sector, there has been a 'flight to quality' with 84% of space leased in 2024 by serviced office providers being of Grade A quality (Savills, December 2024). This is due to increasing focus on environmental/net-zero obligations; accessibility needs; increased competition to recruit and retain the best talent; and desire to deliver on workplace values. Demand for fully fitted Grade A office space is being witnessed equally at regional level.

In London, there is increasing demand for managed office space, where the office and facilities are exclusive to that business, but they pay only one single monthly fee. This is a blend of co-working spaces and

conventional offices and may become more sought after by larger SME's on a regional basis over the next few years.

## Ireland Market Trends

In rural Ireland, the expansion of co-working and digital hubs has been key to revitalising these areas by enhancing digital connectivity, fostering regional development, and creating jobs.

The Connected Hubs network, established in 2021, supports over 360 hubs (May 2024), contributing approximately €1 billion annually to local economies (SURC, 2024). These hubs provide flexible workspaces, high-speed internet, and community services, enabling professionals to work remotely without relocating to urban centres.

Government initiatives, such as the Our Rural Future policy, have further encouraged this growth by investing in remote working facilities and launching voucher schemes to encourage hub utilisation. This strategic development has not only reduced commuting and associated emissions but also attracted talent back to rural communities, thereby strengthening local economies and promoting sustainable regional growth (GOV.ie, 2022).

# Workplace Trends

## Working from Home

In 2023, Ulster University research (Is Remote Working, Working?) showed that remote working increased from just 10% of the workforce in 2019 to 41% at its peak in April 2020 (one month into Covid, in response to the work from home mandate). However, it also noted it had fallen back to 17% , the lowest level in the UK, and almost half the UK average of 31%.

Further Ulster University research (Remote Working on the Island of Ireland – A Cross Border Comparison) that year showed that the Irish average of 34% of people working remotely, with Dublin a higher level yet again at 42%.

With only 1 in 6 of people in NI remote working, this is approximately half the equivalent UK and Irish rates. This may indicate potential for growth, shorter commuting times and/or a reluctance by employers.

Opportunities for remote work predominantly favour professional, managerial, and technical roles, often requiring higher education and found in sectors like IT, finance, and business services. Higher earners generally have greater access to this flexibility.

## Co-Working Hubs

The demand for co-working spaces has grown globally. This is because of a growth in flexible working practices and an increase in freelancers, start-ups, and SMEs.

According to the Global Coworking Growth Study in 2024, the coworking space market size has grown rapidly in recent years. It will grow from \$19.05 billion in 2023 to \$22.44 billion in 2024 at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 17.8%. It will grow to \$40.4 billion in 2028 at a CAGR of 15.8%. The UK Flex Market Update Report 2024 (CBRE) highlights a continued high take-up and maturing market across the UK.

Key trends include hybrid work models, community-focused spaces, and value-added services like mentoring and networking. Northern Ireland mirrors these trends, with urban hubs increasingly popular among creative and tech industries.

Co-working spaces are seen as vital for economic regeneration, offering affordable solutions for small enterprises while fostering collaboration and innovation in local communities.

## Serviced Offices

Serviced offices are in demand due to their flexibility and ability to support hybrid working models. These offices provide ready-to-use spaces, reducing the need for businesses to invest in long-term leases or infrastructure.

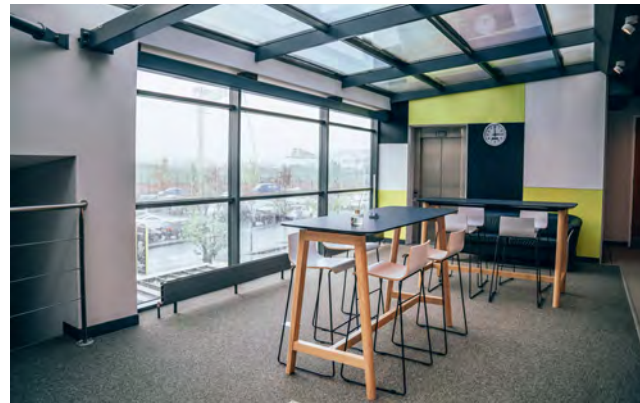
In the Ards and North Down Borough, the demand for small, affordable office spaces has been identified, particularly in towns like Comber, where there are gaps in business support facilities. The Comber Masterplan Review 2023 notes that enhancing commercial infrastructure could help retain and grow local businesses. Serviced offices are a strategic solution to support economic development and align with council objectives to create thriving communities.



# Current NI Providers

## Variety of Providers in NI

There are a large number of individual hubs in NI, some standalone hubs and some part of a wider UK/Global network that may have only one office in NI. A non-exhaustive sample list of multi-site providers in NI is below to indicate the growth and diversity of the sector.



▲ Fig 3D: Catalyst Workspace. Source: <https://wearecatalyst.org/about-us/>

In addition to the list, fig. 3C, there are the Connect2 Civil Service Hubs and 66 offices and industrial estates offered by Enterprise NI's 27 local enterprise agencies. There are also a large number of commercial, community and bespoke/accelerator hubs that offer specific wrap-around services in NI, a growing number outside Belfast.

The sector has a diverse offering in terms of places, prices, services, support, networking and locations. Some are also dedicated to technology and/or creative artists. Some providers own their sites, whilst others lease them.

Some providers offer a variety of accommodation spaces across NI, that you can have access to when a resident of one. In the Republic of Ireland they have a connected hubs network of almost 400 hubs, to help take up in rural areas, networking, back-office demands and marketing. Many hubs in Ireland were busier during the summer, with visitors using them as part of a workcation. Some Council areas in NI are exploring the creation of a network of providers to make it easier for people to work from a variety of hubs in their area.

▼ Fig 3C: Sample List of Multi-Site Providers

Multi-Site Providers (Sample)
Blick Studios
Catalyst
Formation Works
Glandore
Hubflow
International Workplace Group (IWG, formerly Regus)
Space NI
venYou



▲ Fig 3E: Space NI Workspace. Source: <https://space-ni.co.uk/>

# Ards & North Down Business Breakdown

Business Numbers	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
<b>Births</b>								
A&ND	420	405	415	405	535	395	370	2,945
NI	6,175	6,020	6,605	6,475	7,580	5,510	5,370	43,735
<b>Deaths</b>								
A&ND	360	360	445	395	475	490	360	2,885
NI	4,780	4,990	5,885	5,925	6,070	7,345	5,110	40,105
<b>Net New Businesses</b>								
A&ND	60	45	-30	10	60	-95	10	60
NI	1,395	1,030	720	550	1,510	-1,835	260	3,630

▲ Fig 3F: All Business Births & Deaths 2017-2023. Source: NISRA



Ards & North Down - DEA	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Growth (2019-2023)
Ards Peninsula	920	910	925	940	940	2.2%
Bangor Central	885	870	880	890	895	1.1%
Bangor East and Donaghadee	395	400	400	415	395	-
Bangor West	215	220	225	225	225	4.7%
Comber	710	715	705	720	730	2.8%
Hollywood and Clandeboye	850	870	870	895	875	2.9%
Newtownards	775	750	780	790	765	(1.3%)
Total	4,755	4,740	4,790	4,870	4,815	1.3%
NI	75,490	76,090	77,640	78,885	79,235	5.0%
A&ND As % of NI	6.3%	6.2%	6.2%	6.2%	6.1%	

▲ Fig 3G: Number of VAT and/or PAYE Registered Businesses Operating in NI by District Electoral Area (DEA), 2019 to 2023. Source: NISRA





# Productivity

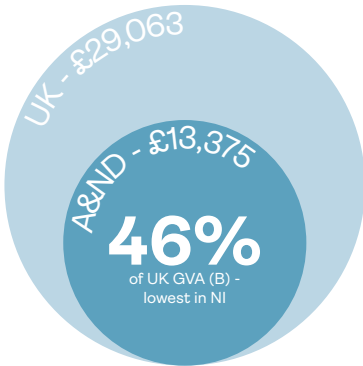
Productivity is vital for economic growth. When businesses and workers produce more with the same resources, it boosts efficiency. This leads to higher incomes, improved living standards and increased economic output. In essence, productivity fuels prosperity for individuals and nations alike.

Over the last 10-15 years productivity in the UK has fallen behind that of the EU and the USA. The UK economy, and budget is based on increasing economic growth through productivity gains. NI is one of the least productive parts of the UK and is now at least 20% less productive than the Republic of Ireland.

The Office of National Statistics (ONS) measures productivity in terms of Gross Value Added (GVA). Under their preferred measure, GVA (Balanced), the ONS has calculated productivity by Council area in NI. In 2020 AN&D had a GVA(B) of £13,375 per head. This is less than half (46%) of the UK figure and was the worst LGD in NI.

Local Government District/Region	1998	2003	2008	2013	2018	2019	2020
Belfast	16,836	24,022	30,062	31,467	39,016	40,269	40,148
United Kingdom	15,385	19,024	23,408	24,984	29,241	30,201	29,063
Mid Ulster	13,378	17,387	18,486	18,699	23,344	24,547	23,329
Northern Ireland	11,799	15,383	18,157	18,784	22,322	23,241	23,035
Antrim and Newtownabbey	12,336	15,691	18,099	18,429	22,551	23,709	22,979
Lisburn and Castlereagh	11,599	15,334	17,628	18,626	22,245	23,275	22,912
Derry City and Strabane	9,017	11,727	14,458	15,526	18,653	19,879	20,708
Fermanagh and Omagh	10,333	13,279	15,790	15,293	19,283	20,004	20,496
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	9,928	12,526	14,593	15,000	18,428	19,057	19,076
Mid and East Antrim	15,686	18,070	20,619	22,088	17,223	18,005	17,815
Newry, Mourne and Down	8,640	11,075	12,970	13,790	17,032	17,926	17,546
Causeway Coast and Glens	8,794	11,210	12,934	13,261	15,232	15,637	15,591
Ards and North Down	7,106	9,057	10,864	10,502	13,278	13,795	13,375

▲ Fig 3H: Gross Value Added (Balanced) (GVA (B)) Local Government District (LGD), NI and UK comparison table. Source: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossvalueaddedgva>



▲ Fig 3I: Comparing A&ND and NI GVA (B)

# Business Profile (Registered)

## Business Growth

This table shows net business growth annually across Local Government Districts (LGDs) in NI. The NI total is listed at the top in bold, with the NI growth (13.4%) representing the average across NI. The LGDs are listed highest to lowest by percentage growth over the period 2017-2023.

## LGD Comparison Table

This table shows that A&ND has recorded a total net growth of 290 businesses between 2017 and 2023. This accounts for a 6.4% growth, under half of the overall NI figure of 13.4%. This ranks it as the lowest LGD, indicating a severe need to encourage greater local business growth in A&ND.

The table above shows that the net business growth is slowing year on year in A&ND. In 2017 and 2021 there was an average of 64 net new business per year in A&ND. Between 2022 and 2023, there was an average net loss of 15 business per year. Admittedly, this is a small sample, but it does illustrate a significant decrease in net business growth. There is a clear need to restore higher levels of business growth.

Local Government District	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total Businesses	Growth 2017-2023	Growth as %
Newry, Mourne and Down	345	195	200	210	205	55	30	7,622	1,240	16.3%
Belfast	360	260	360	315	350	15	175	11,546	1,835	15.9%
Mid Ulster	305	145	110	140	225	40	65	6,761	1,030	15.2%
ABC	275	170	100	160	335	115	-60	7,439	1,095	14.7%
Derry City and Strabane	140	150	80	115	110	60	15	4,568	670	14.7%
Fermanagh and Omagh	170	125	75	100	175	50	5	5,070	700	13.8%
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	<b>2,315</b>	<b>1,440</b>	<b>1,255</b>	<b>1,540</b>	<b>1,640</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>64,699</b>	<b>8,665</b>	<b>13.4%</b>
Causeway Coast and Glens	220	90	45	90	165	-10	5	4,595	605	13.2%
Mid and East Antrim	135	100	65	55	45	-35	90	4,029	455	11.3%
Lisburn and Castlereagh	135	110	175	140	20	10	-85	4,867	505	10.4%
Antrim and Newtownabbey	100	45	20	165	-55	-45	10	3,706	240	6.5%
Ards and North Down	130	50	25	50	65	-40	10	4,512	290	6.4%

▲ Fig 3J: Net Business Growth Comparison between LGDs in NI. Source: IDBR Business Demography, Northern Ireland: 2023. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/business/activitysizeandlocation/bulletins/businessdemography/latest>.



# Town Centre Non-Domestic Vacancy

## Vacancy

Across the 41 towns and cities in NI, the average non-domestic vacancy rate was 22.8% in October 2024. This is heavily weighted toward Belfast, an outlier, at 34.3%. Therefore, the average vacancy rate excluding Belfast (the light blue line) has been used as a more comparable baseline for Comber (dark blue line), as shown in fig. 3K opposite.

Fig 3K shows Comber has a lower non-domestic vacancy rate, of 15.5%, than the NI (ex. Belfast) vacancy rate of 18.8%. This vacancy rate has been lower than NI (ex. Belfast) since 2016, troughing at 9.8% in 2022.

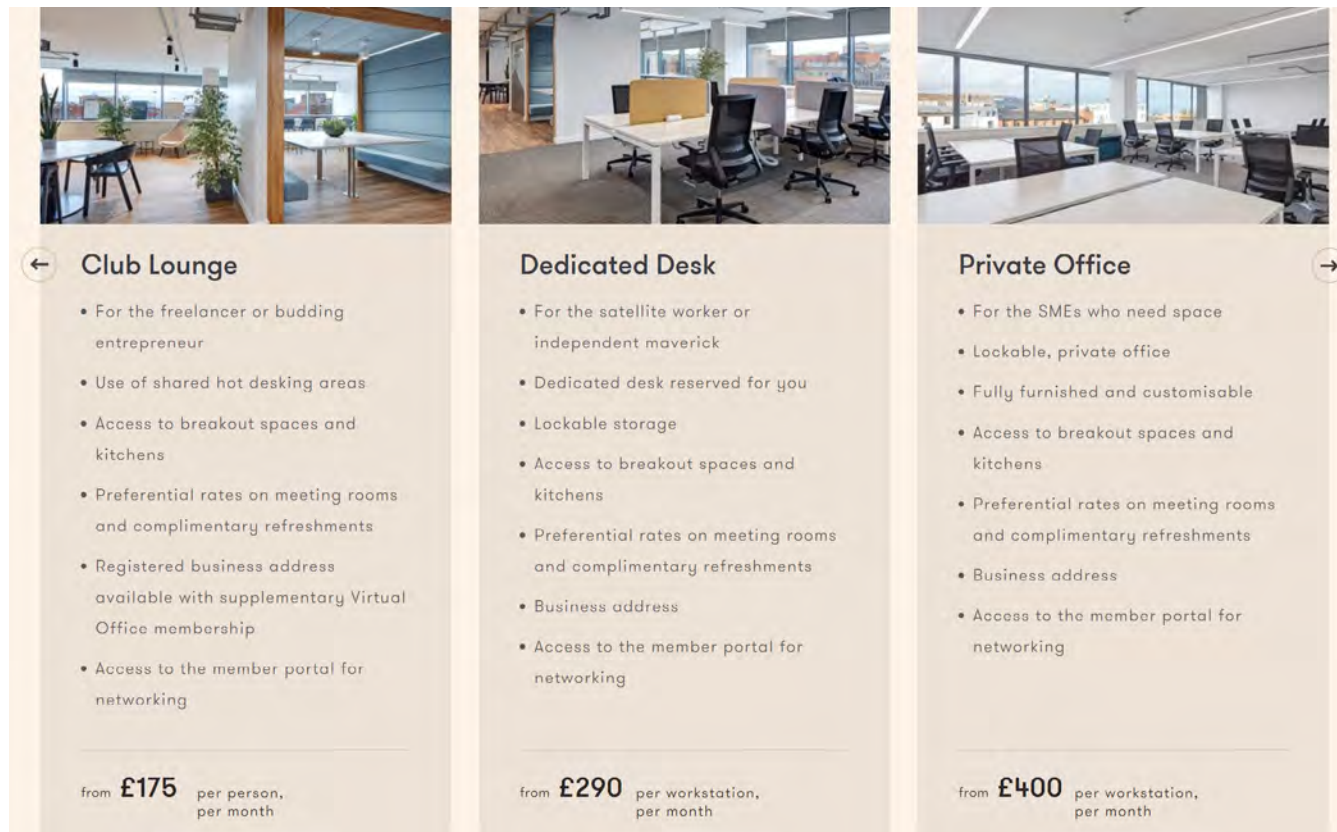
The chart also shows that since 2022 the vacancy rate has increased continually.



Fig 3K: Comparison Between Comber and NI (ex. Belfast) Non-Domestic Vacancy Rates 2016-2024 ▼



# Sample Serviced Office Pricing



Enterprise hubs offer desk space for an all-inclusive fee. Financially, the most desirable model is to have offices only, as they are easier to manage and bring in more rent.

Opposite is a sample service offering in Belfast and price comparison (as at April 2025). Hotdeskers, i.e. those who only need a desk for a short period (hours or days) would require even more management (e.g. staff presence, induction, etc).

To be sustainable, hubs need to cover staff costs. If rent doesn't cover it, then the hub needs subsidised from other sources (e.g. grants).



▲ Fig 5L: Workspace price comparison. Source: <https://work-clockwise.com/locations/belfast/>





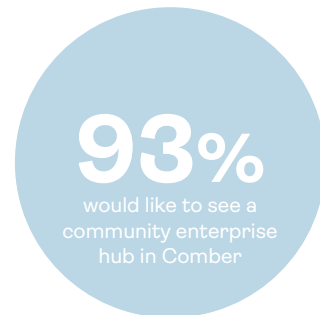
# Stakeholder Feedback

# Public Consultation Survey Feedback (1/3)

## Survey Overview

Our survey was issued online and had 16 responses, of which 14 came from people who lived or worked in the town. Of the 16, only one worked in a hub, and that was one day a week.

93% of people would like to see a community enterprise hub in Comber, with two in three strongly liking the idea.

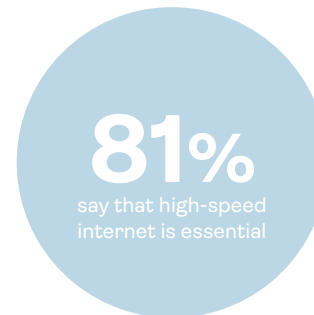


## Desired Hub Features

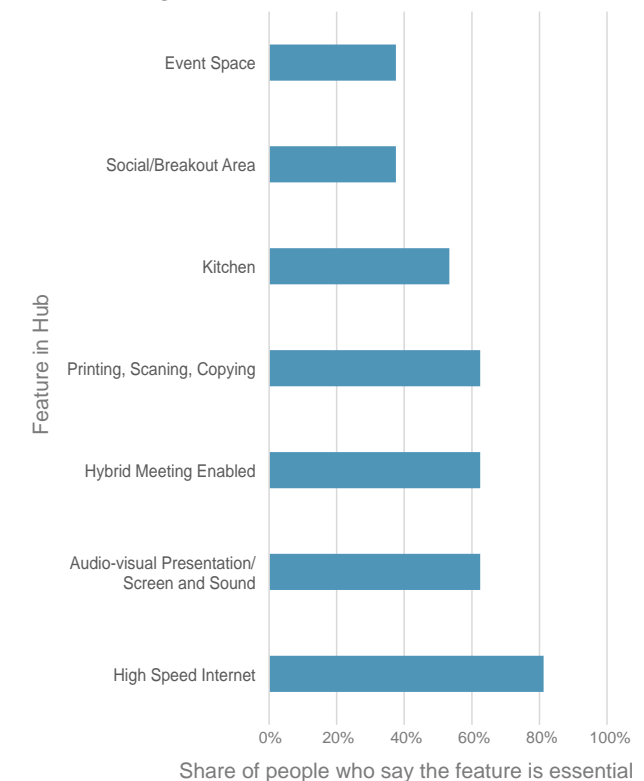
Any hub would have to the following:

- High-Speed Internet (81% Essential)
- Audio-Visual Equipment (63% Essential)
- Hybrid Meeting Enabled (63% Essential)
- Printing, Scanning & Copying (63% Essential)

A kitchen, and event space were less sought after (both 38% essential).



▼ Fig 4A: Essential Features of a Hub

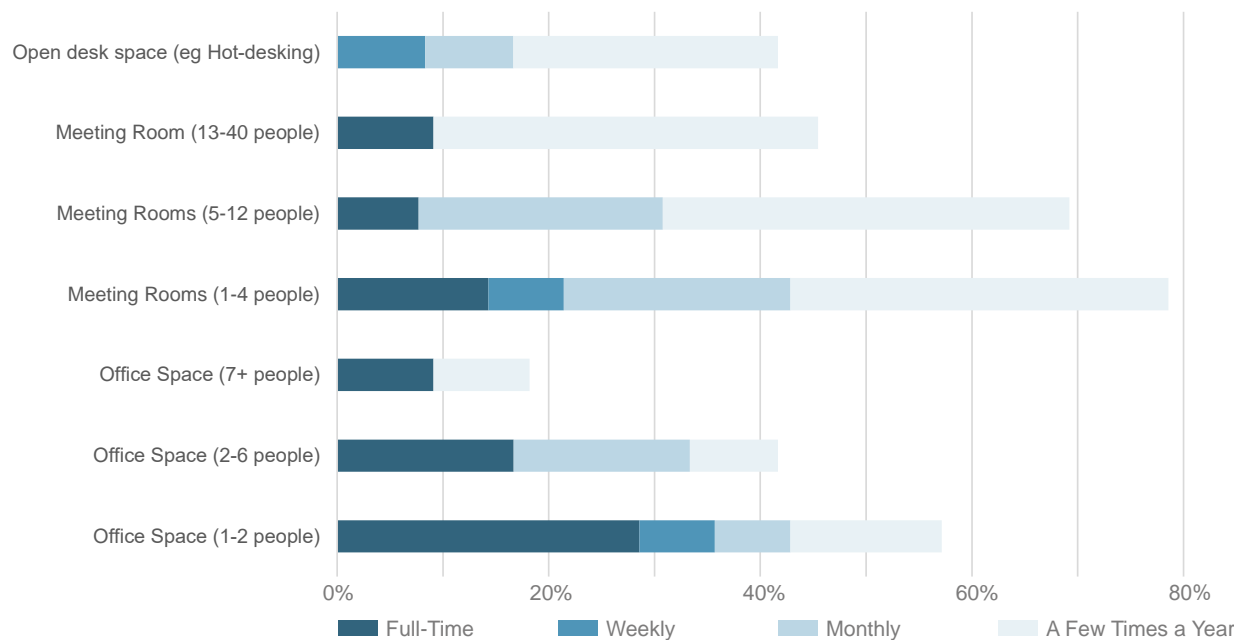


# Public Consultation Survey Feedback (2/3)

## Hub Usage

The most popular need was for a small offices (1-6 people) and meeting rooms (1-12 people); with less interest in larger rooms and open space:

▼ Fig 4B: Anticipated usage of Hub Workspaces



- 3 in 10 respondents would use a **1-2 person office** on a full-time basis, with 1 in 14 using it on a weekly basis.
- 1 in 6 respondents would use a **2-6 person office** on a full-time basis; with a further 1 in 6 using it on a monthly basis. Most people (58%) would never use it.
- 1 in 6 respondents would use a **small meeting room** (1-4 people) on a full-time basis, with 21% using it monthly and 36% using it only a few times a year.
- 1 in 7 respondents would use a **meeting room** (5-12 people) on a full-time basis, with 23% using it monthly and 38% using it only a few times a year.
- 1 in 12 would use **hot-desking** on a weekly basis, with 1 in 12 also using it on a monthly basis and 1 in 4 using it a few times a year.



# Public Consultation Survey Feedback (3/3)

## Working Hours

In reflection of modern work practices, 53% would like to use the office outside traditional 9-5 office hours. Meeting rooms would be used mostly in the evenings (50%) and weekends (30%). This may suggest demand more from clubs and community groups; but the office access needs may indicate businesses also want meeting space outside traditional hours.

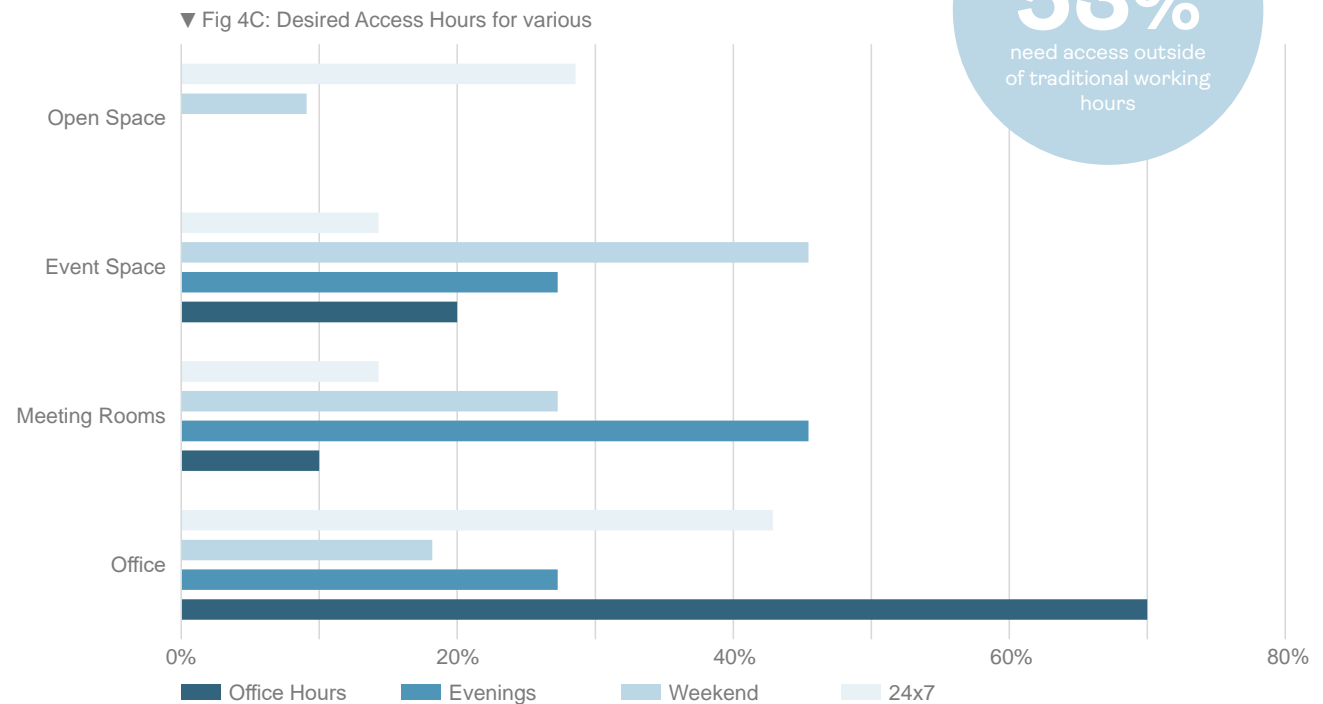
Event space would be needed more at weekends (45%) and evenings (27%), although some would like it during the day. Overall, this shows that any hub would need to provide access outside of traditional office hours, with evenings and weekends most popular for meeting rooms and events.

## Impact

In terms of impact, most stated none directly with some indicating it would help directly (e.g. as a meeting and event venue) or indirectly by bringing more people into the town. However, most thought it could help the town by supporting small businesses and remote workers, creating networking opportunities and a meeting spot; and raising footfall.

## Further Comments

Other comments related to any hub needing full-time staff and be committed to innovation; and that Comber has many community groups that could use such a facility.

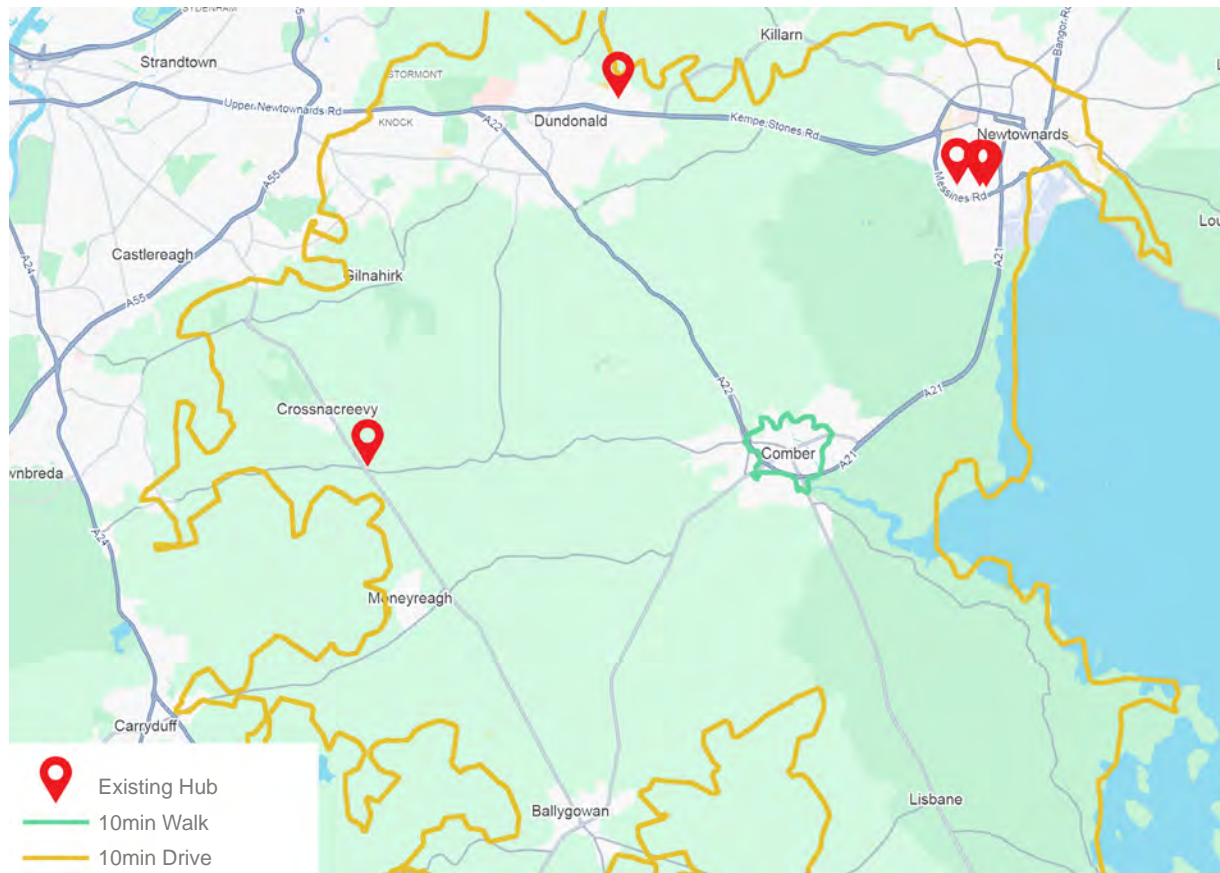




# Hubs Case Studies



# Existing Provision Overview



## Existing Provision

This map shows the existing provision of hubs within a 10min drive of Comber. There are 5 hubs within this boundary, three of which are in Newtownards.

### Newtownards

Formation Works, Sketrick House.  
Ards Business Hub, Strangford House  
Sketrick House

### Crossnacreevy

Formation Works, Maryland Industrial Site

### Dundonald

Inspire Business Centre, Dundonald

Fig 5A: Map of Existing Provision of Business  
Hubs within 10mins Drive of Comber.

# Formation Works, Maryland Industrial Estate

## Introduction

Formation Works provide flexible working spaces to meet the growing demand for hybrid and flexible workplaces in Northern Ireland since the COVID-19 pandemic. Since opening in 2021, they have opened 12 workplaces, with plans for many more, indicating continued growth in demand.

## Office Space

In the Maryland Site, Formation Works have a ground floor with 100 ft<sup>2</sup> - 1,200 ft<sup>2</sup> serviced offices available, as well as larger office and warehousing units. The upper floor is yet open but will include offices in the 85 ft<sup>2</sup> – 325 ft<sup>2</sup> range. This diversity in office size space gives the opportunity for start-ups and SMEs to grow and stay within Formation Works.

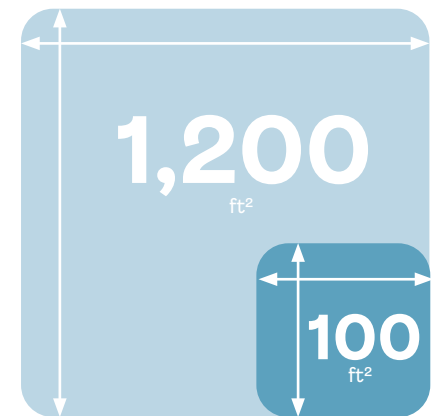
## All-inclusive

The all-inclusive monthly fee ensures minimal set-up and maintenance are required from the users. Every office suite in Formation Works has reliable, high-speed cable ethernet or Wi-Fi, depending on user preference. There is 24x7 access available, with plenty of carparking on-site, essential due to the lack of public transport connections. Contracts are negotiated on a case-by-case basis, with minimum terms possible. The fee also includes 5hr/month access to a 6-person

meeting room. The workspace includes bathrooms and a shared kitchen. The entire workspace is well-maintained with a clean, professional finish. The open areas are finished to a high standard and are cleaned regularly.

## Scalable

The range of office sizes, makes transitioning from one size of office to a larger unit, easier than usual for small enterprises. This is made easier with all-inclusive service and setup packages enabling teams to move quickly into new offices with minimal disruption.



▲ Fig 5C: Office sizes available



▲ Fig 5B: Formation Works



▲ Fig 5D: Formation Works

# Ards Business Hub

## Introduction

Ards Business Hub, founded in 1988, is a Local Enterprise Agency working in BT21-23 (Ballgowan, Comber, Donaghadee, Ards Peninsula, and Newtownards). They manage a total of 80,000 ft<sup>2</sup> of workspace across three sites in Newtownards. Their mission is to be a key driver, working in partnership with others, of economic generation and regeneration throughout the constituency.

## Office Space

Ards Business Hub offers a variety of office spaces between **180 ft<sup>2</sup> and 4,000 ft<sup>2</sup>** designed to accommodate businesses of various sizes. Their facilities include modern, fully serviced offices equipped with high-speed internet, meeting rooms, and ample parking. The monthly licence and monthly fee allow businesses maximum flexibility, which allows SMEs to scale their operations as needed, without the expense of long-term leases.

## Support Services

Beyond office space, Ards Business Hub provides a range support services, including:

- Workshops aimed at enhancing skills and knowledge
- Business mentoring
- Networking events

- Admin services, including postal services

## Charitable Benefit

Ards Business Hub is committed to giving back to the community. As a not-for-profit organisation, they reinvest surplus funds into local economic development initiatives and charitable activities. This commitment ensures that their success directly benefits the wider community, fostering economic growth and social well-being in the area.

▼ Fig 5E: Ards Business Hub



▼ Fig 5F: Ards Business Hub Summary Table

Summary Table	
Number of Sites	3
Office Sizes	180 – 4000 ft <sup>2</sup>
Serviced Offices Sizes	180 – 900 ft <sup>2</sup>
Capacity	100%
Individuals mentored/yr	400
Total Business Advisors	10

# The Cube, Ballyclare

## Introduction

The Cube, established in 2021, is a modern co-working space located on the ground floor of a social housing development by Choice Housing Association in Ballyclare. This initiative was developed in partnership with Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council and is managed by the local enterprise agency, LEDCOM, under a long-term lease arrangement. The Cube aims to support local entrepreneurs and businesses by providing flexible and affordable workspace solutions.

## Office Provision

The Cube offers two workspace options designed to cater to different business needs:

1. **Open Desks:** A shared workspace environment with dedicated desks available at £150 per month (excluding VAT). Tenants enter into a licence agreement requiring 30 days' notice for termination.

2. **Private Office:** An enclosed, glass-partitioned office suitable for businesses seeking privacy.

Amenities include high-speed broadband, a small kitchenette, and restroom facilities. The workspace is maintained with weekly cleaning services. Licensees receive a fob and shutter key, granting 24/7 access to the facility. For security, a lockable shutter is available for storing private documents overnight. The environment is quiet, with users respecting shared space etiquette.

▼ Fig 5H: Kitchen at the Cube



▼ Fig 5I: Office Space at the Cube



Fig 5G: Choice Social Housing, Cube ground floor ►





# Inspire Business Centre

## Introduction

Inspire Business centre is a non-for-profit local enterprise agency, started in 1993. They encourage economic development by offering business support, development services, and rent of affordable premises on rolling periodic tenancies to local enterprises.

## Office Space

The business centre offers 18 x 250 ft<sup>2</sup> offices, as well as a range of large industrial units to the rear of the site.



## Charitable Benefit

Inspire Business Centre operates as a charity (NIC102419), reinvesting its profits into supporting local businesses and economic development. Its charitable benefits include providing affordable workspace for start-ups, delivering mentoring and business development programmes, and fostering entrepreneurship in the community. The centre also contributes significantly to the local economy, having supported over 1,500 businesses and generated £35 million in economic impact. By prioritising social and economic growth over profit-taking, Inspire plays a crucial role in strengthening the local business ecosystem.



▲ Fig 5J: Inspire Business Centre, Dundonald

## Additional Benefits

All tenants at Inspire benefit from a large range of amenities for supporting business operations and growth. Each office space offers 24-hour access and security. Tenants benefit from free parking facilities, for both staff and visitors. The centre has a range of business facilities, including on-site catering, conference suites, Wi-Fi access, and business administration services. Additionally, Inspire provides a comprehensive portfolio of business development programmes, mentoring, and business plan advice to help enterprise growth.



▲ Fig 5K: Community Involvement, Inspire Business Centre

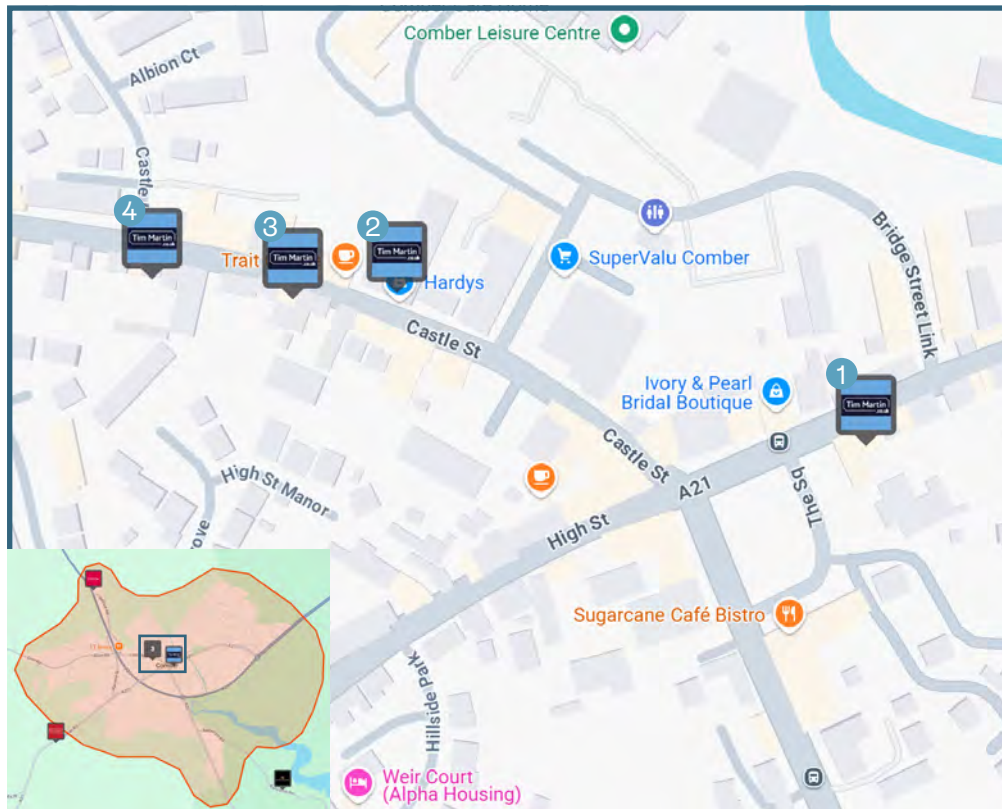




# Site Review



# Properties for Sale



▲ Fig 6A: Commercial Property for sale in Comber, April 2025.

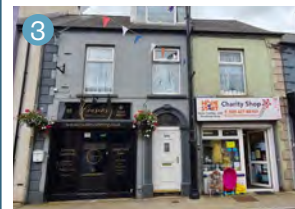
Fig 6A-6E Source: <https://www.propertypal.com/map/commercial-property-for-sale/>



◀ Fig 6B  
**5 Bridge Street,**  
Comber, BT23 5AT  
Commercial Property  
Offers Around £175,000  
409 ft<sup>2</sup> shop



◀ Fig 6C  
**23-35 Castle Street,**  
Comber, Newtownards, BT23 5DY  
Business  
Offers Around £180,000  
12,334 ft<sup>2</sup> shop

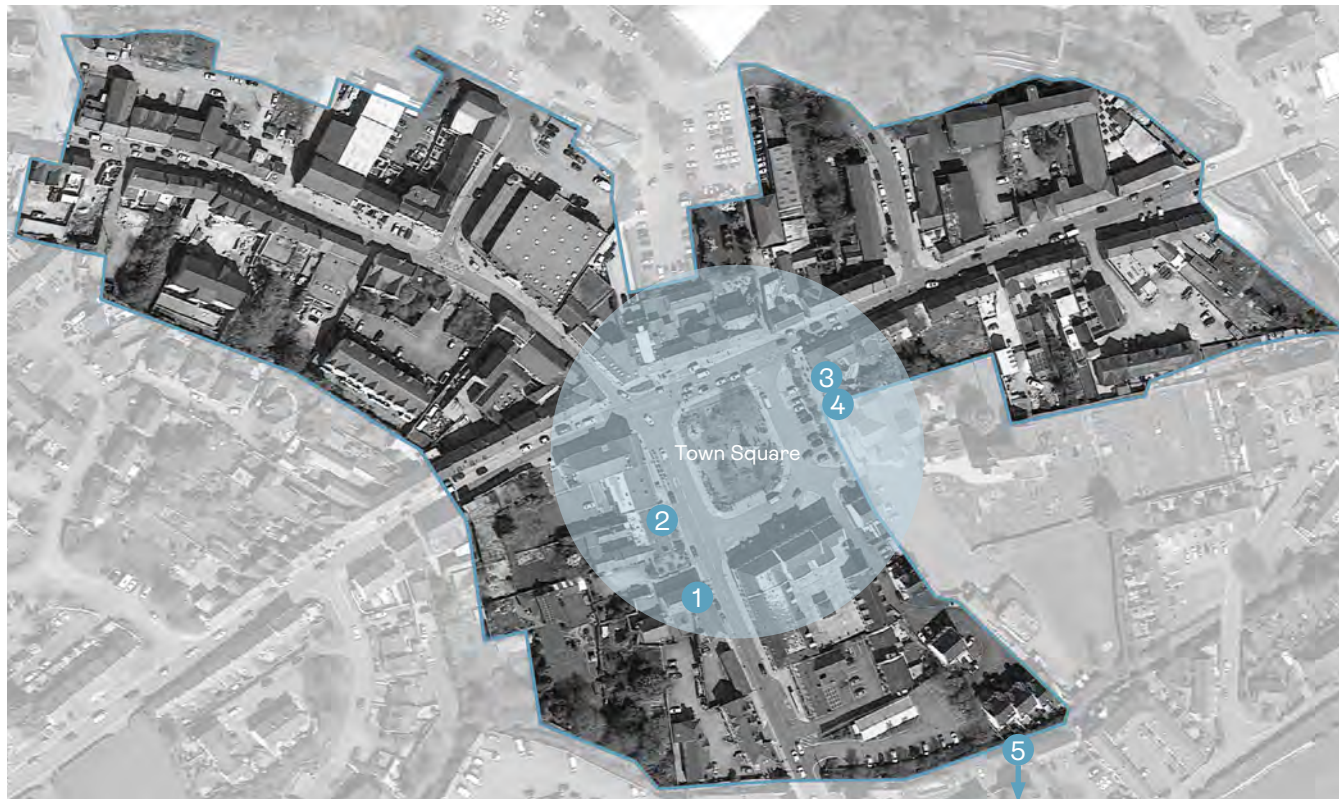


◀ Fig 6D  
**50-52 Castle Street,**  
Comber, BT23 5DZ  
Commercial Property  
Offers Around £160,000  
416 ft<sup>2</sup> shop, 412 ft<sup>2</sup> retail



◀ Fig 6E  
**68-70 Castle Street,**  
Comber, BT23 5DZ  
Commercial Property  
Offers Around £120,000  
315 ft<sup>2</sup> and 469 ft<sup>2</sup> shops

## Suggested Sites from Public Consultation



▲ Fig 6F: Comber Town Centre, with suggested sites for a Community Enterprise Hub.

### Location

Most respondents wanted a hub to be located close to the town centre/Square (e.g. former Danske bank site, above Gilmore Funeral Directors), with some suggesting upgrading the community hall/centre. **90%** of respondents who suggested locations for a Community Enterprise Hubs, suggested sites in the town centre for the hub. The suggested sites are listed below and labelled in the map, fig 6F. None of the suggested properties are for sale, as at 27-03-2025 on Property Pal.

1. *Above Gilmore Funeral Directors, The Square*: There were 6 suggestions for this site.
2. *Above Aureen, The Square*.
3. *Above Hairdressers, The Square*
4. *Old Progressive Building Society unit*.
5. *Comber Community Centre*: This is outside of the town centre boundary, to the south. This is the site to be used for the Mini Digi Hub.



# Site Options

▼ Fig 6G



**Above Gilmore Funeral Directors**

This site is located on the SW corner of The Square, on Killinchy Street. Although it is in a well-finished building this site is unsuitable for a community enterprise hub, due its small size, and the accessibility constraints to the upper floor. This site is also unavailable to purchase.

▼ Fig 6H



**Auren**

This site is located on West edge of The Square. This site is a 1000 ft<sup>2</sup> commercial unit. It may be suitable for a community enterprise. It is available to rent, with no indication it is available to purchase (as of Apr 2025).

<https://www.propertypal.com/auren-11-the-square-comber/999166>

▼ Fig 6I



**Above Hair Zone**

This site is located on the NE edge of The Square. This site is a small upper floor residential unit, which is unsuitably small to accommodate the needs of a community enterprise hub. There is no indication it is available to purchase (as of Apr 2025).

▼ Fig 6J



**Old Progressive Building Society Unit**

This site is also located on the NE edge of The Square. Although this site includes both the ground and upper floors, it is also too small for a community enterprise hub. Again, there is no indication it is available to purchase (as of Apr 2025).

▼ Fig 6K



**Comber Community Centre**

This site is located on Park Way, to the south of the town centre, along Killinchy Street. The community centre is the site of a proposed Mini Digi Hub.



# Enler Mill

## Introduction

Enler Village is a significant residential development located off the Newtownards Road in Comber, County Down, that also has commercial element, as described below. The huge residential scheme, led by Hagan Homes, is a £50 million project encompassing 900 three and four-bedroom homes across a 112-acre site. The development is designed to combine modern living with a sense of the area's history, offering residents a high-end turnkey finish.

Enler Village plans also include a business park, nursing home, sheltered accommodation, crèche, and retail units, to make a holistic community environment. Its proximity to Comber town centre will give easy access to local amenities, schools, and the scenic Comber Greenway, enhancing both convenience and lifestyle for its residents.



▲ Fig 6L: Enler Village Housing

## Commercial Component

The commercial opportunity on the site, is only for the erection of Class B1 (b) (Call Centre) or B1(c) (Research and Development) building with associated car parking and landscaping. The requirement of B1 (c) or B1 (b) is problematic for most businesses, as they won't fall into either of these requirements. Planning approval is granted under Application Reference (LA06/2018/1295/RM).

The £40m Olympic House in Belfast was under similar planning restrictions and was unable to secure tenants in the first two years after opening. In late 2024, Olympic



▲ Fig 6M: Enler Mill Commercial Property. Source: <https://www.propertypal.com/the-mill-offices-at-enler-village-comber/808342>

House sought to alter its planning permission to allow it to provide general office space.

Currently the building has recently been completed to a shell and core specification, so would require a full fit-out. Units are available from 2,646 ft<sup>2</sup> (246 m<sup>2</sup>) to 7,938 ft<sup>2</sup> (738 m<sup>2</sup>), which would require a sizeable tenant to fill.

900

3+4 bedroom  
homes

B1

Planning  
Classification

# Mini Digi Hub

There are plans for Comber Community Centre, located five minutes from the town centre, to become an Internet of Things (IoT) exemplar site. This €553,000 (Euros) PEACEPLUS project aims to enhance the centre's management and usability, while demonstrating IoT's potential to local businesses and residents.

## Key Elements

Key elements of the funding application that will create a more efficient and data driven community space include:

- Live people counting
- Environmental monitoring
- Energy tracking

## Project Structure

The project is structured in three phases:

1. The first phase plans to re-imagine the centre, modernising the ageing facility to include refurbishing doors, toilets, floors, lights, the kitchen, and the car park.
2. The second phase will introduce IoT sensors, networking, and hardware to improve building management and provide new data driven insights.

3. The final phase will focus on engagement, marketing, and education, ensuring that local businesses and residents can access and understand IoT applications.

The Mini Digi Hub project will convert a small 5m x 8m room into a high-tech business space for meetings, hybrid events, and mentoring, responding to local business needs for professional meeting spaces. The larger hall will also be enhanced with IoT capabilities.

Additionally, outreach efforts will include open days, mentoring, and workshops. The Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT), one of the partners on the PEACEPLUS, is in the process of developing a Mobile Lab. This will have the potential to visit the various partner regions to provide hands-on technology demonstrations and facilitate the de-risking of the adoption of digital transformation hardware.



▲ Fig 6N: Outside Comber Community Centre



▲ Fig 6O: Inside Comber Community Centre.





# Operation and Delivery Considerations



# Operation and Delivery (1/2)

## Operating and Governance Models

Multi-site operators are seeking to provide high-quality facilities and amenities, with parking provision outside of city centres. It is unlikely that they would take a site in Comber town centre at this time. Smaller private or non-profit providers could operate from a smaller site and provide a more a bespoke offering, often at a lower price. However, they would be subject to the current shortage of suitable sites within the town centre.

Even if a small-medium sized site could be found, in the absence of a remote model similar to the Cube (of which the local enterprise agency, Ards Business Hub is not interested in pursuing), staffing may be an issue.

A new hub would likely require an in-person presence – at least on a part-time basis – to facilitate visitors, users (from venue hirers, and hot-deskers to self-contained offices), and potential users; run promotions and events; manage bookings; shared areas and amenities; and manage the building; as well as finance/admin functions. These roles would have to be covered from rent, reserves or grant funding; and/or covered by volunteers.

The survey further identified that meeting rooms and

event space would be sought more at evenings and weekends. Operators would also have to cover the opening and closing of the hub at these times and may also need to be present on the site. In the absence of volunteers, this would increase staffing requirements and increase venue hire rates.

For these reasons the Hub would have to be subsidised and/or be of a sufficient scale to be viable. Alternatively, the hub would be run under a community minded ethos and/or be part of locally based capable organisation who can place existing staff there and cover some of the admin/finance functions. The study has not identified a suitable willing operator at this time.

## Risk Analysis

Whilst many serviced offices are full, this is not always the case. Especially for more rural based provision not run by an experienced operator of sufficient scale. Even with experienced operators it may take 2-3 years to reach 80% plus occupancy, with deficits possible in Year 1. The risk is magnified when operators have taken out loans and/or have dedicated staff in place.

In recent years, rising utility, staffing, rates and insurance costs have also placed pressure on Operators. These

risks would need to be mitigated. One solution would be for a landlord to be contract out the management of a hub. With the landlord retaining responsibility for the building and the operator being on a fixed price or performance related contract. The absence of suitable



▲ Fig 7A: Ards Business Hub. Source: <https://ardsbusiness.com/new-staff-appointed-at-ards-business-hub/>

## Operation and Delivery (2/2)



▲ Fig 7B: Map of Comber showing Comber Community Centre

### Funding and Finance

Many hubs have emerged from regeneration projects. With local groups securing grant support to acquire and renovate a property (often a vacant heritage property). As a condition of the grant they have to offer it to the public, with a hub being an eligible avenue. Funding has typically come from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), Council, DfC, Levelling Up Umbrella, Growth Funds and/or Town Centre Funds, and Philanthropic Trusts & Foundations; plus fundraising.

This route does not appear feasible at this time due to reduced funding options open to Comber; a shortage of sites and clearly identified operator; and lack of a robust business case for support.

More commercial operators may have a wider portfolio of funding/finance options, which they could pursue. However, they would need an identified site of sufficient scale and a robust financial and/or strategic rationale for investing. The study has not found those to be in place at this time.

### Community Centre and Mini Digi Hub

The Community Centre should receive over £500,000 to help convert it into a Mini Digi Hub with modern meeting facilities. The community centre has two meeting rooms, a large hall and an area round the kitchen. The centre is within comfortable walking distance of the town square (Fig 7B), has a large carpark and will be equipped with the latest audio-visual equipment and technology as part of the investment. If the project is successful, This should meet most of the demand expressed within the survey.

It is anticipated that the re-imagining of the centre will provide a more appealing business aesthetic appropriate for the project's ambitions.





# Conclusion



# Conclusion

## EXISTING OPERATORS

### Existing Operators

Since the Review of the Masterplan, the serviced office market has continued to expand. The opening of the new Formation Works Maryland site, only 2-3 miles from Comber, has provided high-end capacity within the immediate Comber area. Formation Works has also opened offices in Newtownards. Ards business hub is currently at capacity and are pursuing plans to expand its own provision within Newtownards.

Given the maturing serviced office market, and absence of clear local or community provider at this time, it should be left to the market to determine whether they would invest in Comber to meet further demand, and what support if any may be required to do so.

## SITE REVIEW

### Site Review Summary

No sufficiently suitable sites have been clearly identified. Suggested sites are on upper floors (which present access issues), vacant properties (which may need work to bring up to a suitably appealing modern standard) and/or small premises (which may affect layout/returns).

Beyond the town centre, is outside the brief, but would include the Mini Digi Hub Community Centre site and the Enler Mill site. Enler Mill is currently a shell, awaiting fitout subject to sufficient interest coming forward. Enler Mill is restricted by planning to operating as a call centre or research and development base. Change of use may be a path Enler Mill follows at a later date, and if successful, it could open up opportunities for serviced office providers to take on all or part of the building.

## CONCLUSION

### Conclusion

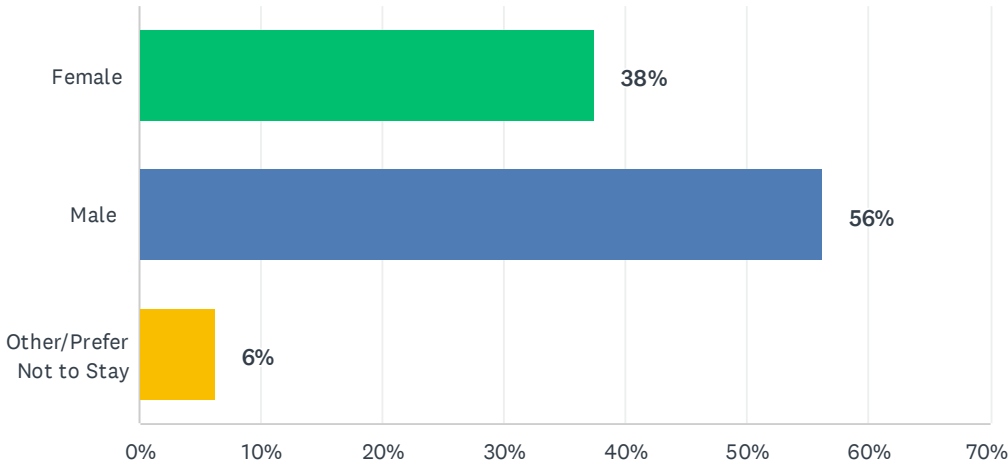
Comber is a growing town, with over 700 PAYE or VAT registered businesses within the Comber DEA. Whilst there is a growing market and a need to improve productivity within the borough, there is not a clear route to a sustainable community enterprise at this time within the town centre due to the issues raised above.

What demand there is, is at least partially being met by neighbouring facilities and potentially the proposed Mini Digi Hub projects scope to provide meeting, training and mentoring facilities. The situation should be reviewed in 18-24 months, as circumstances may have changed. In the meantime, any future provision is best left to the growing serviced office market

# End of Report

# Q1 Gender

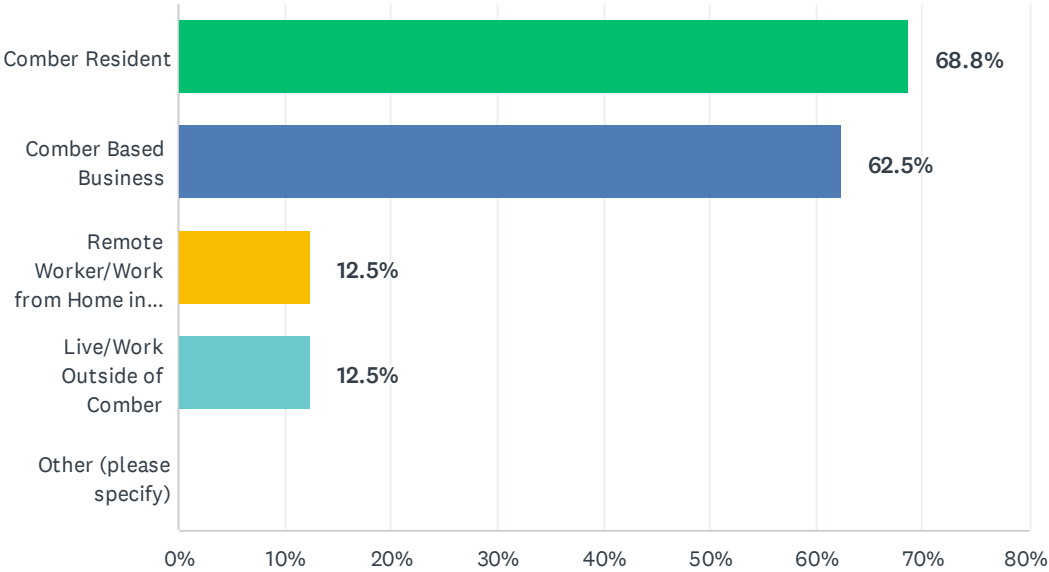
Answered: 16    Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Female	38%	6
Male	56%	9
Other/Prefer Not to Stay	6%	1
TOTAL		16

Q2 Background (please tick all that apply)

Answered: 16    Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Comber Resident	68.8%	11
Comber Based Business	62.5%	10
Remote Worker/Work from Home in Comber	12.5%	2
Live/Work Outside of Comber	12.5%	2
Other (please specify)	0.0%	0
Total Respondents: 16		

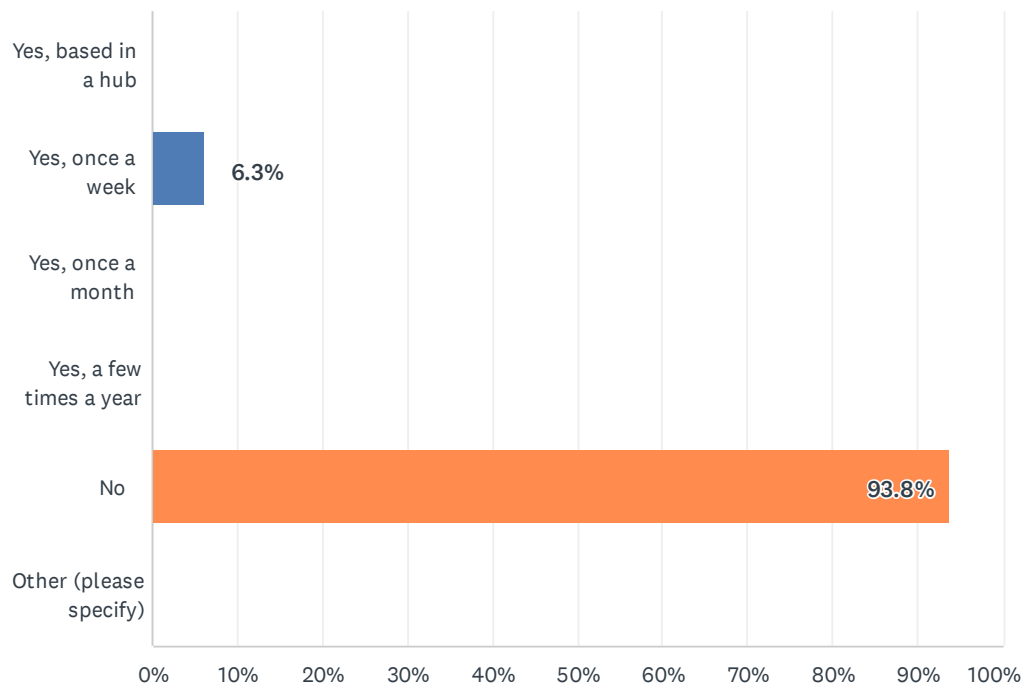
#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE
	There are no responses.	



Q3 Are you currently using a co-working or serviced office hub?

160

Answered: 16 Skipped: 0

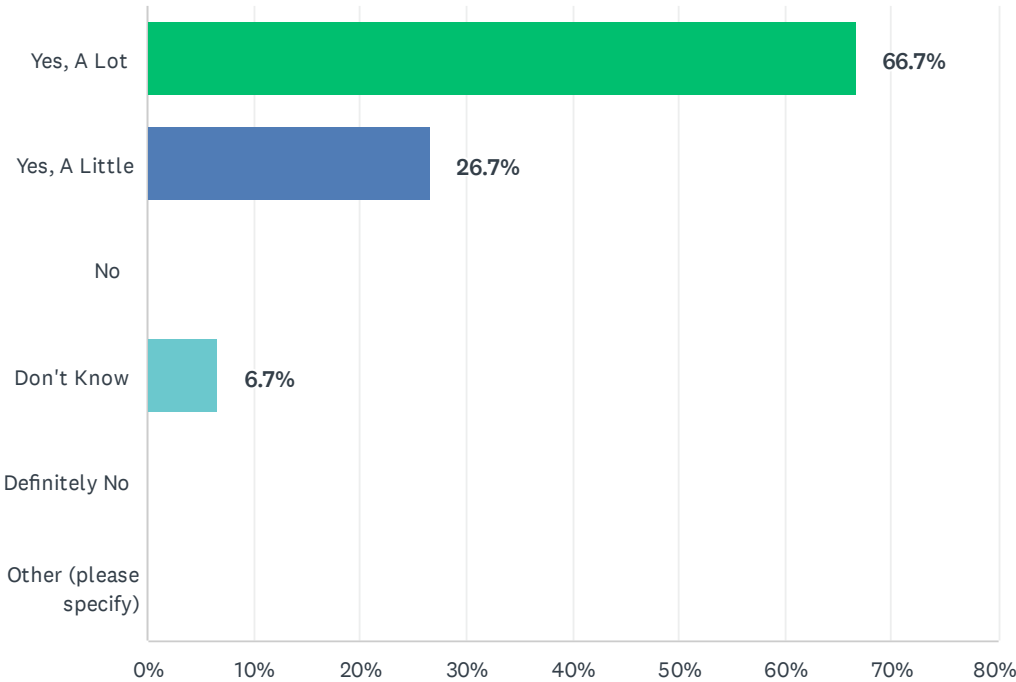


ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES	
Yes, based in a hub		0.0%	0
Yes, once a week		6.3%	1
Yes, once a month		0.0%	0
Yes, a few times a year		0.0%	0
No		93.8%	15
Other (please specify)		0.0%	0
TOTAL			16

#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE
	There are no responses.	

Q4 Would you like to see a community enterprise hub in Comber, that could serve businesses, remote workers and the local community?

Answered: 15    Skipped: 1

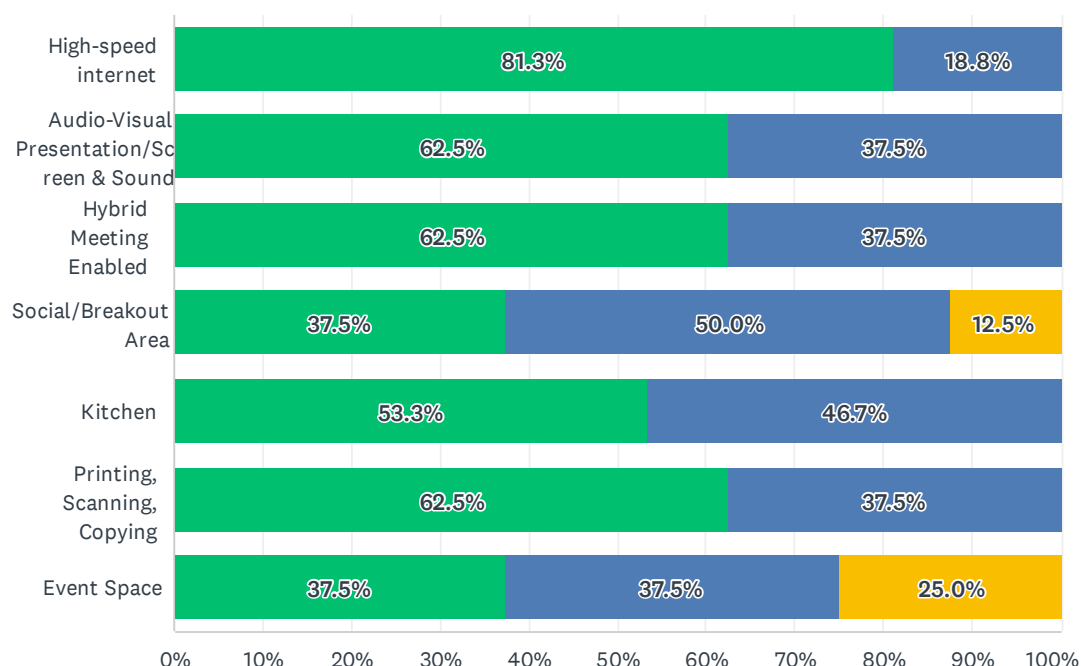


ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES	
Yes, A Lot		66.7%	10
Yes, A Little		26.7%	4
No		0.0%	0
Don't Know		6.7%	1
Definitely No		0.0%	0
Other (please specify)		0.0%	0
TOTAL			15

#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE
There are no responses.		

## Q5 If there was to be a community enterprise / co-working hub in Comber, what features would you require? (Select all that apply)

Answered: 16 Skipped: 0

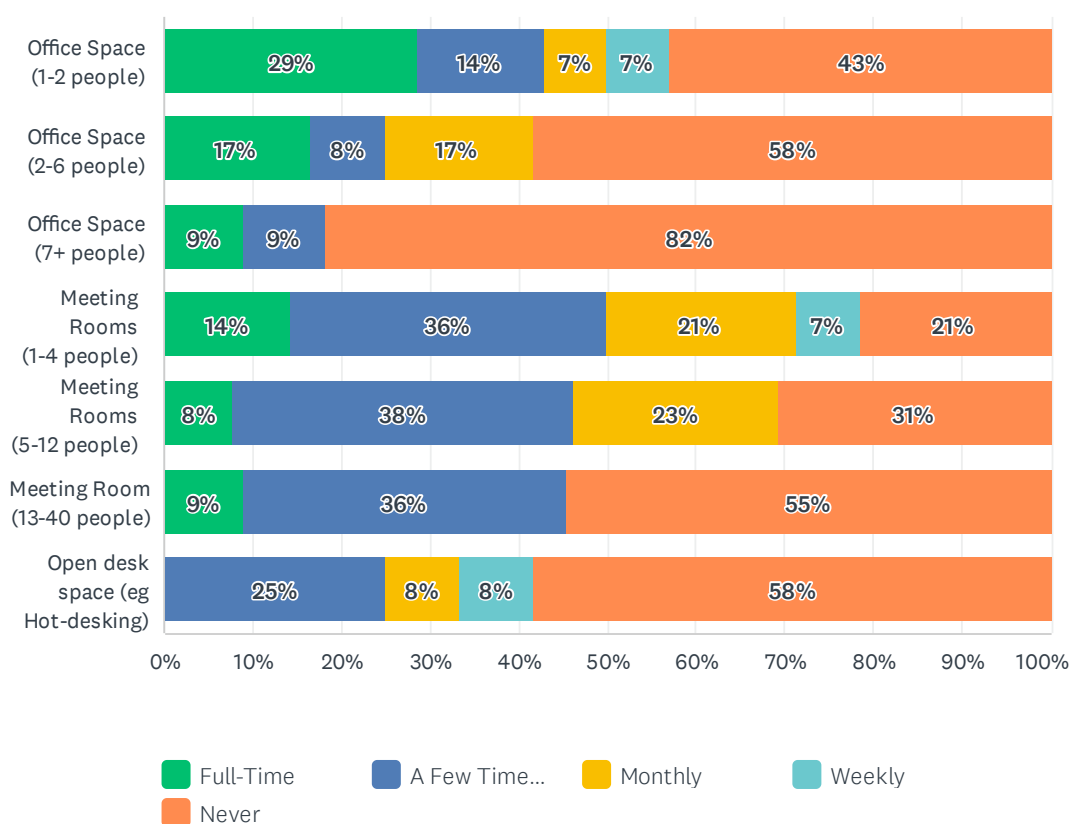


■ Essential
 ■ Desirable
 ■ Not Required

	ESSENTIAL	DESIRABLE	NOT REQUIRED	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
High-speed internet	81.3% 13	18.8% 3	0.0% 0	16	1.19
Audio-Visual Presentation/Screen & Sound	62.5% 10	37.5% 6	0.0% 0	16	1.38
Hybrid Meeting Enabled	62.5% 10	37.5% 6	0.0% 0	16	1.38
Social/Breakout Area	37.5% 6	50.0% 8	12.5% 2	16	1.75
Kitchen	53.3% 8	46.7% 7	0.0% 0	15	1.47
Printing, Scanning, Copying	62.5% 10	37.5% 6	0.0% 0	16	1.38
Event Space	37.5% 6	37.5% 6	25.0% 4	16	1.88

## Q6 If there was to be a community enterprise / co-working hub in Comber, what space would you need? (Select all that apply)

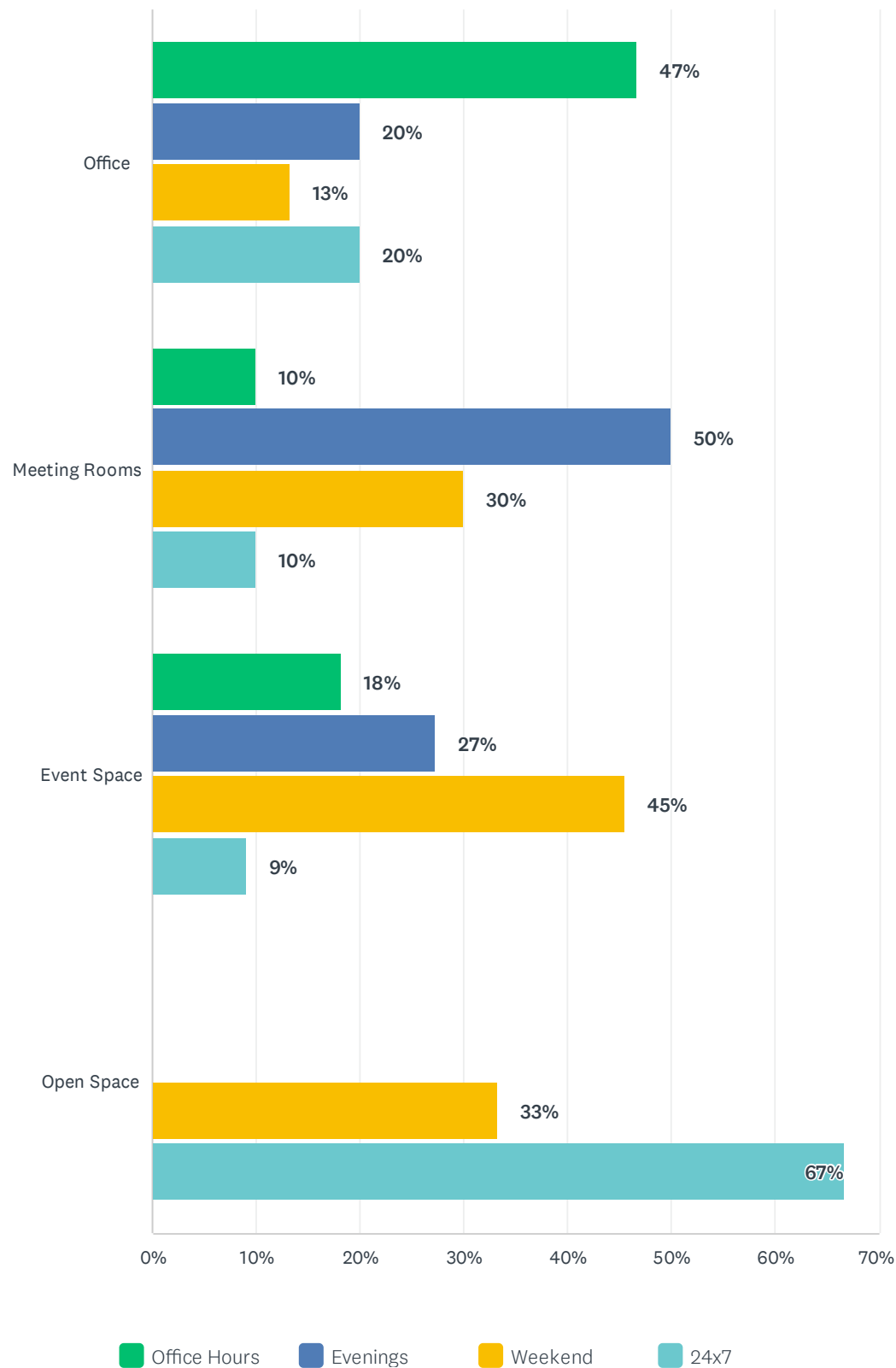
Answered: 16 Skipped: 0



	FULL-TIME	A FEW TIMES A YEAR	MONTHLY	WEEKLY	NEVER	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Office Space (1-2 people)	29% 4	14% 2	7% 1	7% 1	43% 6	14	3.21
Office Space (2-6 people)	17% 2	8% 1	17% 2	0% 0	58% 7	12	3.75
Office Space (7+ people)	9% 1	9% 1	0% 0	0% 0	82% 9	11	4.36
Meeting Rooms (1-4 people)	14% 2	36% 5	21% 3	7% 1	21% 3	14	2.86
Meeting Rooms (5-12 people)	8% 1	38% 5	23% 3	0% 0	31% 4	13	3.08
Meeting Room (13-40 people)	9% 1	36% 4	0% 0	0% 0	55% 6	11	3.55
Open desk space (eg Hot-desking)	0% 0	25% 3	8% 1	8% 1	58% 7	12	4.00

## Q7 What access would you need?

Answered: 13 Skipped: 3





	OFFICE HOURS	EVENINGS	WEEKEND	24X7	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Office	47% 7	20% 3	13% 2	20% 3	15	1.00
Meeting Rooms	10% 1	50% 5	30% 3	10% 1	10	2.00
Event Space	18% 2	27% 3	45% 5	9% 1	11	3.00
Open Space	0% 0	0% 0	33% 1	67% 2	3	4.00

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## Q8 Are you aware of any sites for a community enterprise hub within Comber? and/or where would you prefer to see a community enterprise hub within Comber?

Answered: 13 Skipped: 3

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	It would be good if some redundant space could be used. It would for it to be co located.	3/7/2025 11:56 AM
2	Parkway.. a re-imagining of the community hall	3/5/2025 2:28 PM
3	Pls. Check already sent full box answers to these 4 questions by WhatsApp screen shot to Iris McBride	2/28/2025 3:21 PM
4	Somewhere in the main town rather than outskirts	2/28/2025 2:29 PM
5	Above undertakers office or Aureen - both The Square.	2/27/2025 2:49 PM
6	1 Killinchy Street bt23 5ap	2/27/2025 11:16 AM
7	Vacancy above funeral directors	2/27/2025 10:42 AM
8	1 Killinchy st bt23 5ap	2/27/2025 10:21 AM
9	Probably the biggest challenge. It would be good to position it near the town centre, but sites are currently few	2/26/2025 5:11 AM
10	Mucker's area at Upper Crescent would be a good place to have a community hub. Or council could expand the community centre at Park Way. There is a group who have had a lot of work done in the Muckers area from 2009 and I believe council should do more work with this group.	2/25/2025 2:43 PM
11	No	2/25/2025 12:56 PM
12	Any of the vacant property on the Church of Ireland side of the Square, Progressive building Society, Hair dressers or Boyces etc. The first floor above Gilmore Funeral directors	2/25/2025 12:48 PM
13	There is a fantastic space above Gilmore Funeral Directors. Previously used by Danske Bank. Space upstairs is fantastic. Located right by the square with a car park opposite.	2/25/2025 12:43 PM

Q9 What impact would a community enterprise hub would have on you or your business?

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Answered: 10    Skipped: 6

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Ditto ... above	2/28/2025 3:21 PM
2	Provide a venue of meetings, workshops and the odd event. But use would be ad hoc limited.	2/27/2025 2:49 PM
3	None	2/27/2025 11:16 AM
4	None	2/27/2025 10:21 AM
5	N/k	2/26/2025 5:11 AM
6	It would help it no ends.	2/25/2025 2:43 PM
7	Not sure	2/25/2025 12:56 PM
8	Unfortunately none, as my business is based from home and not office related. But I can see this adding benefit to home workers or for collaborative hybrid working.	2/25/2025 12:54 PM
9	We are a hospitality business, so a hub would hopefully attract more footfall in to the town, may also bring us opportunities to cater for events and meetings held there.	2/25/2025 12:48 PM
10	It would be great to see a space that local businesses could use or local people that need a space to work in.	2/25/2025 12:43 PM

## Q10 What impact would a community enterprise hub would have on Comber?

Answered: 13 Skipped: 3

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Hopefully it would be supportive for small businesses, and community groups	3/7/2025 11:56 AM
2	-Heighten need for enterprise -To enhance the incubation of small companies -To provide training/upskilling for small producers & makers. Eg We could offer this to traders at Comber Farmers Market - Provide a space as focal point for community activities.	3/5/2025 2:28 PM
3	Ditto above	2/28/2025 3:21 PM
4	Provide an opportunity for home workers, sole traders and SME's to access local office facilities. Potential networking benefits too and an outreach centre for council's economic development function.	2/27/2025 2:49 PM
5	More people to spend	2/27/2025 11:16 AM
6	Flexible working for residents	2/27/2025 10:42 AM
7	Bring more people to comber	2/27/2025 10:21 AM
8	N/K	2/26/2025 5:11 AM
9	It would have a great impact on Comber.	2/25/2025 2:43 PM
10	Not sure	2/25/2025 12:56 PM
11	This could be fantastic, it could potentially support other businesses/social groups and perhaps be a meeting location for other areas e.g. Ards and Dundonald.	2/25/2025 12:54 PM
12	I feel a hub would have a great impact, it would help us attract a range of new businesses into the town, give us an angle to compete with larger towns/cities in the borough and surrounding area. Help raise footfall into the town especially on a Monday -Friday	2/25/2025 12:48 PM
13	It would bring more business to the coffee shops etc	2/25/2025 12:43 PM

Q11 Thank you for your time. We welcome any other comments or suggestions you may have.

Answered: 3    Skipped: 13

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Need to have full time staff, fully committed to innovation with in the social enterprise sector.	3/5/2025 2:28 PM
2	Ditto I took an hour crafting full box inputs to above 4 questions So not keen to rewrite due to tech hitch ...but I can send in 4 screen shots if McGarrys or ANDBC contact me and provide WhatsApp link My mobile is 0747 968 3478	2/28/2025 3:21 PM
3	A community Hub is badge needed in Comber due to the amount of groups Comber has. Just one thing, No group involved in Criminal behaviour should be allowed anywhere near it.	2/25/2025 2:43 PM



Unclassified

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## ITEM 11

### Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	04 September 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Economic Development (Interim)
Date of Report	05 August 2025
File Reference	DEVP18
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Participation in DSIT Regulators Pioneer Fund 4(RPF4) - National Coverage Mapping Report
Attachments	N/A

#### Background

The UK Department for Science, Innovation & Technology (DSIT) is running Round 4 of its Regulators' Pioneer Fund which aims to support regulatory innovation.

A collaborative bid has been submitted by Caerphilly County Borough Council (on behalf of all Welsh local authorities) and Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council (on behalf of all Northern Ireland local authorities) in partnership with StreetWave, a telecoms data innovator.

The project proposal includes mobile signal mapping across all 11 council areas in Northern Ireland. The resulting data will provide detailed coverage maps for all roads and railways within the Borough.

Mobile connectivity responsibilities and influence span multiple Council directorates. The deadline for project submission was 31 July 2025. If successful, the project is expected to commence before the end of the calendar year.

Not Applicable

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**Partner**

The Council is listed as a supporting partner in the joint Wales-Northern Ireland funding application under the RPF4, led by Caerphilly County Borough Council and coordinated in Northern Ireland by Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council.

**Project Objectives**

The project objectives include:

- Collection of real-world mobile signal data across Northern Ireland council areas through drive and walk studies using mobile coverage sensors
- Supporting regulatory innovation and investment planning with verified, hyperlocal coverage insights
- Informing future digital infrastructure decisions, including emergency services coverage and rural accessibility

**Council's Roles and responsibilities**

No financial or resource commitment is required from ANDBC. The Council is asked only to support inclusion in the bid as a partner.

**RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Council notes:

1. the inclusion of Council as a supporting partner in the RPF4 bid and
2. that Council officers will liaise with Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council on any future steps or outputs and report back to Committee when appropriate.

Unclassified

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## ITEM 12

### Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	04 September 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Tourism
Date of Report	06 August 2025
File Reference	TO/EV121
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Annual Tourism Events Programme 24/25 Evaluation Report
Attachments	Appendix 1 Tourism Events 2024 Evaluation Summary Appendix 2 - Tourism Events Programme 2025

The Tourism Events team delivered the following eight Tourism Events between May and November 2024.

Event	Date (2024)	Budget
May Day, Holywood	Monday 6 May	£10,000
UK Pipeband Championships, Ward Park, Bangor	Saturday 18 May	£34,900
Sea Bangor	Saturday 1 and Sunday 2 June	£75,000
Summer Food Festival including Comber Earlies Food Festival (Saturday 22 June)	Saturday 22 – 30 June	£70,000

Not Applicable

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Autumn Food Festival incorporating Tide and Turf, Portavogie (Saturday 7 September)	Thursday 5 - 13 October	£70,000
Shorelife Celebration	Saturday 5 October	£30,000
Bangor Switch On	Saturday 23 November	£20,000
Newtownards Switch On	Saturday 30 November	£20,000
		£329,900

The programme attracted a total of 80,000 attendees, just below the target of 81,000. Unfortunately, no attendance figures were recorded for the Bangor Switch On event due to being cancelled. This figure also only includes events directly delivered by the Tourism Events team, excluding shoulder events and other related events within the Taste Summer and Autumn Food Festivals.

Market research was undertaken at each of the tourism events. Some events had market research undertaken by the in-house team (May Day, Shorelife Celebration and Newtownards Switch On). Sample sizes ranged widely and therefore results should be interpreted by the reader accordingly. A summary is included in Appendix one.

### **Hollywood May Day— Monday 6 May**

The Hollywood May Day celebrations were delivered in partnership with Hollywood and District Community Council (HDCC). The event retained its traditional structure and featured; community activities - Bonnie Baby, fancy dress competitions, the ceremonial crowning of the May Queen, two scheduled maypole dancing sessions, c.70 stalls spread across the Hibernia Street car parks with commercial and charitable offerings prioritised for Hollywood and Borough-based enterprises. Art on the Rails included 30 arts and crafts stalls along Church Road supporting local artists and encouraging extended visitor dwell times.

### **Successes**

- Community engagement - two Hollywood Walking Tours were delivered and the fancy dress competition was simplified with one category for judging.
- Event communications were significantly enhanced through the new control room infrastructure. More cohesive coordination of event plans between Council Tourism Events team and HDCC will assist.
- The introduction of professional Event Security contributed positively to overall operations.
- No cross-contamination was reported in the waste recycling, attributed to comprehensive waste station management and effective signage.

### **Challenges and observations**

- High reliance on gazebos presented operational vulnerabilities.
- Several town centre shops remained closed, limiting additional attendee spend.
- Programmed entertainment was curtailed due to budget and no formal entertainment programming was included; resources were allocated to

Not Applicable

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essential services including traffic management, first aid, stewarding, and cleansing.

### **UK Pipe Band Championships, Ward Park, Bangor — Saturday 18 May**

This event was hosted at Ward Park on Saturday 18 May 2024, following an approach to the Council from the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association (RSPBA). It was delivered in collaboration with the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association NI (RSPBANI). The championship brought together pipe bands and spectators from across the UK and the weather on the day was very favourable.

#### **Successes**

- The Ward Park venue received strong endorsements from RSPBANI and participating bands, with positive remarks on layout, trade offerings, and convenient on-site parking.
- Partnership between RSPBA, RSPBANI and Council.
- Delivery of the hospitality provided to the RSPBA by SERC.
- PSNI, Eventsec, and Bronze Command reported smooth operations and no incidents.

#### **Challenges and observations**

- Breaks that bus drivers required needed to be built into the programme so that these do not slow down operations or increase wait times.
- Rotation of the event returning to Newtownards in 2025 – new site identification.

### **Sea Bangor – Saturday 1 and Sunday 2 June**

A well supported event with excellent weather entertaining c. 30,000 over the weekend. The festival marked the 80th anniversary of D-Day and included a 1940s themed programme to commemorate the occasion with an urban beach, funfair rides, 1940's music programme and dancing, festival bar, food trucks, food demonstrations, children's entertainment and 'have a go' on water activities as well as the return of the rowing competition.

The D-Day 80 Commemorative Service was held at the McKee Clock Arena on 2 June including a Drumhead Service and Beating Retreat by the Royal Irish Regiment accompanied by a military village. Both were well attended.

#### **Successes**

- The passport trail, which spanned the City Centre on Saturday and the Military Village on Sunday had 1000 passports completed.
- The urban beach was busy with families throughout the day and the rowing competition drew significant interest, with positive feedback from participants encouraging consideration of a two-day format going forward.
- A pre-event disability audit was carried by North Down Disability Forum prior to opening the Sea Bangor site. The audit confirmed the site was well laid out, with only minor adjustments suggested for further improvements.
- Waste and cleansing operations were notably effective, achieving zero contamination across all four recycling stations. Elevated signage and pagoda placement proved successful in guiding waste disposal.



Not Applicable

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### *Challenges and observations*

- Some limitations arose around maritime content: the absence of a ship and fewer sea-themed crafts were noted in market research.
- Budget constraints restricted options for further programming elements.
- The Old Market House was open on Saturday to house local traders, although only four in attendance they reported a positive day.

### **Taste Ards and North Down Summer Food Festival incorporating Comber Earlies Food Festival – 22 June**

The Comber Earlies Food Festival is the headline event in the Taste Summer in Ards and North Down programme which showcases the Borough's food and drink offering. Programming at the event included artisan stalls featuring local producers, a demo kitchen featuring celebrity chef Rachel Allen, producer stage, cookery school, music stage and bar along with family themed arts, crafts and activities.

### **Successes**

- Celebrity chef Rachel Allen was a major attraction. Culinary demos by SERC were professionally executed and well received by audiences.
- A closure of Bridge Street Link was implemented due to observations from the previous year.
- Directional signage and additional car parks were implemented to support the set up and event day.
- Implementation of previous disabled access audit recommendations such as location of toilets and an accessible viewing area improved inclusivity across the site.
- The passport trail encouraged attendees to visit shops in the town with 800 passports distributed. Positive feedback from businesses indicated increased footfall in previously unfamiliar shops to those attending.

### **Challenges and observations**

- Pinch points for attendee flow were experienced during peak times. Site layout and timing of opening hours require reassessment.
- Cars were double parking along Darragh Road which caused access problems for the petrol station.
- The leisure centre site works well for this event, however, considerations will be given to managing the site regarding capacity as necessary, along with the external traffic management plans.

### **Taste Ards and North Down Autumn Food Festival incorporating Tide and Turf, Portavogie – Saturday 6 September**

The Tide and Turf Festival welcomed an estimated 11,000 attendees over its five-hour duration, offering a mix of music, local food and drink, culinary demonstrations, and sea/harbour themed activities. Artisan and food vendors were distributed across three themed zones: food demo area, stage/bar, and children's area. 20 chalets hosted local traders, complemented by eight truck-based vendors and two mobile dessert/coffee stalls. Stargazing and Demo at Dock formed shoulder events at the event in the preceding day.

Not Applicable

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### Successes

- The jet lev display was received well by good audience attendance. This extended the footprint of the site allowing people to view it from the harbour wall, an area which had not been used before.
- The trial routes from Millisle helped alleviate local parking pressure. 551 tickets were booked across Ards, Bangor, and Portaferry for transport services.
- Positive feedback from PSNI regarding staffing, traffic management, and communication.

### Challenges and observations

- Disabled parking arrangements were ineffective; future plans may involve relocating accessible bays to the next quay adjacent to the harbour office.
- Issues within the working harbour during build/takedown to be reviewed for planning.
- Traffic enforcement measures and resident-focused signage are to be reviewed for Harbour Road in 2025.
- Parking pressures, particularly along Harbour Road, despite park and ride support.
- Community Safety reported 22 youth engagements and handled one minor disruption involving alcohol.
- The Food and Drink Officer and Events Team have been trying to source local suppliers to sell wet fish/seafood at the festival for a number of years without success. Negative feedback around the lack of wet fish/seafood for sale at a seafood festival is a common theme from the market research. Officers with the local event working group will continue to try to source producers or providers of wet fish/seafood to sell at the festival.
- The distance to travel for site visits and set up, deliveries to the site etc are higher in cost due to location from depot/office.
- This format will be planned for 2025 with a focus placed on improving the traffic management.

### Shorelife Celebration – Saturday 5 October

The Shorelife Celebration ran as a pilot event in 2024. It was held across Castle Espie and Mount Stewart House and Gardens and was a collaboration between the Council and the two venues. The agreed partner ethos behind the event is a celebration of nature, heritage and community and the event attracted a first time attendance of c. 4,000 visitors with average dwell times exceeding 3 hours. The event showcased the best of both sites, bringing families, nature enthusiasts, and culture seekers together.

### Successes

- Strong partnerships and collaboration between Mount Stewart House and Gardens and Castle Espie contributed significantly to the event's delivery.
- Both venues reported successful secondary spend; Mount Stewart's food court and Castle Espie's retail areas performed strongly.
- Both venues offered free entry on the day which proved effective in securing attendees for this pilot event.

Not Applicable

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### Challenges and observations

- Planning and marketing were constrained by a tight schedule in the first year of delivery.
- The talks programme was affected by the short lead time and as a result experienced low attendance.
- There was a delay in the homeward bound service due to traffic outside each site leaving lengthy wait times for those wishing to depart
- Resources stretched due to the dual-site format.

Both venues have confirmed their participation for a second event in 2025. Shorelife Celebration has the potential to grow into a key shoulder season event and it is therefore programmed for a second year. Proposals include more planning time, audience development to include stalls and exhibitions aligned to each venue and improved traffic management.

### Bangor Switch On, Saturday 23 November

Working in partnership with Bangor Chamber of Commerce the Bangor Switch On event was planned to include a light show which was to be projected onto the Castle. Unfortunately, due to a storm over the weekend the light show was unable to take place. Other elements of the event happened on the day, including a Christmas Market within the vacant TK Maxx building, a school choir programme at Translink and the Christmas passport trail, run in partnership with local businesses to encourage movement through the city centre. Market Fresh ran an additional craft market in City Church on Main Street and the Old Market House was open with free family activities.

A second attempt to run the light show was planned for Wednesday 4 December but again the weather conditions made this impossible.

It should be noted that no market research was undertaken at this event as this was planned for the finale element which included the light show.

### Successes

- The passport trail with over 1,000 passports being used.
- Collaborative working with Bangor Chamber, Market Fresh and the Old Market House
- Planned indoor events were able to happen despite the poor weather.

### Challenges and observations

- Weather mitigations are a requirement at this time of year.
- Budget limitations.
- Planning conversations are required with Bangor Chamber regarding programming.

### Newtownards Switch On – 30 November

Working in partnership with Newtownards Chamber of Trade, the Newtownards Christmas Switch On event was delivered, attracting 5,000 visitors despite the adverse weather. A festive programme included a Christmas Market, a community programme in Conway Square, a switch on finale with snow effects, cold spark

Not Applicable

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displays, choirs and festive characters/ walkabout performers. The passport trail was also delivered with 1000 passports printed and all distributed. The feedback from retailers was positive ensuring footfall moved around the town and into the shops.

The traditional Ards Saturday Market was moved to the car park at Kennel Lane. To facilitate this event, a road closure was implemented on Friday night to allow for the four hour build time for the chalets, reopening at midnight on Saturday night.

### **Successes**

- The Newtownards Switch On event continues to be successfully 'weather proofed' with the chalet set up for the market and has less reliance on a switch on finale programme
- Collaborative working with Newtownards Chamber of Trade.

### **Challenges and observations**

- Delivery costs are high for infrastructure and traffic management to facilitate the road closure. Considerations should be given to how cost efficiencies may be maximised across these two areas.
- The weather continues to be a challenge at this time of year.

### **Event Service Developments 24/25**

The 2024 events programme met attendance targets and maintained high levels of attendee satisfaction. Strong recycling performance was recorded across all events and effective partnership working and operational improvements e.g. control rooms and bus shuttle services were implemented across the season.

Infrastructure improvements (toilets, parking, shelter) remain a priority and are to be managed within budget. For Council to grow on the success of sustainability initiatives at events, and at more events, further investment and attendee education is required.

The Borough Events Strategic Direction 2021-26 (BESD) sets out the key areas for event development over a five year plan. Due to the pandemic, the planning and programming of events across Tourism and Arts were not fully delivered in the first two years. A desk top review of the BESD has taken place across event delivery, grant schemes, capacity development and bid for opportunities. There has been progress across all strands and a further two years to address the 'missing' events years, implemented as a Strategy extension (until 2028), should place the Council in a good position regarding intended outcomes.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Council notes the evaluation report and the Borough Events Strategic Direction extension to 2028/29.

Appendix 1 - Tourism Events 2024 Evaluation Summary

Event	Date	Sample Size	Budget	Actual Net cost	Target Attendees	Actual Attendees	Cost per Attendee	Total Estimated Attendee Spend	Estimated Average Spend per Attendee	OoB % of attendees	Ex NI % of attendees	% Customer Satisfaction
May Day	6 May	103	£10,000	£17,500	5,000	9,000	£1.94	£280,890	£31.21	53	1	82.5%
UK Pipe Band Championship, Bangor	18 May	342	£34,900	£33,864	8,000	10,000	£3.39	£98,444	£9.84	49	20	80
Sea Bangor	1 & 2 June	318	£75,000	£89,199	30,000	30,000	£2.97	£364,299	£12.14	19	0	79
<sup>1</sup> Summer Food Festival CEEF 22 June	22 June – 30 June	127	£70,000	£69,812	10,000	11,000	£6.34	£117,542	£10.69	28	0	88
<sup>2</sup> Autumn Food Festival T&T Fest 5-7 Sept	6 Sept – 13 Oct	138	£70,000	£78,390	8,000	11,000	£6.87	£157,542	£14.00	25	0	91
<sup>3</sup> Shorelife Celebration	5 Oct	17	£30,000	£28,293	3,000	4,000	£9.43	£76,280	£19.07	0	0	88
Bangor Switch On	23 Nov	0	£20,000	£15,823	10,000	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Newtownards Christmas Switch On	30 Nov	90	£20,000	£22,648	7,000	5,000	£4.53	£163,333	£32.67	12	0	79
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>£329,900</b>	<b>£355,529</b>	<b>81,000</b>	<b>80,000</b>	<b>Av. £5.06</b>	<b>£1,258,330</b>	<b>Av.£18.51</b>			

<sup>1</sup>11,000 attendees CEFF & c. 440 at other Festival activity. Total estimated attendee spend, av. spend, OoB, ex NI attendees and customer satisfaction data CEFF only  
<sup>2</sup> 11,000 attendees T&T during Festival. 5,000 at Chilli Fest and 9,000 at Taste at Clandeboye plus c.200 at other Festival activity. Total estimated attendee spend, av. spend, OoB, ex NI attendees and customer satisfaction data T&T only  
<sup>3</sup> Low sample as pilot event



## Tourism Events Programme 2025

Appendix 2

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Date 2025	Event
Mon 6 May	May Day, Holywood
Sat 24 and Sun 25 May	Sea Bangor
Sat 21 June	Armed Forces Day, Newtownards
Wed 25- Sun 30 July	Summer Food Festival including Comber Earlies Food Festival (Sat 28 June)
Sat 19 July	Ards and North Down Pipe Band Championships , Regent House Playing fields, Newtownards
Thurs 5 – Sun 28 Sept	Autumn Food Festival, incorporating Tide and Turf, Portavogie (Sat 7 Sept)
Sat 4 Oct	Shorelife Celebration (multi venue)
Sat 18 Nov	Bangor Switch On
Sat 25 Nov	Newtownards Switch On

Unclassified

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## ITEM 13

### Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	04 September 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Tourism
Date of Report	28 July 2025
File Reference	170871
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below: Update report
Subject	Tour Operator / Trade Show Engagement 24/25 Update Report
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Trade and Consumer Show Attendance 2024/25

#### Background

Throughout 2024/25, the Tourism Development Team (Tourism Manager and a Tourism Development Officer) promoted the Borough at a series of Tour Operator Trade Shows and by hosting familiarisation trips. The budget allocated within existing tourism budgets is c. £8,500 per annum.

#### One-to-one Appointments at Trade Shows

During 24/25 a total of 112 face to face appointments took place at trade shows with 220 follow up emails. Tour operators are given a 10-15 minute 'pitch' of the destination and later are sent links to the bespoke 'Tour Operator' web pages on [Visit Ards and North Down Tour Operators](#). This includes a photo library, itineraries, interactive map and details of local tourism businesses within the area. New contacts are established, and existing relationships are strengthened with the aim of securing tour operators to attend familiarisation trips to the borough. See below for those attended in 2024/25 season and see the Appendix 1 for more details.

Not Applicable

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<b>Event</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Appointments</b>	<b>Follow Up Emails</b>
<i>Meet the Industry Evening</i>	<i>Dublin</i>	4	4
<i>Meet the Buyer (MTB)</i>	<i>Belfast</i>	33	36
<i>Global European Marketplace (GEM)</i>	<i>London</i>	22	22
<i>World Travel Market (WTM)</i>	<i>London</i>	27	132
<i>ITOA (Irish Tour Operator Association)</i>	<i>Derry/Londonderry</i>	10	10
<i>Britain and Ireland Marketplace (BIM)</i>	<i>London</i>	16	16
		<b>112</b>	<b>220</b>

### **Familiarisation Trips (fam trips)**

The aim of securing fam trips is key to educating and showcasing the destination to tour operators. However, these trips can take several years of face-to-face meetings, regular communication and relationship building for them to consider a destination worthy of inclusion in tours. Practically, attending fam trips is also a significant time away from their base, so they must have a high level of assurance that the area will work for their customer base or clients. It is a valuable opportunity to showcase AND and engage with local providers who will negotiate the rates directly with the operators. The fam trips are created on a bespoke basis, based on the operators' desired product/area. All associated costs are covered within existing tourism development budgets, with local trade e.g. hotels supporting by offering complimentary or reduced rates. The Tourism Development service secured seven 'out of market' fam trips and two NI industry fam trips in 2024/25. Word of mouth referral is still a trusted source for visitors making choices for their trips and itineraries. The following trips have taken place during summer 2025.

<b>Tour Operator/other</b>	<b>Fam trip detail/note</b>
Claudia Anton, 360 Travel Design	One day fam trip including visits to Strangford Lough Activity Centre, Walled Garden Helen's Bay, Castle Espie, Echlinville Distillery, North Down Museum and Bangor Castle Walled Garden. This followed initial contact at Meet the Buyer (2024) and follow up at BIM (2025).
AC Group	A one hour online/virtual fam hosted by Tourism Development for approximately 80 of the AC Group team across their various national/international offices. This showcased the destination to a large group with the aim to secure and host in person visits at a later stage.
Meet the Buyer (range)	Meet the Buyer is the largest trade engagement opportunity in Northern Ireland, hosting over one hundred international operators (normally held in ICC Belfast) in the Eikon Centre, Lisburn. In addition to the Business to Business (B2B) meetings, buyers undertook fam trips of different areas of Northern Ireland. This year the Ulster Folk Museum was included as a fam destination with Tourism Officers attending on the day to support

Not Applicable

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	the museum with animation and present destination pitches to the operators. Copeland Distillery and Echlinville Distillery were also at the show to promote their offerings.
Ireland US Experience	Beginning in early 2024 the relationship developed over the next 12 months and a subsequent two-day fam trip hosted the two owners of Ireland US Experience in spring 2025. Visits included: Walled Garden Helen's Bay, Bangor Abbey, Bangor Castle Walled Garden, North Down Museum, Copeland Distillery, Echlinville Distillery, The Old Inn, Mount Stewart House and Gardens, Grace Neill's, Ulster Folk Museum and Ulster Transport Museum. Both owners were first time visitors to the area and now plan to include AND in place of 'more traditional' NI locations within their bespoke travel itineraries, when possible, for their US market.
Alainn Tours	This French Tour Operator, based in Sligo, was scheduled to visit in early 2025 but due to a change of plan now aims to schedule a visit at a future date.
Tim Burford (travel writer)	Writing a travel guide to Northern Ireland for 'Bradt Guides', the world's largest independently owned guidebook publisher, and following a meeting in 2024, Tim spent two days of his nine-day visit to NI within AND. His itinerary included, Nendrum Monastery Castle Espie, Greyabbey, Echlinville Distillery, Bangor Castle Walled Garden, North Down Museum and Ulster Folk and Transport Museums. This publication due to be published in 2026.
Italian Bloggers	A group of three Bloggers who the team initially met in 2023 visited AND in summer 2024 as part of a week-long tour of NI. Visits included Mount Stewart Gardens, the Ulster Folk Museum and staying overnight in Pier 36, Donaghadee. They indicated that the visit highlighted their lack of knowledge of the area and they have committed to return to AND in autumn 2025. Sites they wish to visit include the Walled Garden Helen's Bay, Bangor Abbey, Bangor Castle Walled Garden, North Down Museum, Copeland Distillery, Echlinville Distillery, Mount Stewart House, Grace Neill's, and Ulster Transport Museum. Following their visit, they have posted 11 Blogs on the area reaching over 44K followers.
Hastings Hotel Group	This fam trip included 15 members of staff from different departments within the Culloden Hotel and Spa visiting Redsmith's Forge, Eden Pottery, Copeland Distillery, Harbour & Co., Walled Garden Helen's Bay and Strangford Lough Activity Centre.
Tourism Northern Ireland Staff Fam	In June 2025, members of the Grants Team visited previously TNI funded sites including Tracey's Farmhouse Kitchen, Strangford Lough Activity Centre, Exploris and finishing with lunch in the Portaferry Hotel.

Not Applicable

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### **Tour Operator business**

Lead time on 'direct return on activity' for all aforementioned activity is lengthy, in most instances, and most contacts do not provide updates until 'deals' are already well progressed/committed. However, it is known that the following schedules/tours are direct results of officer trade engagement activity over the last period.

### **Rabbie's Tours**

[Discover Northern Ireland - 3-day tour | Rabbie's Tours](#). Includes Mount Stewart House and Gardens.

### **Middleton's Tours**

[Antrim Coast & Mount Stewart](#). Includes Donaghadee, Ballywalter and Mount Stewart House and Gardens.

### **Nordic Visitor Ireland**

[Ulster Folk and Transport Museum : Travel Guide & Map : Nordic Visitor](#)

And

[Mount Stewart House : Travel Guide & Map : Nordic Visitor](#)

Included on four of their tours: Complete Ireland, Grand Tour of Ireland, Ultimate Tour of Scotland and Ireland and NI Road Trip

### **Great Days Tours**

[Hidden Gems of Northern Ireland](#). Includes Walled Garden Helen's Bay and Ulster Folk Museum

### **Tours by Locals**

[Tour of Belfast & Ards Peninsula by Lorraine M. The best private tours in Belfast](#)

Includes Greyabbey and Mount Stewart House and Gardens.

### **Norwegian Cruise Line**

[Belfast, Northern Ireland Scenic Ards Peninsula Excursion | Norwegian Cruise Line](#)

Includes: Greyabbey, Millisle and Donaghadee

### **Kudos Executive Transfer**

[Ards Peninsula day tours](#). Includes Newtownards, Scrabo Country Park, Mount Stewart House and Gardens and Echlinville Distillery

### **2025/26 activity**

The upcoming season of trade shows begins in October with spaces confirmed to date at Flavours of Ireland, Meet the Industry, to be followed by World Travel Market, Global European Marketplace, Ireland Inbound Tour Operator Workshop and Britain and Ireland Marketplace. Additional shows may be attended as opportunities arise, and existing budget allows.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Council notes this report.



## Trade/Consumer Show Attendance 2024/25

### **Meet the Industry, Dublin**

An event designed to showcase Northern Ireland to Ireland based Tour Operators through an evening networking event.

### **Meet the Buyer, Belfast**

Tourism Northern Ireland's flagship event showcases local tourism businesses to a pre-qualified group of international buyers from Northern Ireland's key markets. This event has now expanded to 1 ½ days.

### **Global European Marketplace (GEM), London**

GEM is a full-day workshop for global tour operators and travel buyers that want to meet the best European product in the most influential contracting event of the year. Over 800 attendees from member companies attend the event, with a personalised agenda of pre-scheduled meetings.

### **World Travel Market (WTM), London**

World Travel Market (WTM) is the leading global event for the travel industry to meet industry professionals and conduct business deals. WTM provides a key opportunity to build business relationships and tour operator engagement. Council exhibits within the Tourism Ireland stand alongside independent operators, national museums and other NI councils and from across ROI.

### **Flavours of Ireland, London**

Flavours of Ireland brings together industry from the island and global travel trade to showcase the Island of Ireland with a programme of 10-minute 1-2-1 meetings.

### **Incoming Tour Operators Association (ITOA), Various locations**

Incoming Tour Operators Association Workshop is an opportunity to meet Ireland's largest and long-established Tour Operators/Handling Agents/DMC's.

### **Britain and Ireland Marketplace (BIM), London**

BIM (Britain and Ireland Marketplace) is a one full-day B2B workshop for international Tour Operators and Travel Buyers that want to meet tourism products from across the UK and Ireland.

Unclassified

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## ITEM 14

### Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	04 September 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Tourism
Date of Report	11 July 2025
File Reference	TO/EV124
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Heritage Cross Trails Project Update Report
Attachments	None

In November 2023, the Council was advised that through the East Border Region (EBR) the Tourism Thematic Local Authority Group would be applying under Investment Area 4.2: Rural Regeneration and Social Inclusion for a 'Heritage Cross Trails' project. It would deliver inclusive shared space within the local area and would see the enhancement and creation of up to three outdoor trails (heritage and biodiversity) to increase links between existing green infrastructure, community heritage and tourism, build cross-community outdoor access and services, and provide better health outcomes. The identified sites were:

1. Sketrick Island (Whiterock Car Park to serve as trailhead)
2. Island Hill
3. Glastry Clay Pits

The project was submitted in May 2024 to SEUPB with a total budget allocated to the Council projects of €522,528.14 (Euros).

Not Applicable

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Officers provided numerous clarifications during the period August to November 2024. In April 2025, the Council was advised the project had been unsuccessful. The Project Manager at EBR sought feedback on behalf of the Council partners. This was provided and shared with the tourism service in June 2025.

The Project Manager was advised that the application failed to meet the required eligibility scoring thresholds and SEUPB indicated it was a very competitive call and severely oversubscribed.

Significant preparatory work has been completed for the three trails included in this project. Therefore, officers in Tourism and Parks and Cemeteries services will continue to seek other sources of funding to deliver these projects.

### RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes this report.

Unclassified

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## ITEM 15

### Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	04 September 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Finance
Date of Report	03 June 2025
File Reference	FIN45
Legislation	Section 5 Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Place Directorate Budgetary Control Report - March 2025
Attachments	

The Place Directorate's Budgetary Control Report covers the 12-month period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. The net cost of the Directorate is showing an underspend of £410k (22.3%) – box A on page 3.

### Explanation of Variance

The Place Directorate's budget performance is further analysed on page 3 into 3 key areas:

Report	Type	Variance	Page
<b>Report 2</b>	Payroll Expenditure	£178k favourable	<b>3</b>
<b>Report 3</b>	Goods & Services Expenditure	£255k favourable	<b>3</b>
<b>Report 4</b>	Income	£23k adverse	<b>3</b>

Not Applicable

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## Explanation of Variance

The Place Directorate's overall variance can be summarised by the following table (variances over £25k): -

Type	Variance £'000	Comment
<b>Payroll</b>	(178)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mainly vacant posts within Regeneration and Strategic Capital Development.</li> </ul>
<b>Goods &amp; Services</b>		
Regeneration	(98)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project underspends:-                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Rural (£56K)</li> <li>ii. BID (£50k)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Strategic Development	(152)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Underspend in revenue costs for Capital Projects</li> </ul>
<b>Income</b>		
Regeneration	(42)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Additional project grant funding –                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Shop Local Campaign (£20k)</li> <li>ii. Rural Devel Grants (£10k)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Strategic Development	65	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>24/25 Levelling Up grant less than budget.</li> </ul>



Not Applicable

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REPORT 1 BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT					
Period 12 - March 2025					
	Year to Date Actual	Year to Date Budget	Variance	Annual Budget	Variance
	£	£	£	£	%
Place					
800 Place HQ	251,614	266,900	(15,287)	266,900	(5.7)
810 Regeneration	865,363	1,113,300	(247,937)	1,113,300	(22.3)
820 Strategic Capital Development	307,160	453,600	(146,440)	453,600	(32.3)
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,424,136</b>	<b>1,833,800</b>	<b>A (409,664)</b>	<b>1,833,800</b>	<b>(22.3)</b>
REPORT 2 PAYROLL REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Place - Payroll					
800 Place HQ	163,924	174,900	(10,976)	174,900	(6.3)
810 Regeneration	545,914	654,200	(108,286)	654,200	(16.6)
820 Strategic Capital Development	314,289	372,900	(58,611)	372,900	(15.7)
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,024,127</b>	<b>1,202,000</b>	<b>(177,873)</b>	<b>1,202,000</b>	<b>(14.8)</b>
REPORT 3 GOODS & SERVICES REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Place - Goods & Services					
800 Place HQ	87,689	92,000	(4,311)	92,000	(4.7)
810 Regeneration	361,128	459,100	(97,972)	459,100	(21.3)
820 Strategic Capital Development	52,870	205,200	(152,330)	205,200	(74.2)
<b>Total</b>	<b>501,688</b>	<b>756,300</b>	<b>(254,612)</b>	<b>756,300</b>	<b>(33.7)</b>
REPORT 4 INCOME REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Place - Income					
800 Place HQ	-	-	-	-	
810 Regeneration	(41,679)	-	(41,679)	-	
820 Strategic Capital Development	(60,000)	(124,500)	64,500	(124,500)	51.8
<b>Totals</b>	<b>(101,679)</b>	<b>(124,500)</b>	<b>22,821</b>	<b>(124,500)</b>	<b>18.3</b>

## RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council notes this report.

Unclassified

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## ITEM 16

## Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	04 September 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Finance
Date of Report	18 August 2025
File Reference	FIN45
Legislation	Section 5 Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Place Directorate Budgetary Control Report - July 2025
Attachments	

The Place Directorate's Budgetary Control Report covers the 4-month period 1 April to 31 July 2025. The net cost of the Directorate is showing an underspend of £15k (2.8%) – box A on page 2.

**Explanation of Variance**

The Place Directorate's budget performance is further analysed on page 3 into 3 key areas:

Report	Type	Variance	Page
<b>Report 2</b>	Payroll Expenditure	£28k favourable	<b>2</b>
<b>Report 3</b>	Goods & Services Expenditure	£13k adverse	<b>2</b>
<b>Report 4</b>	Income	n/a	<b>2</b>

Not Applicable

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## Explanation of Variance

The Place Directorate's overall variance can be summarised by the following table (variances over £10k): -

Type	Variance £'000	Comment
Payroll	(28)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regeneration vacancies</li> </ul>
Goods & Services		
Regeneration	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EI Schemes - £10k</li> </ul>

REPORT 1 BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT					
Period 4 - July 2025					
	Year to Date Actual	Year to Date Budget	Variance	Annual Budget	Variance
	£	£	£	£	%
Place					
800 Place HQ	134,470	133,400	1,070	266,300	0.8
810 Regeneration	271,397	276,300	(4,903)	1,717,200	(1.8)
820 Strategic Capital Development	121,707	133,100	(11,393)	641,100	(8.6)
<b>Total</b>	<b>527,574</b>	<b>542,800</b>	<b>A (15,226)</b>	<b>2,624,600</b>	<b>(2.8)</b>
REPORT 2 PAYROLL REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Place - Payroll					
800 Place HQ	58,065	57,900	165	174,300	0.3
810 Regeneration	240,736	257,300	(16,564)	771,100	(6.4)
820 Strategic Capital Development	118,419	129,800	(11,381)	386,900	(8.8)
<b>Total</b>	<b>417,220</b>	<b>445,000</b>	<b>(27,780)</b>	<b>1,332,300</b>	<b>(6.2)</b>
REPORT 3 GOODS & SERVICES REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Place - Goods & Services					
800 Place HQ	76,404	75,500	904	92,000	1.2
810 Regeneration	30,661	19,000	11,661	946,100	61.4
820 Strategic Capital Development	3,288	3,300	(12)	254,200	(0.4)
<b>Total</b>	<b>110,354</b>	<b>97,800</b>	<b>12,554</b>	<b>1,292,300</b>	<b>12.8</b>
REPORT 4 INCOME REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Place - Income					
800 Place HQ	-	-	-	-	
810 Regeneration	-	-	-	-	
820 Strategic Capital Development	-	-	-	-	
<b>Totals</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	

## RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council notes this report.

Unclassified

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## ITEM 17

### Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	04 September 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Finance
Date of Report	03 June 2025
File Reference	FIN45
Legislation	Section 5 Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Prosperity Directorate Budgetary Control Report - March 2025
Attachments	

The Prosperity Directorate's Budgetary Control Report covers the 12-month period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. The net cost of the Directorate is showing an underspend of £480k (14.5%) – box A on page 3.

### Explanation of Variance

The Prosperity Directorate's budgetary performance is further analysed on page 3 into 3 key areas:

Report	Type	Variance	Page
<b>Report 2</b>	Payroll Expenditure	£75k favourable	<b>3</b>
<b>Report 3</b>	Goods & Services Expenditure	£142k adverse	<b>3</b>
<b>Report 4</b>	Income	£548k favourable	<b>3</b>

Not Applicable

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## Explanation of Variance

The Prosperity Directorate's overall variance can be summarised by the following table (variances over £50k): -

Type	Variance £'000	Comment
<b>Payroll</b>	(75)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Economic Development – (£83k) – vacant post during the year.</li> <li>Tourism – <b>£13k</b>. mainly due to extra staff costs for Tourism Events.</li> </ul>
<b>Goods &amp; Services</b>		
Economic Development	<b>260</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Go Succeed Programme grants - <b>£303k</b>. Offset by additional grant income.</li> <li>Development Projects (£42k) – £33k re Seal Sanctuary claim which offsets the adverse income variance below. (<b>£55k</b>) for Innovation Hub</li> </ul>
Tourism	(119)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ards TT 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (£60k) – Council transfers £60k per year to its EarMarked Funds for this event but the transfer is processed at a Corporate level and not charged to Tourism so it shows as an underspend in Tourism.</li> <li>Growth Event fund (£33k)</li> </ul>
<b>Income</b>		
Economic Development	(495)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Additional grant income for the Go Succeed Programme (£303k).</li> <li>Bangor Harbour contract income higher than budget (£139k).</li> </ul>
Tourism	(53)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tourism - (£17k)</li> <li>Tourism Events – (£35k).</li> </ul>



Not Applicable

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REPORT 1 BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT					
Period 12 - March 2025					
	Year to Date Actual	Year to Date Budget	Variance	Annual Budget	Variance
	£	£	£	£	%
<b>Prosperity</b>					
700 Prosperity HQ	151,175	153,500	(2,325)	153,500	(1.5)
720 Economic Development	960,529	1,278,600	(318,071)	1,278,600	(24.9)
740 Tourism	1,723,741	1,883,700	(159,959)	1,883,700	(8.5)
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,835,445</b>	<b>3,315,800</b>	<b>A (480,356)</b>	<b>3,315,800</b>	<b>(14.5)</b>
REPORT 2 PAYROLL REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
<b>Prosperity - Payroll</b>					
700 Prosperity HQ	141,443	145,100	(3,657)	145,100	(2.5)
720 Economic Development	834,229	917,200	(82,971)	917,200	(9.0)
740 Tourism	1,016,554	1,004,500	12,054	1,004,500	1.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,992,226</b>	<b>2,066,800</b>	<b>B (74,574)</b>	<b>2,066,800</b>	<b>(3.6)</b>
REPORT 3 GOODS & SERVICES REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
<b>Prosperity - Goods &amp; Services</b>					
700 Prosperity HQ	9,732	8,400	1,332	8,400	15.9
720 Economic Development	1,462,642	1,202,400	260,242	1,202,400	21.6
740 Tourism	795,395	914,700	(119,305)	914,700	(13.0)
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,267,769</b>	<b>2,125,500</b>	<b>C 142,269</b>	<b>2,125,500</b>	<b>6.7</b>
REPORT 4 INCOME REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
<b>Prosperity - Income</b>					
700 Prosperity HQ	-	-	-	-	-
720 Economic Development	(1,336,342)	(841,000)	(495,342)	(841,000)	(58.9)
740 Tourism	(88,208)	(35,500)	(52,708)	(35,500)	(148.5)
<b>Totals</b>	<b>(1,424,550)</b>	<b>(876,500)</b>	<b>D (548,050)</b>	<b>(876,500)</b>	<b>(62.5)</b>

## RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council notes this report.

Unclassified

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## ITEM 18

### Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	04 September 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Finance
Date of Report	18 August 2025
File Reference	FIN45
Legislation	Section 5 Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Prosperity Directorate Budgetary Control Report - July 2025
Attachments	

The Prosperity Directorate's Budgetary Control Report covers the 4-month period 1 April to 31 July 2025. The net cost of the Directorate is showing an underspend of £38k (3.1%) – box A on page 2.

#### Explanation of Variance

The Prosperity Directorate's budgetary performance is further analysed on page 3 into 3 key areas:

Report	Type	Variance	Page
<b>Report 2</b>	Payroll Expenditure	£6k favourable	<b>2</b>
<b>Report 3</b>	Goods & Services Expenditure	£37k favourable	<b>2</b>
<b>Report 4</b>	Income	£4k adverse	<b>2</b>

Not Applicable

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## Explanation of Variance

The Prosperity Directorate's overall variance can be summarised by the following table (variances of more than £10k explained below): -

Type	Variance £'000	Comment
<b>Goods &amp; Services</b>		
Tourism	(44)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spring Food Festival (£21k), Armed Forces Day (£10k) and Festival of Seas (£8k) and small underspends across others</li> </ul>

REPORT 1 BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT					
Period 4 - July 2025					
	Year to Date Actual	Year to Date Budget	Variance	Annual Budget	Variance
	£	£	£	£	%
<b>Prosperity</b>					
700 Prosperity HQ	52,207	52,800	(593)	158,500	(1.1)
720 Economic Development	338,640	372,700	(34,060)	1,299,200	(9.1)
740 Tourism	789,191	792,900	(3,709)	2,169,600	(0.5)
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,180,038</b>	<b>1,218,400</b>	<b>A (38,362)</b>	<b>3,627,300</b>	<b>(3.1)</b>
REPORT 2 PAYROLL REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
<b>Prosperity - Payroll</b>					
700 Prosperity HQ	49,838	50,000	(162)	150,100	(0.3)
720 Economic Development	275,800	314,300	(38,500)	947,600	(12.2)
740 Tourism	386,063	353,300	32,763	1,029,800	9.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>711,702</b>	<b>717,600</b>	<b>B (5,898)</b>	<b>2,127,500</b>	<b>(0.8)</b>
REPORT 3 GOODS & SERVICES REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
<b>Prosperity - Goods &amp; Services</b>					
700 Prosperity HQ	2,368	2,800	(432)	8,400	(15.4)
720 Economic Development	196,880	189,200	7,680	859,100	4.1
740 Tourism	434,361	478,400	(44,039)	1,199,800	(9.2)
<b>Total</b>	<b>633,609</b>	<b>670,400</b>	<b>C (36,791)</b>	<b>2,067,300</b>	<b>(5.5)</b>
REPORT 4 INCOME REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
<b>Prosperity - Income</b>					
700 Prosperity HQ	-	-	-	-	
720 Economic Development	(134,040)	(130,800)	(3,240)	(507,500)	(2.5)
740 Tourism	(31,233)	(38,800)	7,567	(60,000)	19.5
<b>Totals</b>	<b>(165,273)</b>	<b>(169,600)</b>	<b>D 4,327</b>	<b>(567,500)</b>	<b>2.6</b>

## RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council notes this report.

Unclassified

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## ITEM 19

### Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	04 September 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Economic Development (Interim)
Date of Report	12 August 2025
File Reference	ED 137
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Economic Scoping Study on the Future of Economic Development Sectors in Ards and North Down (2025)
Attachments	Appendix 1: Economic Scoping Study Final Report 2025

### Background

Jettora Consulting was commissioned by the Economic Development Section to produce an Economic Scoping Study on the future economic development sectors within Ards and North Down area.

The aim of the scoping study was to assess the current economic landscape of the Borough, explore its future potential and forecast how the local economy might evolve.

The report is structured around two main elements:

### Setting the Baseline

This involved assessing the Council's progress towards achieving its job creation, productivity and visitor targets over the last six years (2018-2024). The research

Not Applicable

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was primarily desk-based research, drawing on relevant quantitative data to inform conclusions.

### Scoping Study

The study addressed the following areas:

- What will the economy look like in Ards and North Down by 2030?
- Which sectors are expected to be most prominent and high performing and where should the Council focus its efforts to create more and better jobs, boost productivity and build on existing strengths?
- Considering the current sectoral and human capital profile of the Borough, which jobs are likely to be in demand and which may decline?
- Will ongoing and future market disruptions impact certain jobs and how can the Council and its partners manage the transition to minimise hardship?
- Are traditional and current working models likely to be replaced by more flexible approaches and what would be the implications for the Borough's economy, infrastructure and society?
- How can the Council prepare for and respond to these shifts to in the local economy to support businesses, promote job creation, increase productivity, and GVA, grow the non-domestic business rates base and meet its environmental commitments?
- What interventions could the Council consider in reaching these goals?
- Which stakeholders or partners should the Council engage to deliver the proposed interventions?

The attached Economic Scoping Study (Appendix 1) outlines the key findings and recommendations for the Council to consider as part of its strategic efforts to drive economic growth in the Borough.

It is recommended that Council approves the conclusions and recommendations detailed in this Economic Scoping Study. This will support continued progress on the current Integrated Tourism Regeneration and Development Strategy (ITRDS) 2018-2030 and inform the development of any future strategies aligned with the report's key findings. Members will be aware that Council is already progressing a number of the recommendations outlined in the report.

### RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council approves the conclusions and recommendations detailed in this Economic Scoping Study.

# ECONOMIC SCOPING STUDY

## Future Economic Development Sectors in Ards and North Down

JUNE 2025





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**Important Notice**

Jettora Limited (Jettora) has been commissioned by Ards and North Down Borough Council (ANDBC) to undertake a scoping study into the economic performance of businesses in Ards and North Down. This Report is based on the tender submission document dated December 2024.

This report is not suitable to be relied on by any party wishing to acquire rights against Jettora for any purpose or in any context. Any party that obtains access to this Report or a copy (under Freedom of Information Act 2000 or otherwise) and chooses to rely on this Report (or any part of it) does so at their own risk. To the fullest extent permitted by law, Jettora does not assume any responsibility and will not accept any responsibility in respect of this report to any party other than the original addressee.

In developing this report, Jettora used data and information provided to us by ANDBC and its advisers. We have indicated within this report the sources of the information provided to us. We have not sought to independently verify those sources. We therefore cannot provide assurance on the accuracy of this information.

The procedures we carried out in performing the work that forms the basis of this report did not constitute an audit. As such, the content of this report should not be considered as providing the same level of assurance as an audit. It should be noted that the information contained in this report is subject to change as a result of changing economic circumstances and factors and is based on circumstances, data and information available at the time of drafting.

Only the final version of this report should be considered definitive.

**Commercial Sensitivity**

The contents of this report are highly commercially sensitive, such that disclosure of any of the contents of this report to any third party (outside ANDBC) could potentially prejudice commercial negotiations between ANDBC and any third party with an interest in development within Ards and North Down. We therefore recommend that the contents of this report be treated as highly commercially sensitive and not disclosed, verbally or in writing, to any third party outside of ANDBC.

ANDBC may also wish to seek legal advice as to whether the commercial sensitivity of the contents of this report would justify it being exempt from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

- This report presents the findings of an Economic Scoping Study undertaken to establish progress against job growth and productivity targets set by Ards and North Down Borough Council in 2018 for achievement by 2030, to identify the key business sectors that will form the sources of employment within the Borough in the future and to establish how the Council can support these businesses in their growth.
- The analysis has been underpinned by a detailed consultation exercise supported by analysis of empirical data. The key stakeholder consulted have included representatives of innovative businesses with links to the Borough, skills providers (UU, QUB, SERC), public organisations responsible for economic development (DfE, Invest NI) and business development providers (e.g. Catalyst, Boom Studios etc)

### Summary of Key Findings

- The table below details the research questions set out within the terms of reference for the assignment and a brief summary of the findings arising from the scoping study:

Research Question	Section of Report Addressed	Scoping Study Finding
<b>Research Question 1: Setting the Baseline</b>		
To establish the extent to which the Council has progressed towards the achievement of the Job, Productivity and Visitor targets in the preceding six years (2018-2024).	Section 2	<p>Whilst job numbers have increased above the average for NI, the Council is <u>regressing</u> in a number of key areas. Particularly:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Productivity: GVA per head has fallen against NI average in real terms</li> <li>2. Tourism - Visitor numbers, tourism expenditure and overnight stays have fallen since baseline (albeit NISRA have changed the approach to collecting the data on visitor numbers since 2019 and so this analysis will have to be revised when comparable data becomes available)</li> </ol> <p>(Full Details in Section 2)</p>
<b>Research Question 2: Scoping Study</b>		
What will the future economy look like in Ards and North Down by 2030?	Section 4	<p>Ultimately the economy of the Borough is tied to the wider economy in NI. The factors as likely to dictate the future economy across NI are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Labour Market and Demographics</li> <li>2) International Policies (for example US tariffs)</li> <li>3) Increased number of Jobs based Remotely / Gig Economy</li> <li>4) Growth of the Tech Sector:</li> <li>5) Green Economy and Sustainability</li> </ol> <p>The key strength of the Borough is a high level of skills and low unemployment. Productivity is falling because a significant proportion of employees in high-productivity jobs are working outside of the Borough (primarily in Belfast) and a high proportion of individuals working in the Borough are employed by the public sector.</p> <p>Full details in Section 4.2.</p>

Research Question	Section of Report Addressed	Scoping Study Finding
Which sectors are likely to be most prevalent and performant and where should Council concentrate its efforts to create more and better jobs, raise productivity and leverage current advantages?	Section 4	The six key sectors expected to drive innovative growth for the Borough most commonly raised in the consultations were: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Creative Technology – particularly screen industries</li> <li>2. Financial, Professional and Regulatory</li> <li>3. Advanced Manufacturing</li> <li>4. Health and Wellbeing</li> <li>5. Agri-Food</li> <li>6. Cybersecurity</li> </ol>
Taking into consideration the current sectoral and human capital make-up of the Borough, what jobs are likely to be in demand and which ones are likely to disappear?	Section 4	The key jobs that will be required to support growth in the six key sectors listed above are expected to be the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ICT professionals / programmers / software developers</li> <li>• Data analysts</li> <li>• Research and development (R&amp;D) managers</li> <li>• Business, research and administrative professionals</li> <li>• Legal professionals</li> <li>• Cyber security professionals</li> </ul> The question of which jobs are likely to disappear is addressed below.
Will the current and future market disruption come at a cost for certain jobs and how can the transition to new jobs be anticipated and undertaken by the Council and its partners to minimise hardship?	Section 3.6	The growing levels of automation and artificial intelligence (AI) utilised by businesses combined with global economic restructuring (e.g. foreign tariffs) and policy changes (e.g. Net Zero) will inevitably have an impact on the numbers of jobs within Ards and North Down. Examples of some sectors that are considered to be vulnerable include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrative and Clerical Roles</li> <li>• Retail Assistants &amp; Cashiers</li> <li>• Call Centre and Telemarketing Jobs</li> <li>• Transport and Storage Occupations</li> </ul> However, recent empirical analysis indicates that rather than 'disappear' many of these roles are likely to transform into other areas. Therefore, the risk of a material section of the ANDBC workforce becoming obsolete by 2030 is considered low.
Is it likely that the traditional and current working models will be replaced by new flexible ways of working and how will it affect the Borough on an economic, capital infrastructure and societal level?	Section 3.5	The use of hybrid structures (whereby employees work a certain number of days from home) is currently the norm within office-based roles and is expected to remain as such for the foreseeable future. Therefore, businesses in Financial/professional sectors are seeking more flexible leasing options that can address regularly changing accommodation needs whilst also ensuring talented staff can be attracted and retained. <p>In Belfast the numbers of landlords engaging flexible office operators to convert accommodation into flexible offices is growing. The consultation has indicated that there are businesses that would utilise flexible office accommodation in the Borough if it was of the right quality and there are a growing number of people in the Borough working as independent freelancers that are seeking this form of accommodation also. However, the supply of suitable accommodation within the Borough at present is very limited which is forcing businesses to look elsewhere.</p> Full details in Section 3.5,

Research Question	Section of Report Addressed	Scoping Study Finding
How can the Council prepare and respond to these shifts in the local economy with the aim to supporting businesses, promote job creation, productivity, increase GVA, increase the non-domestic business rates and meet its commitment to the environment?	Section 5	<p>DfE's new strategy focusing on sub-regional investment is a significant opportunity to address the declining productivity of the Borough and means the Council has increasingly important role to play. The starting point for DfE's proposals is the establishment of an effective <b>Local Economic Partnership (LEP)</b>. The LEP will bring together key stakeholders and partners whose objectives and goals are aligned to the Council's economic growth objectives. When established the LEP can identify barriers to economic development in the Borough and identify potential interventions to address these barriers.</p> <p>A fundamental driver for increasing employment and enhancing GVA within the Borough is the successful attraction and retention of innovative, high-growth businesses. This includes, in particular, spin-out companies emerging from the Universities in NI which often demonstrate strong potential for commercialisation, export growth, and knowledge-based employment.</p> <p>To achieve this, it is important that the Council has the capability to proactively identify such companies and introduces measures that create a supportive and attractive business environment. The interventions at the Council's disposal are discussed below</p>
What interventions could the Council consider in reaching these aims?	Section 5	<p>There are a range of different interventions that the Council could implement to encourage job growth in the Borough. These are listed in detail in Section 5 but fall into one of the following broad categories:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Innovation and entrepreneurship support</li> <li>2. Commercial Space / Accommodation Facilitation</li> <li>3. Access to Finance for development of accommodation</li> <li>4. Smart Infrastructure and Digital Readiness</li> <li>5. Skills Development &amp; Workforce Readiness</li> <li>6. Partnerships and Joint Ventures</li> </ol> <p>Full details in Sections 5 and 6 and summarised in the conclusions and recommendations below.</p>
Which stakeholders or partners should the Council work with as part of the suggested interventions?	Section 4	<p>Based on the consultations held to date, it is recommended that the following organisations are considered for partnerships<sup>1</sup>:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Invest NI</li> <li>2. SERC</li> <li>3. Universities (Ulster and Queens)</li> <li>4. Business Support Providers (Catalyst Inc, Boom Studies etc)</li> <li>5. Private Business representatives in key growth sectors</li> </ol> <p>Engagement can be part of the LEP or otherwise but each of these organisations' interests are aligned to the Councils in terms of economic growth.</p>

<sup>1</sup> Note: The Council has confirmed that, following the completion of the consultation, it has now extended invitations to the mandatory members of the LEP in line with the Department for the Economy's requirements and additional members will be invited to join following agreement of the LEP's initial action plan.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

- This scoping study has found that whilst jobs numbers in the Borough have increased progress towards targets in the ITRDS on productivity and tourism has not been achieved. Whilst there are a range of interventions already in the pipeline that are expected to improve these metrics, there is a clear need for further support from ANDBC to deliver the targeted benefits by 2030.
- Whilst initiatives such as the Go Succeed support programme are encouraging business start-up in the Borough and so creating opportunities for job creation, the reality is that they do not attract new businesses and indigenous businesses move out of the Borough when they start to expand. Therefore, residents receive little benefits of these jobs as the non-domestic rate income to ANDBC is not materially increased.
- The key limiting factor to growth is the lack of appropriate premises in the Borough to accommodate innovative high-productivity businesses. The economic objectives of the Council all ultimately rely on businesses being based within the Borough's boundary. The consultation has demonstrated that Ards and North Down is an attractive area for businesses so the immediate focus for the Council should be in ensuring that suitable land and accommodation is available for high-productivity businesses to grow and remain within the Borough if the Council's targets as stated are to be achieved.
- The actions it is suggested the Council consider to address the deficiencies in the economic development of the Borough and take advantage of the opportunities for growth are set out below:
  1. **Establish the Local Economic Partnership:** Identify the needs of the local businesses, design and implement the appropriate interventions to meet these needs.
  2. **Prioritise Development of Interventions in Pipeline:** Allocation of resources into implementing key projects as catalyst for growth (Bangor Waterfront Redevelopment, Hollywood Innovation Hub etc).
  3. **Develop an Estate Strategy and Development Brief for Council Assets:** To ensure attractive sites and premises owned by Council are utilised to maximise the productivity of the Borough.
  4. **Assess Feasibility of Engaging with Private Developers:** Consider unlocking potential private investment through a loan fund or for developers or joint venture partnerships.
  5. **Increased Focus on Event-Driven Tourism:** Consider 'event-driven-tourism' opportunities through engagement with local partners to share resources for more regional / international events.

Please note the above is a brief summary only. Full details on all these recommendations are provided throughout this report.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Purpose of Study

This Report sets out the findings of an independent review of the current economic climate in the Borough of Ards and North Down (the “Borough”) with a view to:

- (a) establishing progress against job and productivity targets set by Ards and North Down Council (“ANDBC” or the “Council”) in 2018; and
- (b) identifying the key business sectors that will form the sources of employment within the Borough in the future and how the Council can support these business sectors in their growth.

It is envisaged that the results of this Scoping Study will inform the Council's future strategy regarding interventions to maximise economic benefits for residents of the Borough.

### 1.2. Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference (“ToR”) for the commission states that the aim of the Scoping Study is to support an understanding of the current economic make-up in Ards and North Down, its future potential and to forecast what the local economy could look like in the future. To achieve this goal, the Council wish to address the following two Research Questions:

**Table 1.1: Terms of Reference**

<p><b>Research Question 1: Setting the Baseline</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To establish the extent to which the Council has progressed towards the achievement of the Job, Productivity and Visitor targets in the preceding six years (2018-2024). The research should mainly be desk-based research to compile relevant quantitative data and draw conclusions.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Research Question 2: Scoping Study</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What will the future economy look like in Ards and North Down by 2030?</li> <li>Which sectors are likely to be most prevalent and performant and where should Council concentrate its efforts to create more and better jobs, raise productivity and leverage current advantages?</li> <li>Taking into consideration the current sectoral and human capital make-up of the Borough, what jobs are likely to be in demand and which ones are likely to disappear?</li> <li>Will the current and future market disruption come at a cost for certain jobs and how can the transition to new jobs be anticipated and undertaken by the Council and its partners to minimise hardship?</li> <li>Is it likely that the traditional and current working models will be replaced by new flexible ways of working and how will it affect the Borough on an economic, capital infrastructure and societal level?</li> <li>How can the Council prepare and respond to these shifts in the local economy with the aim to supporting businesses, promote job creation, productivity, increase GVA, increase the non-domestic business rates and meet its commitment to the environment?</li> <li>What interventions could the Council consider in reaching these aims?</li> <li>Which stakeholders or partners should the Council work with as part of the suggested interventions?</li> </ul>



### 1.3. Background and Proposed Approach

The primary strategy that sets out the goals of the Councils regarding job creation and economic growth is the Integrated Tourism, Regeneration and Economic Development Strategy ("ITRDS").

This strategy was developed in 2018 and describes the key investment priorities of ANDBC up to 2030 in order to achieve its vision that *"Ards and North Down will be a place to be proud of which is more prosperous, vibrant, healthy, and sustainable and where people enjoy an excellent quality of life"*.



However, in the interim period since the development of ITRDS the COVID pandemic changed significantly the economic environment within business operates with an increased use of technology and remote working practices. As such, whilst the overarching vision of the ITRDS remains consistent, the Council is considering an update to the approach to delivering this vision.

The key priorities for the Council's Economic Development Team which have formed the basis of this Scoping Study can be summarised into three categories:

- 1) **Economic:** To improve the employment levels and productivity achieved within the Borough to drive economic prosperity that can raise the living standards of all residents of Ards and North Down.
- 2) **Social:** Develop the skills of local residents to ensure that advantage can be taken from increasing need for labour within emerging enterprises and sectors and that social inequality can be minimised.
- 3) **Financial:** Increase the amount of income received by the Council from the non-domestic rate base (rates collected from businesses in the Borough) to allow sustainably reinvestment in appropriate social and environmental actions that align with the Council's vision of a Sustainable Borough.

This Scoping Study has sought to establish the direction of travel of the business community within the Borough over the next five to ten years and how the Council can support business in order to achieve the above outcomes.

## 1.4. Structure of Report

This report aims to address the above objectives and has been set out in the following sections

**Table 1.2: Report Structure**

Section	Title	Overview
2	<b>Setting the Baseline: Progress on ITRDS Targets</b>	This section assesses how the Council has performed against the quantitative economic targets it set itself within the ITRDS in 2018
3	<b>Background to AND Economic Environment</b>	This section provides an overview of the current economic strengths and weaknesses of the Borough and the current activities of the Council.
4	<b>Outcome of Consultation Exercise</b>	This section sets out a summary of the findings of a detailed consultation exercise designed to gather the views of key stakeholders in the business community in the Borough.
5	<b>Potential Council Interventions</b>	This section sets out some examples of local Authority interventions in other areas that have led to successful economic development
6	<b>Conclusion and Recommendations</b>	This section summarises the findings from the Scoping Study and sets out the key recommendations arising from these findings

## 2. Setting the Baseline: Progress on ITRDS Targets

### 2.1. Overview of the ITRDS Targets

The full name of the ITRDS is "*Blue:Green Creatively Connected*" *Integrated Strategy for Tourism Regeneration and Economic Development 2018-2030*". This title reflects the three key areas of economic strength within the Borough as identified by ANDBC, being:

- 1) **The Blue Economy:** 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" and so relates to enterprises associated with the ocean and coastal areas
- 2) **The Green Economy:** The UN defines a Green Economy as "... one that results in improved human well-being and social equity", 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.
- 3) **Creative Industries:** The Creative Industries form a key sector in the Borough, with potential for growth. Our talented producers, makers and creators are central to our society and our economy.

The ITRDS is intended as a long-term vision for the Borough which takes innovative steps to drive the Borough forward and create a more attractive place for residents, businesses and visitors. It articulates the key priorities, targets, outcomes and actions aligned to the latest Corporate Plan ensuring businesses benefit from a prosperous economy.

Section 3.6 of the ITRDS sets out the key outcomes and targets stated for achievement between 2018-30. The key quantitative targets are as follows:

- b) **Jobs Target:** Increase job growth by an ambitious 22% resulting in an additional 7,500 jobs by 2030.
- c) **Productivity 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).
- d) **Visitor Target:** Increase share of Overnight Trips from 6% in 2016 to 10% in 2030
  - a. Overnight Trips to increase from 283,229 in 2016 to 507,227 in 2030
  - b. Associated Visitor Expenditure to increase from £46m in 2016 to £82m in 2030 (based on the assumption that overnight trips in NI increase to 5 million by 2030).

In order to assess performance against these objectives, a range of data sources has been utilised including data compiled by the UK Office for National Statistics ("ONS") and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency ("NISRA").

The latest data available on each target from each of the above sources has been compiled and compared against the existing 2018 data which formed the basis of the ITRDS targets.

## 2.2. Summary Results

The detailed analysis of the latest information recording the economic performance of ANDBC (including links to source data) is provided in Appendix 1. A summary of the latest performance against each target is set out in the table below:

**Table 2.1: Summary Results of Economic Assessment**

Benefit Category	ITRDS Target	Baseline Position	ITRDS 2030 Target	Latest Position	Source of Data used
<b>Jobs</b>	Increase employee job numbers (excluding agriculture) by 22% resulting in an additional 7,500 jobs by 2030	38,182	45,682	<b>43,600</b>	ONS Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES). Baseline- 2015 data Latest: 2022 data
<b>Productivity</b>	Increase GVA per head in AND to at least the NI average by 2030	11,700	26,119	<b>14,259</b>	ONS Regional gross value added (balanced) per head and income components - stated as at 2022
<b>Visitors</b>	Increase share of Overnight Trips from 6% in 2016 to 10% in 2030	6%	10%	<b>4.7%</b>	NI Annual Tourism Statistics 2023
	Overnight Trips to increase from 283,229 in 2016 to 507,227 in 2030	283,229	507,227	<b>256,424</b>	NI Annual Tourism Statistics 2023
	Associated Visitor Expenditure to increase from £46m in 2016 to £82m in 2030*	46,000,000	82,000,000	<b>51,942,893</b>	NI Annual Tourism Statistics 2023

The table shows that, based on the latest economic data available in relation to each category, none of the targets set for 2030 have yet been achieved and, whilst progress has been made with regard to jobs numbers productivity and visitor numbers have regressed.

Each of the three benefit categories are discussed in more detail below.

## 2.3. Performance against Jobs Target

The target for employee job numbers within the ITRDS was an increase of 7.5k (22%) from the baseline data (published in 2015). The latest data on employee job numbers in NI published by ONS was for 2022 and confirmed that the total employment in the Borough (including full-time and part-time employees) had increased by **5.4k (14.2%)** to 43.6k<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, whilst the 2030 target has not yet been achieved, some progress has been made towards this goal.

However, it is important that this result is set in context of the wider NI population and employment growth as a whole.

- The average growth over of all 11 NI Councils is 12% over the same period.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that this figure is the total employment in the Borough. The NISRA Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES) states there were 41,218 employee jobs in year 2022. The difference between this and the 43.6k in the table is that the latter includes employees plus working proprietors.

- The population in Ards and North Down increased from 156k in the 2011 census to 164k in 2021<sup>3</sup> - an increase of 5%.

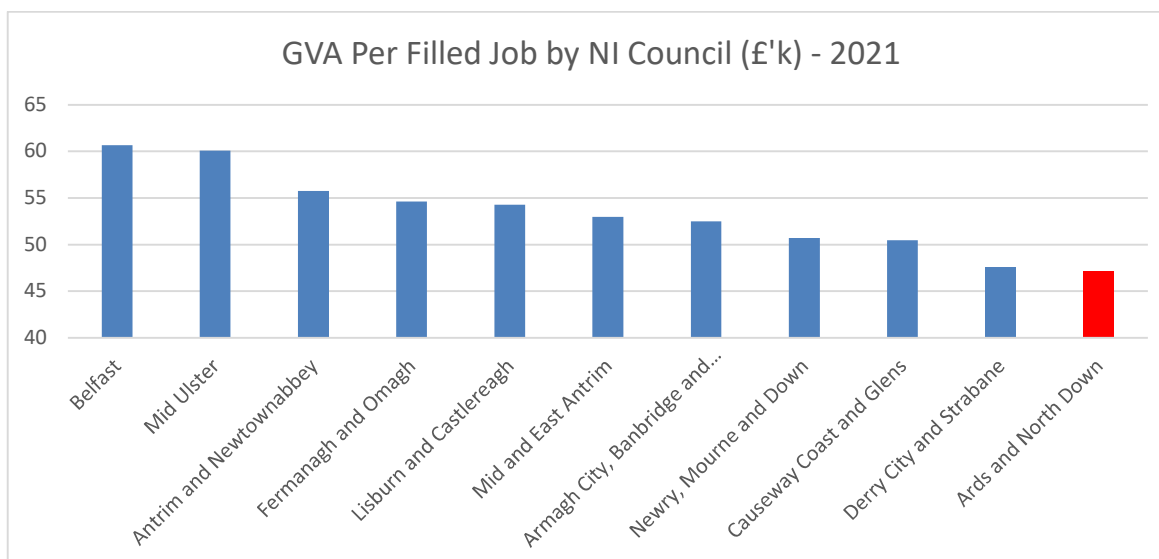
Therefore, the job growth rate is slightly above the average achieved by Local Authorities and the proportion of residents in employment has also increased. This confirms that progress on overall job numbers has been achieved.

#### 2.4. Performance against Productivity Target

The metric used to measure productivity within the ITRDS is Gross Value Added (“GVA”) per head of population. Initial analysis of the table in Section 2.2 above indicates progress has also been made on the productivity metric since the 2018 baseline information was taken. The latest information from 2022 indicates that the GVA per head of population has increased £11.7k to £14.3k in the four years since 2018 (increase of 22%). However, current NI average GVA per head is £26.1k per annum and has been increasing. Therefore, the proportion that AND now contributes to the NI average as a whole has fallen from 60% in 2018 to 55% in 2022.

In addition, there are three key points to note in relation to the measurement:

- 1) **The metric uses GVA per head of population:** Therefore, variances in the resident population of the Borough will impact this metric without any higher-productivity roles being created. A better metric by which to measure changes in the types of job should be GVA per filled job.
- 2) **Context of the wider NI:** ANDBC is still achieving the lowest GVA per Job according to the latest ONS Subregional Productivity June 2023 release.



- 3) **Inflation Adjustment:** Finally, as GVA is measured in monetary value, inflation has an impact. If metric is adjusted to remove the increase due to inflation, the total GVA per head in real terms (2018 prices is

<sup>3</sup> Based on NISRA STATISTICAL BULLETIN 29 November 2022

only £12,956. Whilst this still represents a real increase in Productivity, it is a very long way off the target of £26,119.

These points indicate that the productivity that the Borough contributes to the NI average has **declined** since the baseline position was recorded for the ITRDS in 2018.

## 2.5. Performance against Visitor Targets

### Explanatory Note

It should be noted that Tourism NI has confirmed NISRA tourism data for 2023 and 2024 cannot be directly compared to 2019 data as the methodology changed during the COVID pandemic. In particular the data source used to record information on visitors to NI who exited through an air or sea port in ROI changed and more work needs to be done to assess whether the data can be compared at a NI level.

NISRA has indicated a comprehensive review will be carried out into the difference between the two data sources enable the data to be compared and has recommended that users wait until this process is completed before making any decisions based on the data.

Using the information available, there is an indication that the AND's performance relating to overnight trips has regressed rather than increased since the ITRDS was prepared as:

- 1) The share of Overnight Trips to NI has fallen from 6% in 2016 to **4.7%** according to the latest data.
- 2) The total number of overnight trips has fallen from 284k trips per annum to 256k per annum.

In addition, whilst the visitor expenditure to the Borough initially looks on the face of the table to have increased since 2018 from £46.0m in 2016 to £51.9m in 2023, if this is adjusted to take account of inflation in the intervening period, the expenditure has fallen in real terms to **£42.9m**.

**However, this analysis will need to be updated when the NISRA completes the review of the visitor data as highlighted above.**

In any case, there are two attractions within Ards and North Down that fall within the top 10 attractions by visitor numbers in 2022 according to the latest NISRA data:

- **Pickie Funpark:** In third position with 353k visitors
- **National Trust Mount Stewart:** In fifth position with 215k visitors

## 2.6. Conclusion from Analysis

- The analysis above demonstrates that whilst there has been an improvement in the overall number of residents in employment, this has not led to an increase in the productivity per capita.



- The analysis indicates that public intervention is likely to be required in order to arrest the declining productivity in the area. The results suggest that a shift in the Council's focus from employee numbers to the extent of the contribution to economic growth that these jobs are creating for the Borough would derive benefits. It suggests that future interventions need to consider productivity as a key objective.
- In addition, all the key metrics associated with tourism in the Borough have regressed since the baseline ITRDS data was recorded. The total number of overnight stays and the associated overnight expenditure have declined (although NISRA have changed the approach to collecting the data on visitor numbers since 2019 and so this analysis will have to be revised when comparable data becomes available). Tourism is a key contributor to the GVA generated within any region and so the two points above are linked to an extent.
- In order to attract visitors to the Borough there is a need for either attractive destinations and / or popular events. It should be noted that significant capital projects are in the pipeline designed to improve the tourism destinations within the Borough through the Belfast Region City Deal, including:
  1. Significant upgrade to Pickie Funpark
  2. Upgrade to the Bangor Marina
  3. Conversion of the Ballyholme Yacht Club into a Watersports Centre
  4. Major Public Realm improvement to the Seafront
  5. Upgrade to Whitespots Country Park

The economic forecasts associated with these projects indicate that they will have a material impact on the footfall and visitor numbers to the Borough when complete.

However, there is little evidence of significant demand for the event-based tourism attractions within the Borough to compare with events such as the Lumiere Light Festival and the Halloween Festival in Derry~Londonderry for example or the international golf events hosted within Newcastle, Portrush and Ballymena recently. This might be a potential area for growth in tourism metrics.

### 3. Background to AND Economic Environment

#### 3.1. Existing Business Environment

The key factors that impact the environment for commercial businesses in the Ards and North Down Borough are as follows:

- **Low Private Sector Employment:** Research undertaken by DfE and Queens University for the NI Local Growth Dashboard published in 2023<sup>4</sup> found there are **3,722** private sector employer firms in the Borough (the average for the nine other Local Councils outside Belfast and ANDBC is 4,208) most with fewer than 10 employees. There are a total of **21,500** private sector employer jobs in the Borough. This is the lowest private job numbers of all 11 local councils in NI (the average for councils outside Belfast is 31,881).
- **Low Unemployment:** There is low unemployment in the Borough. As of 2024, the claimant count in Ards and North Down stands at 2.9% of the working-age population<sup>5</sup>, lower than the Northern Ireland average of 3.3%. In 2023, there were 30 confirmed redundancies in the region, compared to 2,570 across Northern Ireland. The borough is home to 5,271 businesses, with small and medium enterprises (SMEs) comprising approximately 89% of these entities, highlighting a strong entrepreneurial spirit.
- **High Commuter Population:** The current population of the Borough is **163,659**<sup>6</sup>. The majority of residents of a working age travel into Belfast based jobs. Traffic volume data held by the Council indicates there is an average net migration of 4,601 cars leaving the Borough every weekday morning to travel primarily to Belfast.
- **High prevalence of jobs in Low Growth sectors:** There is a significant under-representation within high-growth sectors in the Borough. For example:
  - Information and Communication – only **1.5%** of total jobs.
  - Professional, Scientific and Technical – only **3.9%** of total jobs.

Whereas the four largest employing sectors in the Council area are lower growth sectors. Specifically:

- Retail and wholesale (**22%**).
- Health activities (**19%**).
- Education (**10%**); and
- Hospitality, accommodation and food services (**10%**).

It is this factor that is driving the Borough's economic productivity and is the key reason why the GVA per head is the lowest in NI.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/ni-local-growth-dashboard-2023>

<sup>5</sup> Source: Andbusiness.co.uk

<sup>6</sup> Source: 2021 Northern Ireland Census

Research undertaken by ANDBC has shown that employment within the Borough is heavily weighted towards lower-growth employment sectors. The existing economy is underpinned primarily by the following five sectors:

1. **Construction:** A significant contributor to local employment, the construction sector plays a vital role in the region's development<sup>7</sup>.
  2. **Agriculture and Food Processing:** Agriculture remains a cornerstone of the local economy, with numerous businesses engaged in food production and processing. Key sectors include seafood (driven by the Portavogie Harbour) and potatoes/vegetables.
  3. **Professional Services:** The area hosts a robust professional services sector, including legal, financial, and consulting firms, providing a range of employment opportunities.
  4. **Retail:** Retail is a significant sector, offering diverse employment opportunities and contributing to the local economy.
  5. **Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation:** The borough has a vibrant arts and entertainment scene, attracting both residents and visitors.
- **High level of skills and training:** NISRA data demonstrates that 39 of the 86 SOAs within Ards and North Down (45%) are ranked in the top third in Northern Ireland in terms of Education, Skills and Training within NISRA's 2017 analysis. This is a high proportion relative to other Council areas in Northern Ireland.

#### **Summary:**

In summary, the Borough is underperforming in terms of economic performance despite having a high level of skilled individuals and low unemployment. This is because a significant proportion of AND residents employed in the more productive jobs / sectors are working outside of the Borough (primarily in Belfast) and a high proportion of individuals working in the Borough are employed by the public sector.

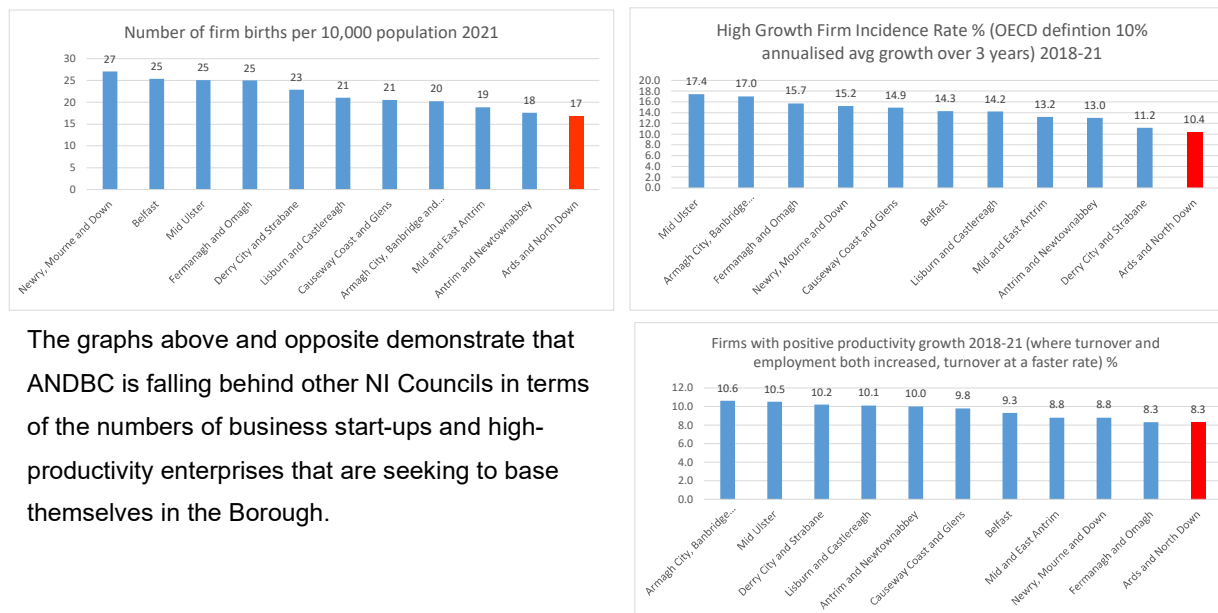
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<sup>7</sup> Source: Andbusiness.co.uk

### 3.2. NI Local Growth Dashboard

The NI Local Growth Dashboard has been developed by Queen's University Belfast in conjunction with the Enterprise Research Centre (ERC) and presents a number of growth metrics for start-ups and existing firms in Northern Ireland.

Ards and North Down are underperforming in a range of different measures associated business growth and productivity. This can be demonstrated by the following data:



The graphs above and opposite demonstrate that ANDN is falling behind other NI Councils in terms of the numbers of business start-ups and high-productivity enterprises that are seeking to base themselves in the Borough.

### 3.3. ANDN Corporate Plan

Whilst the ITRDS is the key long-term strategy for the development of the Borough, the existing Corporate Plan Corporate Plan for 2024-2028 aims to promote sustainable economic growth, enhance service delivery, and improve the quality of life for residents. Three Corporate Priorities have been identified that the Council recognise will require partnerships with other organisations to achieve. These are:

- **Economic:** Increased economic growth attracting more businesses and jobs
- **Environmental:** Reduced carbon emissions as we transition to net zero
- **Social:** Improved wellbeing through social inclusion and reduced inequality

In addition, there is a financial objective to increase the income received from the non-domestic rate base to enable reinvestment in social and environmental projects. Seventeen "Strategic Actions" have been identified for delivery in the four year term of the strategy. The five key actions that are designed to deliver the economic benefits aligned to this Scoping Study are deemed to be:

1. Proactively broadening our community, business and stakeholder engagement approach to include co-design and participation where appropriate.
2. Supporting the growth of key business sectors by focusing on business support, employability skills and
3. Helping people maximise their lifelong potential by increasing their skills, knowledge and employability.
4. Participate in partnerships to improve connectivity (e.g., digital) across the Borough.
5. Working with businesses and communities to enhance and promote the Borough as a sustainable visitor destination.

In summary, it is the desire for partnership working which underpins the latest Council's strategy for addressing the decline in productivity that is occurring within the Borough at present.

### 3.4. Existing Council Interventions

The Council is involved in the development of a number of Projects throughout the Borough that will aim to contribute to the ITRDS targets and need to be taken into account within the Economic Scoping Review. These include the following:

- **Go Succeed Programme:** Go Succeed is a business support initiative which is led by local councils, designed to provide expert guidance to entrepreneurs and businesses. It is funded by DfE but managed by the Council and participants in the programme can access one-on-one mentoring from experts across various sectors, attend masterclasses and events and apply for grants.

There are four categories of support available for enterprises at different stages of development:

- 1) **Engage:** Have a business idea and thinking about starting a business
- 2) **Foundation:** A developed idea, asset ready and capable of achieving VAT threshold within 12 months
- 3) **Growth:** Existing trading businesses with less than 50 employees
- 4) **Scaling:** Existing trading business with export potential and sales potential of £1M within 3 years

The activity in each of the regions of the Borough and the grants awarded are set out below:

**Table 3.1a: Go Succeed Programme Activity against Target**

Go Succeed Active as at 31.03.25	Engage	Foundation	Grow	Scaling
BT18 Holywood	59	12	48	
BT19 Bangor (Outside Ring Road)	142	42	72	
BT20 Bangor (Inside Ring Road)	124	39	64	
BT21 Donaghadee	36	9	10	
BT22 Millisle, Greyabbey, Portaferry	94	21	27	1
BT23 N'ards, Ballygowan, Comber	207	52	118	1
<b>Total Participation</b>	<b>662</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Target (18 months 1/10/23 - 31/3/25)</b>	<b>980</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>2</b>

**Table 3.1b: Go Succeed Grants Awarded**

Go Succeed Grants as at 31.03.25	Target	Actual
Average number of grants	94	99
Total value of Letter of Offer's issued	£320,000.00	£318,366.27

The table demonstrate that the demand for business support has exceeded the original 18 month target for foundation and growth stage businesses and the number of grants awarded has also exceeded targets. This demonstrates there is a material level of business start-up activity occurring in the Borough for which support is being sought.

- **Labour Market Partnership ("LMP"):** Established in 2021 and funded by the Department for Communities. Through the LMP, the Council works collaboratively with statutory, voluntary and community organisations to assess need and improve local labour market conditions. The LMP is responsible for running projects aimed at improving employment rates in the Borough and include:
  - Jobs, Support and Training Fairs
  - Skills for Success Employer Information Sessions
  - Careers Conventions
  - Skills Academies (for such skills as leadership, healthcare, enterprise and entrepreneurship)

The Council use these projects primarily to encourage the economically inactive within the borough into employment.

- **Bangor Waterfront Development:** This is a £40m investment funded through the Belfast Region City deal (Tourism Pillar) with the key objective of improving the visitor numbers to the City of Bangor. Five key BRCD projects that are at different stages of development are as follows:
  - Upgrade to Bangor Marina
  - Re-development of Ballyholme Yacht Club
  - Upgrade to Pickie Funpark in Bangor
  - Public realm development of Bangor Waterfront

This project is expected to generate 114 jobs, 94k visitors and a total of £108m in GVA over 25 years broken down as follows:

**Table 3.2: Bangor Waterfront Benefits**

Project	Net Additional Direct Jobs	Additional Visitors Generated	Total GVA expected to be generated
Public realm	1	N/A	3,802,870
Pickie Funpark	1	15,532	21,619,234
Ballyholme Yacht Club & Watersports Centre	12	48,017	19,385,748
Marina	91	1,135	57,859,782
<b>Total</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>64,684</b>	<b>102,667,634</b>

To date none of the above initiatives have yet been completed but the Council is working with partners and statutory bodies (including the Crown Estate) to ensure delivery as soon as possible.



- **Hollywood Innovation Hub:** Another Belfast Region City Deal funded investment, this is a proposed co-working space with wrap-around programming support that is intended to create a centre of excellence for the creative technology sectors in Northern Ireland - specialising in film, TV and screen industries. The business case for this Project was approved for DfE in 2024 and is expected to deliver the following benefits:

**Table 3.3: Hollywood Innovation Hub Benefits**

Benefit	OBC Targets
Support the growth of new enterprises within the Innovation Hub within high-growth sectors (specifically focussed on Creative Technology / Screen Industries)	Support 20 separate firms in the Digital Creative sector within the Hub
Secure private investment into the Borough	The Innovation Hub will be delivered in collaboration with private sector investors whose objectives are aligned with those of Government relating to GVA and job growth
Support the creation of direct employment	124 employees accommodated and operating within the Hub
Improve the skills and employability of the Region - by providing a programme through the Digital Innovation Hub in collaboration with a local Further Education College or University	20 student per annum receiving formal work experience with Digital Creative firms through the Innovation Hub
Develop an ecosystem within the Creative Tech sector - Create a space to enable an ecosystem within the Creative Tech sector to develop, that meets the specification envisaged for the Regional Innovators' Network.	Total of 16,800ft <sup>8</sup> workspace utilised

- **Council Office Estate Rationalisation:** The Council is currently considering the consolidation of its own widespread estate into a single 5,400sqm headquarters in Bangor City Centre. The proposed HQ will accommodate c400 of the Councils 900 staff on a rota basis on any given working day within the City Centre to provide footfall for hospitality and retail outlets. In addition, this will free up **8,728sqm** of the Councils existing estate footprint for potential business accommodation throughout the Borough. For example the Council are currently considering options for the conversion of Bangor Castle to maximise the jobs and GVA generated within the City Centre. Also, Church Street Council accommodation in Newtownards represents attractive office space for future enterprise.

<sup>8</sup> Target sqft based on 21,000 ft<sup>2</sup> /1,951m<sup>2</sup> at 80% average occupancy after consideration of churn (89.9% occupancy before churn but 80% after churn)

- **Purchase of Land at Comber Road, Newtownards** – Council acquired a site of 13 acres that has been zoned for employment in March 2025 with view to developing for business units to support the next step up from incubation units.
- **Tax Base Development Fund** – The Council has set aside funding by which to undertake initiatives to develop the non-domestic rates base, such as such as the potential to compulsory purchase some derelict properties and restore and offer incentives to undertake meanwhile uses (e.g. offer reduction in rates over number of years).
- **Queens Parade Development:** The Council is working with DfC and Bangor Marine Limited in the redevelopment of this iconic site in Bangor. The plans include a mixed use development with offices, residential and hospitality accommodation. This development, when completed, will create significant capacity for high-quality business accommodation in the City Centre of Bangor.
- **Proposed Empty to Energised Pilot Scheme:** The Council is intending to launch a new grant scheme in November 2025 that will provide financial assistance to property owners who participate in the scheme to renovate vacant properties and reintroduce commercial use to the premises within the Borough under stipulated terms and conditions. A potential future benefit of the pilot scheme may be an opportunity to increase living accommodation on the high street, aligned to the Ministerial Advisory Group Living High Streets programme. The Regeneration team completed a vacancy/dereliction study to inform the details of this pilot programme from which the evidence supported a grant scheme to be piloted in Bangor and Newtownards.
- **Comber Digi-Hub:** The Council is planning to redevelop Comber Community Centre as an Internet of Things (“IoT”) exemplar site. The project will be developed with €553K of funding from the Peaceplus programme. The centre will be used to showcase the value of IoT solutions to the surrounding community and businesses. It will host workshops, mentoring and re-imagine the use of the building itself. this project is at an early stage of design with a view for the project to be operational within the next 24 months.

The above projects each have the potential to contribute towards attracting businesses to establish themselves into the Borough for a range of different reasons. However, it is important to recognise that there are a number of other factors that determine the success of these projects that that are outside of the Councils control – for example infrastructure such as utilities, connectivity, transport planning etc. Therefore, the support of a number of statutory bodies is required to ensure these Projects can deliver their potential benefits.

### 3.5. Continuing Evidence of Demand for Remote Working

A review of business accommodation needs commissioned by the Council in 2021 concluded there was a need for greater supply of flexible office accommodation in the Borough. However, as this analysis was undertaken during the height of the COVID pandemic, there was some uncertainty as to how demand for such facilities have changed since restrictions on working practices have been lifted.

As such, Cushman Wakefield have updated the analysis on the supply of flexible accommodation in the Borough. A report setting out the detailed findings of this analysis is provided at Appendix 2. A summary of the key points noted are as follows:

- Whilst greater numbers of employers are requiring their staff to return to work in a central location, the use of hybrid structures (whereby employees may work a certain number of days from home) is currently the norm within office-based roles. Therefore, businesses are seeking more flexible leasing options that can address regularly changing accommodation needs, whilst also ensuring talented staff can be attracted and retained.
- Private landlords in Belfast have reacted to this increased demand through leasing to private “flex” operators. There has been a significant upsurge of flex providers in the City since the Covid pandemic with new entrants across the city centre including Custom House (2022) Urban HQ (2020) Metro (2025) Regus / IWG at Lincoln (2023) Formation Works across a number of sites and Venyou at Thomas House (2023). A new offer is due to open in Q2 2025 at The Linenhall called Alphonso Gallery. In addition, Catalyst has an active requirement for the city centre (and are already present in Derry City)
- This upsurge in private provision of managed spaces has not yet been reflected into Ards and North Down. With the exception of Formation Works in Newtownards, the offering across the Borough is provided largely by social enterprises for example:
  - 1) **The Old Market House:** Former Danske Bank on Main Street, Bangor - Currently offering event space, hot desking and meeting space (owned by the Kilcooley Women’s Centre (“KWC”)).
  - 2) **Boom Studios:** Main Street, Bangor – Focused on providing maker spaces for artists and creative businesses.
  - 3) **Ards Business Hub:** Sketrick House, Jubilee Road, Newtownards:
  - 4) **North Down Development Agency:** Accommodation available at Balloo Avenue and Innotec Drive.
- Key features of the accommodation for which there is the greatest demand in the “flex” market are:
  1. **Location:** Accessibility to local amenities such as cafes, restaurants and hotels is a priority, making central locations highly sought after.
  2. **Short Lease Terms:** Given the changing needs of occupiers, leases for flexible accommodation can often be as little as twelve months for private offices and monthly for hot-desking tenants.
  3. **Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG):** The modern flexible office offerings enable occupiers of all sizes to choose office accommodation that satisfies various Sustainability Certifications such as Wired Scored, EPC B+.

4. **Facilities & Products:** Operators are increasing the level of amenity space in their centres to support tenants attract and retain staff in competitive labour markets. Whilst meeting spaces are essential, flexible offices are increasingly providing gyms, saunas, roof terraces and private dining and club spaces new schemes.
- The demand for flexible office space is expected to continue to rise. New market entrants are keen to establish themselves in Belfast, driven by the success of the flex model in recent years. As the market evolves, we may see the flex model expand into other sectors outside of the office sector such as industrial and retail. The concept of flexible spaces is poised to grow and adapt, meeting the diverse needs of occupiers.
  - Management agreements have become the industry norm for landlords to engage flex operators rather than leases. These are effectively joint ventures between a landlord and an operator. There is no specific lease between the parties. Usually there will be a base payment to the landlord to cover rent, a management fee to the operator and then a profit share thereafter. The payments are only applicable when the operation is making money and generally the first 50-65% of occupied operating income will cover the base payment. Both parties share the demand risk and will work together to fill space. This is a significant shift in the traditional landlord and tenant relationship.

### 3.6. Jobs Considered at Risk

The growing levels of automation and artificial intelligence (AI) within business at enterprise combined with global economic restructuring (e.g. foreign tariffs) and policy changes (e.g. Net Zero) will inevitably have an impact on the numbers of jobs within Ards and North Down. Examples of some sectors and jobs considered to be most vulnerable to decline or transformation due to automation, digitisation, or business closures in response to economic pressures<sup>9</sup> are set out in the table below:

Broad Roles	Examples of Jobs at Risk	Reason for Decline
<b>Administrative and Clerical Roles</b>	Receptionists, data entry clerks, payroll assistants, personal assistants	Due to rise in automation of routine tasks, adoption of AI-driven systems (e.g. CRM, ERP platforms)
<b>Retail Assistants &amp; Cashiers</b>	Sales assistants, checkout staff	Due to growth of e-commerce, self-service checkouts, reduced high street footfall
<b>Call Centre and Telemarketing Jobs</b>	Customer service agents	Due to growth in AI chatbots and offshore outsourcing
<b>Transport and Storage Occupations</b>	HGV drivers Warehouse operatives Postal and delivery workers	Due to automation of logistics (e.g. driverless vehicles, AI-driven inventory systems) Decarbonisation policies affecting fossil fuel-dependent logistics Brexit-related friction affecting cross-border and export-related transport

<sup>9</sup> Derived from research undertaken by Ulster University Economic Policy Centre and general UK Industrial Strategy

However, recent empirical analysis undertaken by OECD<sup>10</sup> does not suggest that overall employment levels have fallen due to the increased use of AI. Therefore, rather than ‘disappear’ many of these roles are likely to transform into other areas. For example.

- Administrative staff may shift to project coordination or data analysis roles.
- Retail workers may move into customer experience or omnichannel support.
- Drivers may evolve into logistics operators or fleet coordinators.

The risk of a material sector within the Borough becoming obsolete by 2030 is considered low.

Nevertheless, it is important that the Council factor the changing technological and economic / political climate into its plans for future interventions.

### 3.7. Future NI Executive Support: DfE Sub Regional Strategy

The Department for the Economy, as the NI Executive Department in charge of economic development for NI, sets the tone for the actions available to Local Government. The new Sub Regional Strategy which was announced in October 2024 (which replaces the former 10X Strategy) focuses heavily on creating a clear plan to support economic growth and development at a local level.

The strategy focuses on making sure resources and opportunities are tailored to the specific needs of each region, ensuring ANDBC can make the most of local strengths. To deliver this strategy, there will be realignment DfE’s Departmental policies and programmes to drive local growth and Invest NI will be enhancing its sub-regional services with specific local targets.

However, the key tenet of the strategy that is most relevant to Local Authorities in NI (including ANDBC) is in is the introduction of Local Economic Partnerships (“LEPs”). These will be non-statutory, voluntary bodies led by each of the 11 Local Authorities in NI,

A total of £45m of funding will be allocated by DfE into a Regional Balance Fund for use by these 11 LEPs – from which **£4.15m** will be allocated to ANDBC’s LEP.

The Strategy recognises that the structure, membership and approach of these LEPs must be flexible as they must be tailored to local circumstances and that means there will not be a standardised approach. Therefore, each council can decide whether their area is the extent of the LEP or they can choose to collaborate with other council areas to create a bigger partnership. However, DfE have provided a number of guidelines including the following criteria:

- Membership must include the following

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<sup>10</sup> Report: Who will be the workers most affected by AI? (Oct 2024)

- a. FE representative(s)
  - b. Local Enterprise Agency (“LEA”) representative(s)
  - c. Local business representative(s)
- Membership can also include:
  - a. University representative(s)
  - b. Third sector representative(s)
  - c. Financial services representative(s)
  - d. Industry and/or lobby groups
  - e. Public sector organisations(s)
  - f. CPP or LMP representative(s)
  - g. Trade union representative(s)

The purpose of the LEP is to ensure that businesses and other key stakeholders in the economic development of local regions are involved. Therefore, the LEP is required to meet regularly to develop ideas, plans and inform decision making. The Council is responsible for establishing the partnership and will attend LEP meetings as part of fulfilling the role of the accountable body in relation to the funding received from the Department<sup>11</sup>.

### 3.8. Conclusions on Current Business Environment

The empirical analysis within this section has demonstrated that key conclusions drawn behind the under performance of the Borough in terms of Productivity and Tourism growth are likely to be due to

1. Key interventions that will have been delayed
2. High levels skills and education are generating jobs in Belfast primarily
3. Insufficient flexible working accommodation

However, there are number of opportunities that the Council has at its disposal to address this underperformance. The continuing implementation of the HQ relocation in Bangor will create surplus assets that can be utilised to support economic growth. In addition, the shifting focus from DfE towards sub-regional support (in particular the LEPs) represents a significant opportunity for the Council to address some of the underlying issues.

To ensure that support is focused in the correct areas, it is necessary to consult with businesses and with other stakeholders to determine the direction of travel for the economy and for businesses as a whole. This has been covered in detail in the next section.

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<sup>11</sup> Note: The Council has confirmed that, following the completion of the consultation, it has now extended invitations to the mandatory members of the LEP in line with the Department for the Economy’s requirements and additional members will be invited to join following agreement of the LEP’s initial action plan.



## 4. Outcome of Consultation Exercise

### 4.1. Approach to Consultation

In order to establish an up-to-date position of the business landscape in the Borough and the future direction of travel for the local economy a detailed consultation exercise with key stakeholders and local businesses has been undertaken. Four questionnaires were developed tailored to a specific category of stakeholder and issued to select list of consultees with an understanding of / experience in innovative enterprise in the Borough

A copy of the questionnaires prepared for each category is provided at Appendix 3 and the list of stakeholders that were invited for a consultation within each category is below:

**Table 4.1: Organisations Invited for Consultation**

Category	Organisations Approached for Comment
<b>Public Sector Organisations Responsible for Economic Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invest NI</li> <li>DfE – Regional Balance Unit</li> <li>ANDBC – Regeneration Team</li> </ul>
<b>Skills Providers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher Education – Queens and Ulster Universities</li> <li>Further Education – South Eastern Regional College</li> </ul>
<b>Business Development Support Providers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Catalyst Inc (Northern Ireland Science Park): Science and Technology Hub</li> <li>Boom Studios: Creative Hubs in Bangor</li> <li>LEAs</li> </ul>
<b>Sample of Innovative Businesses with links to the Borough</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A range of business working in the following sectors:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Screen Industries / Creative Technology</li> <li>- Financial Regulatory Technology</li> <li>- Cyber Security</li> <li>- Green Energy Storage</li> <li>- Property Development</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

The questionnaire set out the rationale behind the consultation and explained that the two key questions Council were seeking to establish was:

- What are the key enterprise sectors that will form the main sources of employment within the Borough in the future; and
- What support can the Council provide to these sectors in order to improve productivity and employment within the Borough.

Stakeholders were informed that the outcome from this Review will feed into a revision to the economic strategy for the Borough which will set out how the Council provides support to local businesses to maximise the benefits of increased economic prosperity to all residents.

In order to ensure uninhibited views, consultees were assured that all information gathered from Consultees in the course of this consultation will be held in the strictest confidence and that only generalised views will be incorporated in the final report.

## 4.2. Summary of Key Findings

The nine key messages arising from the consultations were as follows:

### 4.2.1. There are a number of key factors that will influence the future economy:

Ultimately the economy of the Borough is tied to the wider economy in NI. The future economy up to 2030 is expected to be dictated by key issues such as the following:

- Changing Demographics: Consultees highlighted an aging population and emigration of skilled / educated individuals from the region (“brain drain”) as being two factors that might impact on the ability to secure talent. This may lead to greater emphasis on local policies designed to retain skills and develop lifelong learning to prepare workers for evolving job markets.
- International Policies: External factors such as international trade agreements between the EU, the UK and the US may have an impact on the businesses that seek to locate themselves in the Borough. An increase in trade tariffs between US and EU that do not impact on the UK may result in businesses seeking to relocate.

However, conversely, the introduction of the Electronic Travel Authorisation (“ETA”) for EU citizens to travel to the UK that came into force on 2 April 2025 may have a detrimental impact on the tourism markets across NI.

- Continuing Remote working / Gig Economy: As highlighted in the Cushman Wakefield report in Appendix 2, the demand for remote working is expected to continue with businesses adapting to a change in the way of working when the ITRDS was developed.
- Continued demand for “Tech” Solutions: The tech sector is expending particularly creative technology with significant investment in digital, Software-as-a-Services (“SAAS”) solutions to replace services. By 2030, this sector is expected to play an even more significant role in the economy.
- Demand for Sustainability: There is likely to be a strong push towards green energy and sustainable practices. The potential in the Borough for wind (onshore and offshore) and renewable energy could become a major economic driver by 2030. Investment in clean energy, electric vehicle infrastructure, and green technologies may transform sectors like construction, transport, and agriculture.

#### 4.2.2. [There are six key sectors expected to drive innovative growth](#)

The following six sectors were raised time and time again by consultees as representing the sectors that are expected to be key areas of innovative growth for ANDBC:

1. Creative Technology – particularly the screen industries (film & TV and game production)
2. Financial, Professional and Regulatory (known as “Reg Tech” or “Big Tech Back Office”)
3. Advanced Manufacturing
4. Health and Wellbeing
5. Agri-Food
6. Cybersecurity

Whilst there was general consensus amongst consultees that the above sectors are likely to see the most growth in terms of demand for jobs in NI, there were different views on which of the above would be most prevalent in Ards and North Down.

However, most consultees recognised that the two key areas that are likely to be most relevant to the Borough are the first two in the list above:

- a) **Creative Technology / Screen Industries:** The Borough is already a growing “base” for innovative companies in this sector such as Yellow Moon, Paper Owl, Italic Pig and Waddell Media. Visual Effects is a growing aspect of this industry and there is significant opportunity for increased jobs and productivity through this service as it can be provided anywhere in the world with access to suitable digital connectivity. The growth in this sector is expected to be further supported by the development of the Hollywood Innovation Hub when completed.
- b) **Reg Tech / Back Office Services:** Companies already operating in this sector include both established global professional services firms such as Allen and Overy and Citi Group as well as new and growing firms such as FSCOM. Whilst most bases for these firms are in Belfast, there is a recognition post-covid that many such jobs can be undertaken remotely and many of the employees in these sectors live in North Down. It is an ideal sector for remote working - potential for use by flexible offices

The jobs needed for these industries include:

- ICT professionals / programmers / software developers
- Data analysts
- Research and development (R&D) managers
- Business, research and administrative professionals
- Legal professionals
- Cyber security professionals

#### 4.2.3. There is a Demand for Skills in Tourism / Hospitality

Most consultees also highlighted tourism as a key sector for the Borough. The growth in demand for the six innovative sectors highlighted above is expected to be economically “additional” (i.e. if growth is achieved in the Borough it will not displace other existing jobs but rather the new jobs will be created or transferred in from other regions). Therefore, the risk of existing jobs in the Borough becoming obsolete is expected to be low.

However, there is a material risk that the demand from individuals to gain skills in these innovative sectors is displacing demand for skills in the existing Hospitality / Tourism sectors. SERC has seen a significant drop in the number of students applying for its courses in these sectors.

This is a risk because (a) tourism is an important source of GVA for the Borough and a key tenet of the ITRDS objectives and (b) the existence of these services in towns attracts businesses from other sectors. Many consultees highlighted the need for a strong “café culture” within a location in order to secure the talented staff they needed to grow. Therefore, if the skills necessary to support these businesses starts to decline, it will have a wider impact than on just the hospitality industry.

#### 4.2.4. University Spin-Out Companies Generate strong Productivity

The consultation with Catalyst, UU and Queens highlighted that companies that have been commercialised (“spun-out”) from University led research and development are a key source of GVA within NI. They highlighted that these companies drive innovation-led economic growth by providing a vehicle to commercialise breakthrough technologies which are able to open up new wealth-creating opportunities, seed new markets, and provide solutions to help other companies raise their productivity and efficiency.

Research undertaken for the ‘*Northern Ireland DeepTech Index 2024*<sup>12</sup>’ found that between 2017 and 2023, a total of 82 active Innovation-Driven Enterprises (IDEs) have been created in Northern Ireland – with a total equity investment of £139m. Out of the 82 active IDEs in NI, almost 30%, or 23 companies, have spun out of the two universities UU and Queens.

Only three (3.6%) of these 82 companies are hosted in Ards and North Down – whereas 58 (70%) are hosted in Belfast. Accordingly, collaboration with the two Universities to attract spin-out firms into the Borough presents a considerable opportunity to enhance productivity.

One of the three AND based IDEs is understood to be Vikela Armour. This company creates 3D printed, light-weight body armour for individuals working in high-risk environments. Vikela is based in the Balloo Industrial Estate and is a prime example of a company within the advanced manufacturing sector with potential for significant growth that the Council might consider supporting.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.beauhurst.com/research/northern-ireland-deeptech-index-2024/#~:text=This%20report%20provides%20a%20snapshot,growth%20and%20innovation%20of%20IDEs.>

#### 4.2.5. The Borough's reputation for art & culture can attract innovative businesses

The Borough has developed strong reputation for arts and culture over the last decade. Enterprises such as Boom Studios, Open House Festival and Project 24 have changed the image. Whilst in themselves these operations do not contribute significantly to the productivity and GVA in the business, they are an important aspect to creating a culture that will attract innovative enterprise.

An example cited by consultees of another similar area in the UK was Brighton. Research undertaken by Arts Council England<sup>13</sup> has highlighted how Brighton's thriving arts and culture scene is a significant driver of economic growth, particularly in the creative digital sectors with businesses combining creative and digital skills showing faster growth than those specialising in only one area. A number of case studies regarding interventions are detailed in Section 5 below.

#### 4.2.6. There is growing demand for jobs in the "gig-economy"

The consultation confirmed that there is a growing number of people within the Borough working as independent freelancers. This trend is likely due to an increase as the number of individuals seeking work but have challenges working '9-5' is rising – parents with childcare challenges for example.

Research commissioned by the UK Government Department for Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy ("BEIS") supports this conclusion. A 2018 report entitled *"The Characteristics of Those in the Gig Economy"* defined the gig-economy as

*"the exchange of labour for money between individuals or companies via digital platforms that actively facilitate matching between providers and customers, on a short-term and payment by task basis".*

The BEIS Report highlighted that roughly 2.8 million people (4.4% of the population in Great Britain) had worked in the gig economy in the past 12 months. A report by the TUC and academics at the University of Hertfordshire found that this had almost doubled to £4.7m only 3 years later at the tail-end of the Covid pandemic.

There is further evidence to support the growth of the gig-economy on a global basis within analysis undertaken by the World Economic Forum<sup>14</sup> ("*...a McKinsey survey in 2022 found that more than a third (36%) of the US workforce identified as independent workers*"). Sectors in which there is a growing number of freelancers/independent workers include digital marketing, website design, software development, accounting, digital administration.

<sup>13</sup> [www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Metro%20Dynamics%20-%20Arts%20and%20Culture%20Impact%20Report.pdf](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Metro%20Dynamics%20-%20Arts%20and%20Culture%20Impact%20Report.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> [www.weforum.org/stories/2024/11/what-gig-economy-workers/#:~:text=The%20rise%20of%20the%20gig,flexible%20and%20agile%20labor%20force.](https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/11/what-gig-economy-workers/#:~:text=The%20rise%20of%20the%20gig,flexible%20and%20agile%20labor%20force.)

As a result, all consultees agreed there is expected to be a growing demand for flexible, high-quality, office accommodation in the City/Town centres of the Borough (driven by both staff working independently as well as remote office workers in professional service firm). Similar demand exists in Belfast and is being addressed by private investors and Catalyst Inc. However, only very limited offerings are available in Ards and North Down currently (see full details in the Cushman and Wakefield report at Appendix 2).

Boom Studios in Bangor is providing this accommodation as a “creative hub” for artists, designers, makers (and is growing having recently expanded to three separate facilities) but there is little accommodation to meet the requirements of business within the professional, finance and/or Reg Tech sectors at present.

4.2.7. There is evidence of a need for greater focus from the Council on “Upskilling”.

The Consultations revealed a potential need for more “upskilling” qualification support from the Council (i.e. the provision of training programs and development opportunities employees already in work to expand abilities and minimize skill gaps).

The consultation with the SERC representative indicated that, in their view, the training courses provided through the Labour Market Partnership focused largely on addressing the economically inactive. Whereas other Councils in NI with whom SERC have worked have achieved productivity benefits through allocating some of the LMP training resources to “upskilling”. Examples being as follows:

Table 4.2: Examples of Upskilling Courses

Council	Programme Name	Examples of Courses Delivered
Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council (LCCC)	Employee Upskilling Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Project Management</li><li>• Strategic Management and Leadership in Practice</li><li>• Reducing Carbon Footprints through Environmental Action</li><li>• International Trade, Customs and Logistics</li></ul>
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council.	Upskilling for Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Leadership and Management</li><li>• Award in Retrofit</li><li>• Professional Coaching</li><li>• Project Management</li><li>• Reducing Carbon Footprint</li></ul>

These all have the potential to drive GVA and productivity and all result in a qualification.



It is recognised that a number of existing ANDBC programmes do include upskilling elements (for example the Classroom Assistant Upskilling Academy, the SIA (Security Industry Authority) Academy, the Childminding Academy, the Childcare Academy) and the Council also allocates grants for Employer Led Upskilling Programmes. However, the SERC representative was keen to highlight a greater focus on boosting individual's existing qualifications has the potential to drive GVA and productivity. The upcoming ANDBC programmes such as Greentech Academy, Administration/Business Services Academy and, potentially, the Working at Sea Academy (subject to funding) may represent opportunities in this regard.

#### 4.2.8. Businesses are seeking Representation Support from Public Bodies

The consultations with private businesses and with Catalyst highlighted a clear desire from local businesses for a route through which ANDBC can represent their interests with regard to wider government support. Businesses owners are keen for a forum through which they can access support with:

- Identifying and accessing grant NI Executive / UK Government Grant support
- Support in dealing with statutory bodies associated with infrastructure, planning, utilities etc.
- Support in representing acquisition/use of surplus public assets
- Designing training programmes for staff to ensure the skills necessary for development exist

There are many different ways that businesses and local Councils can work together for mutually beneficial ends. These can range from formal joint ventures to informal discussion forums /workshops.

#### 4.2.9. There is Strong Support for Engagement in the LEPs

It is understood that DfE guidance on the formation of LEPs states that membership of the LEP must include:

- A representative of the local Further Education College (SERC)
- LEAs – Ards Business Hub, North Down Development Organisation
- Local business representative(s)

Membership can also include:

- University representative(s)
- Third sector representative(s)
- Financial services representative(s)
- Industry and/or lobby groups
- Public sector organisations(s)
- CPP or LMP representative(s)

- Trade union representative(s)

All businesses, skills providers and public bodies consulted confirmed their desire to see ANDBC engage in the LEP to the fullest extent possible. The representatives from SERC, UU, Queens and Catalyst all confirmed their desire to be part of the ANDBC LEP and extolled the potential benefits that they believe such a forum could generate.

Since the completion of the consultations, ANDBC has confirmed the LEP will soon be formalised and mandatory members have all been invited to become members along with Invest NI and DfE. The Council is still in the process of finalising membership and the membership will depend on the projects which will form part of the Action Plan.

## 5. Potential Council Interventions

### 5.1. Overview

There are a number of different interventions that the Council could consider to support the growth of jobs in the Borough. However, it is important to recognise that the Council is bound by public legislation when considering possible interventions. The following are examples of regulations with which ANDBC must take into account in any proposed

- **State Aid Regulations:** The Council has an obligation to adhere to the legislation on State Aid which exists to avoid public authorities granting an advantage through state resources to organisations that could potentially distort competition
- **Procurement Regulations:** As a public body in the UK, ANDBC is bound by Public Contract Regulations 2015 which exist to ensure public funding achieves value-for-money through competition and through adherence to the principles of: non-discrimination, equal treatment, transparency, mutual recognition and proportionality.
- **Planning Policies:** Whilst the Council has increased responsibilities for planning following the transfer of responsibilities in 2015, planning policy in NI is still a two-tier model. Therefore, the Department for Infrastructure retains responsibility for regional Planning Policy.

### 5.2. Interventions Available to the Council

A list of some possible means of support that could be provided by the Council to develop jobs is set out in the table below:

*Table 5.1: List of Possible Council Interventions*

Support Area	Examples of Possible Interventions
<b>Innovation and entrepreneurship support</b>	<p>The Council has existing links to business and skills providers which mean it is well placed to provide mentorships and identify targeted advisory programmes which can connect businesses with experienced advisors to identify and implement productivity improvements. Support programmes that might improve productivity within the Borough include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Support with Applying for Grant:</b> Providing financial support for specific productivity-enhancing projects like technology upgrades or market research.</li> <li>• <b>Business networking events:</b> Creating opportunities for businesses to collaborate and share best practices.</li> <li>• <b>Investment Readiness Support</b> – Helping businesses attract private investment through tailored advice and mentorship.</li> <li>• <b>Digital skills training:</b> Supporting businesses in adopting new technologies and digital tools to streamline operations.</li> </ul>

Support Area	Examples of Possible Interventions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Green Innovation Voucher Scheme:</b> A proposed scheme to offer small-scale grants (e.g. £2,500–£5,000) to rural SMEs to trial, test or adopt low-carbon technologies or sustainable business practices. This could include energy-efficient production methods, sustainable packaging, waste reduction, or digital tools that reduce carbon intensity. Delivery could be led in partnership with SERC or local enterprise agencies, using a competitive application process. A similar model has been implemented in Scotland through the Scottish Government's "Green Business Support" programme, and in Wales via the "Green Business Loan Scheme" administered by the Development Bank of Wales..</li> </ul> <p>In addition, the Council has an important role to play in "signposting" businesses to other NI Executive and UK Government Programmes such as Innovate UK and Innovate NI support. DfE's shifting focus towards delivering support through Local Authorities under its latest strategy mean that the Council's Economic Development Team can provide the link between the national support programmes and the businesses in the Council that will benefit from this support.</p>
<b>Commercial Space / Accommodation Facilitation</b>	<p>One of the key deficiencies that has been identified through this scoping exercise is the lack of suitable accommodation for productive growth in the Borough – in particular flexible office accommodation. The Council's surplus assets, such as the former NIE Site and the accommodation that will be freed-up following the development of the new HQ (including Bangor Castle and Church Street in Newtownards) can be utilised for economic growth.</p> <p>In addition, the Council has the powers to vest (i.e. compulsorily acquire) privately-owned derelict sites (subject to statutory procedures and ministerial oversight) and market these sites for alternative uses that generate economic benefits for the Borough.</p> <p>Interventions to achieve this goal include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Development of Innovation Hubs:</b> Public support for the development of Innovation Hubs is growing pace across Northern Ireland. In addition to the Hollywood Creative Hub, the City and Growth Deals are funding hubs in other key towns and cities in NI.</li> </ul> <p>These hubs can act as incubators for local start-ups and University spin-outs but it is important that the accommodation is combined with the Innovation and entrepreneurship support discussed above.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Provision of a Managed Loan Fund:</b> The Council has access to finance on terms that would not be available to private developers. This finance could be utilised to provide businesses and developers with loan finance (see below for other potential sources of loan funding).</li> </ul>

Support Area	Examples of Possible Interventions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Commercial Opportunities in Council-Owned Recreation Spaces</b> In addition to surplus accommodation, the Council owns and operates a significant portfolio of land currently designated for recreation and open space across the Borough. There may be opportunities to create new commercial offerings within these parks, such as seasonal or permanent café, hospitality or retail units, through long-lease or concession agreements. This could help activate underutilised sites, improve visitor experiences, generate new jobs, and support local entrepreneurs. </li> <li> It should be noted that delivery of this intervention would be subject to several constraints, including planning policy limitations on non-recreational use of open space, potential public opposition to perceived commercialisation of public land, and the need to balance amenity value with revenue generation. Therefore, a site-by-site feasibility and community impact assessment would be essential. </li> <li> <b>Joint Lease Arrangements:</b> Benefits could be created through joint leases to utilise the surplus accommodation of other potential public/third sector Partners to provide business with accommodation and support. An example is the Department for Education (“DE”) who control a site in Rathgael that is now surplus to their requirement. ANDBC and DfE are exploring the possibility for DE to lease part of the Council’s new HQ building in Bangor when completed. </li> </ul>
<b>Smart Infrastructure and Digital Readiness</b>	<p>The Council can enhance the Borough’s attractiveness to technology-driven businesses through investment in smart infrastructure and providing opportunities for digital development. As digital transformation accelerates across sectors, councils that lead in this space are better positioned to attract high-value jobs, secure innovation funding, and future-proof their urban environments. These types of interventions also support the Borough’s ambition to compete within the regional innovation ecosystem. Examples of interventions the Council could consider include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Spin-out Soft-Landing Programme:</b> A pilot initiative to attract university spin-outs from Ulster University and Queen’s University Belfast by offering subsidised accommodation in key locations (e.g. Hollywood Creative Hub or a future Innovation Hub in Bangor or Newtownards), business mentorship, and access to local supply chains and talent pools. This would help high-growth start-ups establish an early presence in the Borough and build commercial links locally. </li> </ul> <p>A similar approach has been used in Oxfordshire through the Oxford Innovation “Launchpads” programme and in Manchester via the Citylabs innovation district, which provides discounted space and wraparound support for life sciences spin-outs.</p>

Support Area	Examples of Possible Interventions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Digital Twin / Smart City Pilots:</b> The Council could partner with local tech firms or universities to create digital twin models of towns in the Borough. These models would replicate urban systems (transport, energy use, footfall etc.) to help plan infrastructure, optimise service delivery and attract inward investment in smart technologies. Both Belfast City Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council are progressing a “Smart Districts” the City and Growth Deals. Another example is Sunderland which has used digital twin technology to test transport and planning changes through its Smart Sunderland programme. </li> </ul>
<b>Access to Finance</b>	<p>The Council is also well placed to assist local business access grant funding and affordable loan finance that may not be available to businesses from private banks and lenders. Examples include:</p> <p><b>Grant Finance:</b> When established, The LEP will be provided with £4.1m from the Regional Balance Funding but it will also be well placed to identify and support applications for other funding programs such as Innovate NI - a programme from DfE that is being delivered by Invest NI</p> <p><b>Loan Finance:</b> Whilst the Council itself has access to affordable loan finance through the Public Works Loan Board (“PWLB”), a key source of finance for projects that deliver social/economic benefits is Financial Transactions Capital (“FTC”). This is capital funding from the UK Government that sits outside the Block Grant but can only be deployed by the NI Executive as a loan to, or equity investment in, private sector “non-government” entities to support the delivery of socio-economic projects. Since 2013, FTC has been utilised to fund a number of different projects including Housing Development as well as other managed loan funds administered by Invest NI (in addition to the Flexible Workspace).</p> <p>FTC funding is more flexible than private investment and so would represent less risk to ratepayers if used to fund a managed fund for development in the Borough. Whilst FTC cannot be provided directly to the Council under current rules, it may be possible to establish a collaboration with Central Government provided objectives can be aligned.</p> <p>It is important that State Aid and Subsidy Control regulations are adhered to in the provision of this support. The Strategic Investment Board has assisted the provision of FTC finance for a number of different projects in the past and is available to the Council to assist in advising on how it can be accessed.</p>



Support Area	Examples of Possible Interventions
<b>Skills Development &amp; Workforce Readiness</b>	<p>The consultations held with both Universities and SERC expressed interest in engaging with the Council through the proposed LEP<sup>15</sup>. This is a key opportunity to ensure that resources available for skills development are targeted at the areas that will provide the greatest impact on productivity and economic growth. This is deemed to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Apprenticeship programs:</b> Partnering with local training providers to develop a skilled workforce tailored to local industry needs.</li> <li>• <b>Upskilling initiatives:</b> Funding training programs for existing employees to acquire new skills and enhance productivity.</li> <li>• <b>Collaboration with education institutions:</b> Aligning curriculum with industry requirements to produce job-ready graduates.</li> </ul>
<b>Partnerships and Joint Ventures</b>	<p>There are many successful examples of joint ventures between Councils and other public bodies / social enterprises formed to develop research and innovation with the goal of driving economic growth.</p> <p>One recent example that has achieved this goal is the Clinical Translational Research &amp; Innovation Centre ("C-TRIC"). This is a joint venture (Special Purpose Company ("SPC")) between Ulster University, the Western Health and Social Care Trust, and Derry City and Strabane District Council which has developed a research facility to work in partnership with businesses focused on improving patient care in our community. Other example Case Studies of successful partnerships elsewhere in GB are set out in the next section.</p>

It is important that the Council adhere to internal and external regulations in the implementation of any intervention – for example procurement regulations and State Aid / Subsidy Control regulations.

### 5.3. Case Study Partnership Projects

The consultation exercise has clearly demonstrated that Ards and North Down has a growing reputation for creative businesses (both "maker-based" businesses and digital/technology based businesses). Research undertaken for this Scoping Study has identified some relevant examples of interventions that Local Authorities in England have delivered to use a similar reputation in order to fuel economic growth through encouraging innovation and productivity.

A summary of some successful examples that ANDBC might wish to consider are as follows:

<sup>15</sup> Note: The Council has confirmed that, following the completion of the consultation, it has now extended invitations to the mandatory members of the LEP in line with the Department for the Economy's requirements and additional members will be invited to join following agreement of the LEP's initial action plan.

### STEAMhouse at Birmingham City University

STEAMhouse is a centre for innovation, research and creative production that encourages the collaboration of the science, technology, engineering, arts and maths sectors. STEAMhouse's work aims to demonstrate how art, design and creative thinking can intersect with the STEM disciplines to stimulate economic and cultural growth across four sectors: Creative and Digital, Advanced Manufacturing, Health and Life Sciences and Low Carbon.

STEAMhouse supports SMEs with 1 to 250 employees to develop new ideas, skills, products and services by offering:

1. Free tailored business support and free access to co-working space
2. Opportunities to take part in innovation labs, collaborative workshops, networking events and masterclasses
3. Grants of up to £2500 to support prototyping as well as IP advice and access to other investors

The programme has been created in partnership between Eastside Projects (a social enterprise similar to the former Project 24 in Bangor) and Birmingham City University.

Two businesses supported by STEAMhouse are:

- **MakerLabs**, which creates courses and projects for budding 'makers'. MakerLabs has designed courses and provided consulting services to Apple, Google, the Department for Education, BBC and GiffGaff, among others.
- **HausBots**, which has created a wall-climbing, painting robot using solid-state vacuum technology. The product, when complete, will be sold for use by commercial painting and decorating contractors.



### Creative Fuse North East

Creative Fuse North East is a partnership-based initiative that is exploring how creative, digital and IT firms can add value to the economy and employment base in the North East of England. The partnership involves the North East's five universities (Newcastle, Durham, Northumbria, Sunderland and Teesside) as well as industry, cultural organisations, charities and the Local Authorities.



The partnership started by mapping the creative, digital and IT (CDIT) sector in the North East, and has since moved into facilitating new ways of working between businesses, freelancers and academics via 30 innovation pilots, business support activities, and over 25 monthly Collaboration and Knowledge Exchange (CAKE) events. The project aims to support spillovers from creative and cultural SMEs into other sectors to maximise growth potential.

### **Bristol-Bath Innovation Cluster**

The Bristol-Bath Innovation Cluster (B&B CREATIVE R&D) is a partnership between Watershed (a social enterprise that runs a digital creativity centre in Bristol)



several universities in the region as well local businesses. The cluster's core objective is to inform understanding about user engagement in new digital platforms, including at sites where 5G connectivity, XR technologies and live arts overlap.

The cluster is focused particularly on hi-tech and digital sectors, cultural and creative industry, aerospace and advanced engineering, and financial and business services. One significant area of partnership has been between key cultural assets and enterprises.

### **5.4. Interventions for Growth in the Green Sectors in Rural Areas**

It is recognised that many of the interventions discussed within this report and highlighted in consultations focus on urban areas. Ultimately, the majority of jobs are located in urban areas and so, naturally these are the areas that represent the greatest potential for growth. Whilst renewable energy development is undoubtedly a growing sector globally, jobs in this sector within the rural areas of Ards and North Down are limited to the lack the infrastructure required to support green industries, - specifically grid access onto the energy networks in NI.

This is a recognised problem across Northern Ireland and is not unique to Ards and North Down. However, there is a public intervention project in rural Mid-Ulster that that is seeking to address this limitation at the Desertcreat Site near Cookstown and that may represent an opportunity for other Councils. An overview is provided below:

### **Desertcreat Green Infrastructure Project**

The Mid-South West partnership ("MSW") is a collaboration between Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon; Fermanagh and Omagh and Mid Ulster District Councils. MSW has developed a Regional Economic Strategy which includes proposals for an Industrial Decarbonisation Programme to which the UK Government has agreed to allocate funding through the Mid-South West Growth Deal ("MSWGD") provided the projects meet its key criteria relating to innovation and 'green' technology.

The largest of the four projects in the PSC the **Desertcreat Green Industrial Park ("DGIP")** which involves the following:

- The acquisition of the Desertcreat Site near Cookstown from its current owners, PSNI, and the provision of enabling infrastructure for industrial/commercial businesses accommodation on the site.
- The infrastructure will provide affordable renewable energy sourced through local generators (local wind farms, solar panels and anaerobic digestion facilities) to the businesses that locate themselves within the new business park.
- It is anticipated that these businesses will operate predominantly in the advanced manufacturing sectors and will benefit significantly from the access to this "green energy".
- This funding will be provided through the MSWGD. However, businesses that locate themselves at the business park will fund the development of their own accommodation, therefore, it is envisaged the project will attract private investment and jobs into the rural area of Desertcreat.

An Outline Business Case ("OBC") to provide a detailed analysis of the need for the projects and the options for implementation. Invest NI have taken responsibility for developing the OBC and managing the delivery and implementation of the preferred option.

This OBC is still at very early stage of development. Arup Engineering Consultants has been appointed to identify benchmark projects on which to base the options for the OBC. It is anticipated that the OBC will be completed by March 2026.

### **5.5. Local Economic Partnership (LEP) Opportunity**

The LEPs that are currently being established using DfE funding provides Local Authorities in NI with a new mechanism for enhancing the support that they provide to businesses in order to drive economic growth. LEPs can act as a bridge between NI Executive policy and local business needs, supporting the delivery of targeted interventions to foster economic growth. Their success depends on effective collaboration, investment prioritisation, and strategic alignment with national economic goals.

The establishment of the LEP provides the council with an opportunity to implement a range of different interventions to address the economic decline in the Borough and start moving towards the targets set out in the ITRDS. Whilst the ANDBC LEP is still being developed, it represents an attractive opportunity to generate proposals for economic growth in the Borough.

As highlighted above, each of the Consultees that engaged in this scoping study expressed an interest in exploring opportunities through the new ANDBC LEP when established<sup>16</sup>.

## 5.6. Conclusion

This section has identified a number of strategic interventions that the Council could consider to support employment and productivity growth in the Borough in line with the ITRDS targets. These interventions reflect both short-term opportunities and longer-term structural challenges identified through consultation and data analysis. In summary, they fall into six broad categories:

- **Innovation and Entrepreneurship Support:** Enhancing local innovation capacity through mentoring, digital skills development, and pilot schemes such as the Green Innovation Voucher Scheme to support sustainable business practices, particularly among rural SMEs.
- **Commercial Space and Accommodation Facilitation:** Addressing a key constraint on growth by enabling access to fit-for-purpose workspace. This includes supporting the development of flexible Innovation Hubs and exploring vesting powers for strategic sites. Where planning and community considerations allow, this could support local entrepreneurs, create new jobs and improve the Borough's visitor economy.
- **Smart Infrastructure and Digital Readiness:** Leveraging technology to enhance investment potential and planning. This includes proposals for Digital Twin or Smart City pilots in key urban areas to improve infrastructure planning and attract tech-sector investment and piloting targeted initiatives such as a Spin-out Soft Landing Programme to attract high-growth university spin-outs to the Borough
- **Access to Finance:** Exploring the use of grant and loan finance mechanisms – including Financial Transactions Capital (FTC) and future LEP allocations – to stimulate private investment in productive sectors and employment-generating developments.
- **Skills Development and Workforce Readiness:** Deepening collaboration with regional skills providers to align training pathways with future sector needs, enhance apprenticeship uptake, and support the upskilling of existing employees.

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<sup>16</sup> Note: The Council has confirmed that, following the completion of the consultation, it has now extended invitations to the mandatory members of the LEP in line with the Department for the Economy's requirements and additional members will be invited to join following agreement of the LEP's initial action plan

- **Partnerships and Joint Ventures:** Establishing formal partnerships with other public bodies, social enterprises or private entities to develop research and innovation with the goal of driving economic growth

This list above are only examples of the interventions that might be considered. Ultimately, it will be for the Council to develop this list and agree the approach to implementation. This will require careful consideration of legal, regulatory and funding constraints but they offer a coherent and targeted route to strengthening the Borough's future economic resilience.

However, it is important to recognise that it is also possible for public authorities to restrict growth as well as support it. Earlier this year, Professor Dieter Helm (s Professor of Economic Policy at the University of Oxford and Fellow in Economics at New College, Oxford) wrote a "think-piece"<sup>17</sup> entitled "*Competitiveness: why UK economic growth is so elusive*". He argues that historically government has been poor at *causing* economic growth - rather it is much better at getting in the way of such growth. In consequence, the most successful public growth strategies start with the maxim "*Do no harm*", before moving on to examine what actually causes economic growth, and what typically obstructs it.

There will be circumstances in which the most valuable form of support to businesses that the Council can provide is simply to listen to what businesses are seeking and to provide signposting / representation for businesses rather than any material form of intervention. It is important that the Council takes this into consideration when considering the support that can be provided to local businesses.

<sup>17</sup> <https://dieterhelm.co.uk/economics/competitiveness-why-uk-economic-growth-is-so-elusive/>



## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 6.1. Summary of Findings

A summary of the findings from this report against the two Research Questions set within the ToR is as follows.

**Table 6.1: Summary of Research Question Findings**

Research Question	Section of Report Addressed	Summary of Scoping Study Finding
<b>Research Question 1: Setting the Baseline</b>		
To establish the extent to which the Council has progressed towards the achievement of the Job, Productivity and Visitor targets in the preceding six years (2018-2024).	Section 2	<p>Whilst job numbers have increased above the average for NI, the Council is regressing in a number of key areas. Particularly:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Productivity</li> <li>2. Tourism - Visitor numbers, tourism expenditure and overnight stays (although NISRA have changed the approach to collecting the data on visitor numbers since 2019 and so this analysis will have to be revised when comparable data becomes available)</li> </ol>
<b>Research Question 2: Scoping Study</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What will the future economy look like in Ards and North Down by 2030?</li> </ul>	Section 4	<p>Ultimately the economy of AND is tied to the wider economy in NI. The Consultation Outcome listed in Section 4.2 above factors as likely to dictate the future economy in the Borough:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Labour Market and Demographics</li> <li>2) International Policies</li> <li>3) Increased number of Jobs based Remotely / Gig Economy</li> <li>4) Growth of the Tech Sector:</li> <li>5) Green Economy and Sustainability</li> </ol> <p>The strength of AND as a region is a high level of skilled individuals and low unemployment. The productivity is falling because a significant proportion of AND residents employed in the more productive jobs / sectors are working outside of the Borough (primarily in Belfast) and a high proportion of individuals working in the Borough are employed by the public sector.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Which sectors are likely to be most prevalent and performant and where should Council concentrate its efforts to create more and better jobs, raise productivity and leverage current advantages?</li> </ul>	Section 4	<p>The six key sectors raised by consultees as representing the sectors that are expected to be key areas of innovative growth for ANDBC:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Creative Technology – particularly the screen industries (film &amp; TV and game production)</li> <li>2. Financial, Professional and Regulatory (known as “Reg Tech” or “Big Tech Back Office”)</li> <li>3. Advanced Manufacturing</li> <li>4. Health and Wellbeing</li> <li>5. Agri-Food</li> <li>6. Cybersecurity</li> </ol>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Taking into consideration the current sectoral and human capital make-up of the Borough, what jobs are likely to be in</li> </ul>	Section 4	<p>The jobs that will be necessary to support growth in the six key sectors listed above are expected to be the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ICT professionals / programmers / software developers</li> <li>• Data analysts</li> <li>• Research and development (R&amp;D) managers</li> <li>• Business, research and administrative professionals</li> </ul>

Research Question	Section of Report Addressed	Summary of Scoping Study Finding
demand and which ones are likely to disappear?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legal professionals</li> <li>Cyber security professionals</li> </ul> <p>The potential jobs that may be at risk are discussed in the next question.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Will the current and future market disruption come at a cost for certain jobs and how can the transition to new jobs be anticipated and undertaken by the Council and its partners to minimise hardship?</li> </ul>	Section 3.6	<p>The growing levels of automation and artificial intelligence (AI) utilised by businesses combined with global economic restructuring (e.g. foreign tariffs) and policy changes (e.g. Net Zero) will inevitably have an impact on the numbers of jobs within Ards and North Down. Examples of some sectors that are considered to be vulnerable include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Administrative and Clerical Roles</li> <li>Retail Assistants &amp; Cashiers</li> <li>Call Centre and Telemarketing Jobs</li> <li>Transport and Storage Occupations</li> </ul> <p>However, recent empirical analysis indicates that rather than 'disappear' many of these roles are likely to transform into other areas. Therefore, the risk of a material section of the ANDBC workforce becoming obsolete by 2030 is considered low.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is it likely that the traditional and current working models will be replaced by new flexible ways of working and how will it affect the Borough on an economic, capital infrastructure and societal level?</li> </ul>	Section 3.5	<p>The use of hybrid structures (whereby employees may work a certain number of days from home) is currently the norm within office-based roles and is expected to remain as such for the foreseeable future. Therefore, businesses are seeking more flexible leasing options that can address regularly changing accommodation needs whilst also ensuring talented staff can be attracted a retained</p> <p>In Belfast the numbers of landlords engaging flexible office operators to convert accommodation into flexible offices is growing.</p> <p>The consultation exercise has indicated that there are businesses that would utilise flexible office accommodation in the Borough if it was of the right quality and there are a growing number of people within the Borough working as independent freelancers in the gig-economy that are seeking this form of accommodation also. However, the supply within the Borough at present is limited.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How can the Council prepare and respond to these shifts in the local economy with the aim to supporting businesses, promote job creation, productivity, increase GVA, increase the non-domestic business rates and meet its commitment to the environment?</li> </ul>	Section 5	<p>DfE's new strategy focusing on sub-regional investment is a significant opportunity to address the declining productivity of the Borough and means the Council has increasingly important role to play. The starting point for DfE's proposals is the establishment of an effective LEP. The LEP will bring together key stakeholders and partners whose objectives and goals are aligned to the Council's economic growth objectives. When established the LEP can identify barriers to economic development in the Borough and identify potential interventions to address these barriers.</p> <p>A fundamental driver for increasing employment and enhancing GVA within the Borough is the successful attraction and retention of innovative, high-growth businesses. This includes, in particular, spin-out companies emerging from the Universities in NI which often demonstrate strong potential for commercialisation, export growth, and knowledge-based employment.</p> <p>To achieve this, it is important that the Council has the capability to proactively identify such companies and introduce measures that</p>

Research Question	Section of Report Addressed	Summary of Scoping Study Finding
		create a supportive and attractive business environment. The interventions at the Council's disposal are discussed in Section 5 and summarised below.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What interventions could the Council consider in reaching these aims?</li> </ul>	Section 5	<p>There are a wide range of different interventions that Council could implement to achieve the economic growth potential in the borough. These all fall into one of the following broad categories:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Innovation and entrepreneurship support</li> <li>2. Commercial Space / Accommodation Facilitation</li> <li>3. Smart Infrastructure and Digital Readiness</li> <li>4. Access to Finance</li> <li>5. Skills Development &amp; Workforce Readiness</li> <li>6. Partnerships and Joint Ventures</li> </ol>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Which stakeholders or partners should the Council work with as part of the suggested interventions?</li> </ul>	Section 4	<p>Based on the consultations held to date, it is recommended that the following organisations are considered for partnerships:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Invest NI</li> <li>2. SERC</li> <li>3. Universities (Ulster and Queens)</li> <li>4. Business Support Providers (Catalyst Inc, Boom Studies etc)</li> <li>5. Private Business representatives in key growth sectors</li> </ol> <p>Engagement can be part of the LEP or otherwise but each of these organisations' interests are aligned to the Councils in terms of economic growth.</p>

## 6.2. Conclusion

This scoping study has found that, whilst jobs numbers in the Borough have increased, progress towards targets in the ITRDS on productivity and tourism<sup>18</sup> has not been achieved. There are a range of interventions already in the pipeline that are expected to improve these metrics but there is a clear need for further support from ANDBC to deliver the targeted benefits by 2030.

The primary economic development support programme currently delivered by the Council is the Go-Succeed Programme. This intervention has encouraged over 200 local microbusinesses annually to recruit additional employees. However, whilst this increase in jobs has the potential to be converted into productivity in the long-term, there are three key limitations to this success:

- As most of these new jobs will be absorbed into existing employment base facility, there will be little improvement in the non-domestic rates income to the Council – a stated objective of ANDBC;
- At present many businesses that are set up in the Borough and receive the Go-Succeed support are moving elsewhere when they start to outgrow their premises in the Borough and so provide little benefit to future productivity of ANDBC; and

<sup>18</sup> Statement based on current data. NISRA have changed the approach to collecting the data on visitor numbers since 2019 and so this analysis will have to be revised when comparable data becomes available.

- c) The Go Succeed Programme will not, in itself, attract high-productivity businesses (such as university spin-outs, IDEs or foreign businesses) into the area as it is focused on indigenous enterprise.

All three of these limitations could be addressed through the provision of appropriate accommodation in the Borough. The economic objectives of the Council in the ITRDS all ultimately rely on businesses being based within the boundary of the Ards and North Down Borough. This means achieving the targets is inextricably linked to premises being based within the Borough. The consultations undertaken for this study have demonstrated that Ards and North Down is an attractive area for businesses.

It is the lack of suitable accommodation for productive that is the key limiting factor for businesses seeking to locate in the Borough. The size and type of accommodation required will depend on the location and the nature of the business but an increase in demand for flexible office accommodation is clear (further details provided in the Cushman Wakefield report at Appendix 2)<sup>19</sup>. The final section below sets out the recommended approach identifying and addressing the demand for accommodation (engagement with developers, development briefs etc)

**In summary, the immediate focus for the council should be in ensuring that suitable land and accommodation available for businesses to grow and remain within the Borough if the targets, as stated, are to be achieved in the short term.**

### 6.3. Recommendations and Next Steps

The suggested actions that the Council needs to consider in order to address the deficiencies in the economic development of the Borough and take advantage of the potential opportunities for growth highlighted through this scoping study are set out below:

#### 1. Establish the LEP

The new economic strategy arising from DfE with emphasis on sub-regional economic development represents an opportunity to address the declining economic fortunes. Core to this strategy is the establishment of an effective LEP to develop ideas, plans and inform decision making. The Council is responsible for establishing the partnership and chairing LEP meetings in its role as the accountable body for the **£4.2m** Regional Balance Funding.

<sup>19</sup> The “Supplementary Review of Business Accommodation Needs in Ards and North Down – May 2021” also provides more detail on the specific accommodation needs in the Borough.

As such, it is recommended that establish its LEP as soon as possible and actively engage with businesses to, firstly, identify the needs of the local communities and secondly plan its interventions to address these needs over the short, medium and long terms<sup>20</sup>. For each intervention this should include a timeline and potential funding sources, Key Performance Indicators / success metrics to clarify how success is measured (linking back to the ITRDS targets) and mapping out the role of the partners in delivering each intervention.

## **2. Prioritise Development of Existing Interventions:**

It is imperative that the Council prioritise the allocation of resources into implementing the projects for which funding has been awarded from external sources represent a potential catalyst for future growth– in particular:

- Bangor Waterfront Redevelopment – The proposed investment into Pickie Funpark, the Bangor Marina and surrounding public realm and Ballyholme Watersports Centre.
- Hollywood Innovation Hub:
- Newtownards Whitespots Country Park: Potential to attract additional tourism into the area.

## **3. Develop an Estate Strategy and Development Brief for Council Assets**

The Council owns a number of attractive sites and premises throughout the Borough which is either undeveloped (e.g. the former NIE Site in the Balloo estate or the 13 Acres on Comber Road in Newtownards) or may soon become surplus to requirements (e.g. the Council Offices that will not be required following the rationalisation of the Council estate such as Church Street in Newtownards and the Bangor Castle). It is recommended the Council develop a detailed estate plan to ensure that all surplus assets can be utilised to maximise the productivity of the Borough and development briefs prepared to attract private investment into these assets.

Depending on location, these development briefs should target specific business sectors – for example, town centre sites would benefit from investment in flexible office accommodation designed for digital/creative technology and financial / regulatory firms. Sites on the outskirts of the towns would benefit from bespoke ‘maker-spaces’ / workshop accommodation designed for firms in advanced manufacturing and health sectors.

## **4. Assess Feasibility of Engaging with Private Developers**

Whilst the Council owns some attractive assets in the Borough the vast majority of the land that would be attractive locations for business is owned by the private sector. A key constraint in the conversion of these sites to attract productive businesses is the financial risks associated with the necessary investment. If the Council could mitigate an element of this risk there is potential to unlock potential private investment to create greater and more attractive workspace options in the Borough. The Council might achieve this by, for example:

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<sup>20</sup> As highlighted in earlier footnotes, the Council has confirmed that, following the completion of the consultation, the LEP has now been established, invited members and will host its first official meeting in the very near future.

- Establishing a managed fund to provide finance on more favourable terms than might be available from commercial lenders;
- Entering into Joint Venture partnerships with private developers to generate economic activity through creation of new workspaces and centres for job creation (this is subject to strict State Aid / Subsidy Control regulations which will need to be addressed).

## 5. Increased Focus on Event-Driven Tourism

The Bangor Waterfront and Whitespots projects will enhance the extent of 'destination-driven-tourism' within the Borough. However, other Councils in NI have succeeded in developing 'event-driven-tourism' whereby the hosting/ staging of a regional or international experience is the attraction rather than the destination specifically. It is recommended that the Council consider engaging with local partners to share resources to stage these events. There may be opportunities for such collaboration with the following, for example:

- Ulster Folk and Transport Museum: Seasonal / cultural events
- Open House Festival / Bangor Court House: Concerts and music events
- Local Yacht Clubs: The Ballyholme Yacht Club will be a partner for hosting regional and international sailing events following the implementation of the watersports centre for example)
- Local Golf Clubs: Possibilities for hosting junior / regional competitions



## Glossary of Terms

<b>ANDBC or Council</b>	Ards and North Down Borough Council
<b>ITRDS</b>	ANDBC Integrated Tourism, Regeneration and Economic Development Strategy 2018- 2030
<b>BRCD</b>	Belfast Region City Deal
<b>CPP</b>	Community Planning Partnership
<b>C-TRIC</b>	Clinical Translational Research & Innovation Centre
<b>DfE</b>	Department for the Economy
<b>ESG</b>	Ethical Social Governance
<b>ETA</b>	Electronic Travel Authorisation
<b>FTC</b>	Financial Transaction Capital
<b>GVA</b>	Gross Value Added
<b>KWC</b>	Kilcooley Women's Centre
<b>LEA</b>	Local Enterprise Agency
<b>LEP</b>	Local Economic Partnership
<b>LMP</b>	Labour Market Partnership
<b>MSWGD</b>	Mid South West Growth Deal
<b>NDDO</b>	North Down Development Organisation Limited
<b>NISRA</b>	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
<b>OBC</b>	Outline Business Case
<b>ONS</b>	Office for National Statistics
<b>PWLB</b>	Public Works Loan Board
<b>SAAS</b>	Software-as-a-Service
<b>SME</b>	Small/Medium Enterprise
<b>SPC</b>	Special Purpose Company
<b>ToR</b>	Terms of Reference

## Appendices

- **Appendix 1:** Detailed Analysis on Economic Performance since 2018
- **Appendix 2:** Cushman Wakefield Report on the Flexible Accommodation Market in NI
- **Appendix 3:** Questionnaires issued to Prospective Consultees

Proposed amendment to Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor McCracken and Councillor Harbinson

This Council welcomes the update on Marine Gardens provided by Bangor Marine on 13 August 2025 and agrees that:

1. Council officers should work alongside Bangor Marine to support public communication around this project. This includes inviting Bangor Marine to the next meeting of the Bangor CAG to update stakeholders, supporting the proposed public consultation hub led by Bangor Marine, and by holding regular meetings with Bangor Marine to ensure accurate and complementary messaging on respective websites, newsletters and social media.
2. Council should also work with Bangor Marine to support a commercial marketing plan with the aim of attracting investment for the further phases of Queen's Parade along with complementary investment that will support the ambitions of the wider City Deal. An initial outline should be brought to Committee in Q1 2026 with a view to approve draft marketing collateral that can be used at future property investment conferences in the UK and abroad.