

October 30th, 2025

Notice Of Meeting

You are requested to attend the meeting to be held on **Wednesday, 5th November 2025** at **7:00 pm** in **Hybrid - Church Street, Newtownards and via Zoom.**

Agenda

Agenda

(Attached)

 *EC 05.11.25 Agenda.pdf*

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1. Apologies

2. Declarations of Interest

Reports for Approval

3. Technical Budget

(Attached)

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 *Item 3 Appendix 1 - Condition Scores.pdf*

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Items Delegated for Approval

4. Strangford and Lecale Landscape Partnership (Update) (Landscape Connections HLF application)

(Attached)

 *Item 4 SLLP Update (Landscape Connections HLF app).pdf*

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Reports for Noting

5. Let's Grow Together Strategy Benchmark Review

(Attached)

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6.	Environment Directorate Q2 Budgetary Control Report (August - October 2025)	
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7.	NI Amenity Council 'Best Kept' Awards 2025	
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8.	Off-Street Parking Activity Report January - September 2025	
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9.	North Down Coastal Path Working Group Minutes for 30 June 2025	
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	 <i>Item 9 Appendix 1 - Minutes of the North Down Coastal Path Working Group 30.06.25.pdf</i>	<i>Page 65</i>
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11.	Parks and Cemeteries Engagement Update 2025	
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	 <i>Item 11 Appendix 1 - Parks and Cemeteries Engagement Update Report 2025.pdf</i>	<i>Page 88</i>
12.	Six Monthly Audit of Marine Safety Management System	
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13.	Notices of Motion	
13.1	Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Hennessy and Alderman Brooks	

That this Council brings back a report, with associated costs, detailing the possible road safety and lighting improvements that could be made between Donaghadee harbour and Donaghadee Community Centre.

13.2. Notice of Motion submitted by Alderman Adair and Councillor Edmund

That Council task officers to bring forward a report on the possibly of permitting Wooden memorials at our cemeteries as part of regulations going forward

14. Any Other Notified Business

*****ITEMS 15-18 IN CONFIDENCE*****

Items Delegated for Approval

15. Extension of Marine Services Contract

 *Item 15 Extension of Marine Services Contract.pdf*

Not included

16. Extension of Tender for the Design, Supply and Installation and Maintenance of Solar PV Systems at Various Council Properties

 *Item 16 Extension of Tender for the Design, Supply and Installation and Maintenance of Solar PV Systems.pdf*

Not included

17. Tender for the Supply and Delivery of Parks Plant and Machinery

 *Item 17 Tender fo the Supply and Delivery of Parks Plant & Machinery.pdf*

Not included

18. Tender for the Installation of Primary Sport Pitch Drainage

 *Item 18 Tender for the Installation of Primary Sport Pitch Drainage.pdf*

Not included

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

28 October 2025

Dear Sir/Madam

You are hereby invited to attend a hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of the Environment Committee of Ards and North Down Borough Council in the Council Chamber, 2 Church Street, Newtownards on **Wednesday, 5 November 2025** commencing at **7.00pm**.

Yours faithfully

Michael Steele
Acting Chief Executive
Ards and North Down Borough Council

A G E N D A

1. Apologies
2. Declarations of Interest

Reports for Approval

3. Technical Budget – Estimates Process for 2026/27 (Report attached)

Items Delegated for Approval

4. Strangford and Lecale Landscape Partnership (Update) (Landscape Connections HLF application) (Report attached)

Reports for Noting

5. Let's Grow Together Strategy Benchmark Review (Report attached)
6. Environmental Services Directorate Budgetary Control Report – September 2025 (Copy to follow)
7. NI Amenity Council 'Best Kept' Awards 2025 (Report attached)
8. Off-Street Parking Activity Report January - September 2025 (Report attached)
9. North Down Coastal Path Working Group Minutes for 30 June 2025 (Report attached)
10. Play and Recreation Annual Update 2025 (Report attached)

- 11.Parks and Cemeteries Engagement Update 2025 (Report attached)
- 12.Six Monthly Audit of Marine Safety Management System (Report attached)
- 13.Notices of Motion
- 13.1.Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Hennessy and Alderman Brooks

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- 14. Any Other Notified Business

ITEMS 15-18 IN CONFIDENCE

Items Delegated for Approval

- 15. Extension of Marine Services Contract (Report attached)
- 16. Extension of Tender for the Design, Supply and Installation and Maintenance of Solar PV Systems at Various Council Properties (Report attached)
- 17. Tender fo the Supply and Delivery of Parks Plant and Machinery (Report attached)
- 18. Tender for the Installation of Primary Sport Pitch Drainage (Report attached)

MEMBERSHIP OF ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE (16 Members)

Alderman Adair	Councillor Douglas
Alderman Armstrong-Cotter	Councillor Edmund
Councillor Ashe	Councillor Harbinson (Vice Chair)
Councillor Blaney	Councillor Irwin
Councillor Boyle	Councillor Kendall (Chair)
Councillor Brady	Alderman McAlpine
Alderman Cummings	Councillor McLaren
Councillor Cathcart	Councillor Wray

Unclassified

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ITEM 3

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Environment Committee
Date of Meeting	05 November 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Environmental Services
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Estates
Date of Report	15 October 2025
File Reference	40012
Legislation	Local Government (N) Act 2014
Section 75 Compliant	Yes ☒ No ☐ Other ☐ If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Technical Budget - Estimates Process for 2026-27
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Condition Scores

Strategic Context

The Council’s agreed Maintenance Strategy incorporates a “needs based” budgeting model, rather than a more traditional “fixed amount” approach for its refurbishment programme.

Properties are condition scored (as a percentage) and a threshold for action is to be agreed by the Council, subject to budget considerations.

By making this budgetary decision at this stage, ahead of the rates setting process, Members are able to see the detail behind each option in order to inform the decision and give officers guidance on the amount to include in the next draft of the budget estimates for 2026/27. Members will of course have the ability to change any decision taken in relation to this report, as part of the overall final rates setting process.

Not Applicable

Area of Focus for 2026/27

In 2026/27 works will focus on tourism buildings, public toilets and waste recycling centres.

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Cemeteries & assoc. buildings	Tourism Buildings	Administrative Buildings
Community Centres	Public Toilets	Leisure Centres
Car Parks	Waste Recycling Centres & Transfer Stations	Sports Pavilions

Notable Trends of Improving Condition Scores and Lower Costs

Historically our threshold for action has been between 75% and 80%, with costed options for revising this threshold up or down. In 2023/24 there were several large-scale operational projects required, and the threshold had to be lowered to 70% to meet budget demands. Conversely in 2024/25 there was a lower than usual requirement for operational works, enabling the budget to stretch to allow a higher-than-normal condition acceptability threshold.

Notably, last year we were able to raise the acceptability threshold to 94% yet only require a budget of £68k for condition-based works. This then enabled the implementation of more operational requests, aimed at improving our estate in ways not picked up by the condition surveys.

Generally, there has been a trend of improving condition scores within the estate. Subsequently, the agreed threshold for action has had an upward trend whilst at the same time the revenue budget required for refurbishment projects has been reduced, as demonstrated by the table below.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	23/24	24/25	25/26
Condition Related Works	£291k	£169k	£98,5k	£48k	£166k	£50k	£133k	£68k
Operational Works	£20k	£84k	£154k	£143,5k	£20k	£131k	£77k	£152k
Revenue Budget	£311k	£253k	£252k	£191,5k	£186k	£181k	£210k	£220k
Acceptability threshold	70%	75%	75%	80%	85%	70%	92%	94%

This clearly demonstrates that our planned proactive refurbishment programme is actively improving the condition of our estate on a reducing budget requirement, and in time will reduce our reactive maintenance burden as envisaged within our maintenance strategy.

Limitations of the Condition Survey Process and Scoring

It should be noted that the surveys/scoring focus solely on condition i.e., how functional the various aspects of the building are. They do not capture or reflect whether a building looks “dated”, or its suitability with regard to its intended (potentially changed) purpose. These aspects are covered during our stakeholder

Not Applicable

conversations (see next section) and the works can be implemented via the “Operational Requests”.

Cross-Departmental Working

Cognisance of wider strategies and plans for these assets is essential to meet the expectations of our internal customers and reduce the likelihood of spending significant sums of money on assets that may be disposed of or replaced in the foreseeable future. Therefore, discussions with relevant officers have taken place and the proposed works reflect any known plans for the assets concerned.

In particular, given future plans for Queens Hall, Newtownards, the refurbishment works have been limited to maintenance items only, rather than the more expensive facility improvements that would normally be included in our refurbishments.

In addition to the condition-based works, there are a number of project works that have either been requested by the Council, the facility manager or are otherwise required to maintain the safe and effective operation of the buildings. These “operational” works therefore need to be completed irrespective of the overall condition of the building and are quantified within the table in section 7.0.

Works to be Implemented From other Budgets

Whilst we are focussing our surveys on this sector of the Estate, we use the opportunity to highlight works for other budget streams, outside of our normal refurbishments budget. In recent years we have built up dedicated budgets for “Energy Efficiency works” and “End of Life M&E replacements”. Some other, larger works are too large to be completed within the revenue budgets so need to be capitalised. All of these works are highlighted separately on the table in Appendix 1 for completeness but are all subject to separate budgetary approval.

Refurbishment vs Replacement – Greyabbey Toilets

As per the Maintenance strategy, when a building approaches the end of its life it is sometimes more efficient to simply demolish it and rebuild. The current public toilet in Greyabbey is in a poor state of repair, scoring the lowest out of all buildings in this sector of the estate.

Officers have received a number of representations to suggest that the current toilets are located in the wrong place, close to the Abbey, that has toilets of its own, and that they would be better located at the Village Hall. Officers have therefore included a sum to construct a new, small, all-ability unisex toilet facility (the same as was constructed at Kiltonga duck pond) at this location, subject to Planning consent.

Condition Scores and Costs

The condition scores and corresponding costs are shown on Appendix 1.

Options Available

Option 1

If Members opt to adopt a condition threshold for action of 83%, condition-based works would take place at Greyabbey and Donaghadee W/Cs. By consequence, £184.7k will be included in the 2026/27 estimates for refurbishments, resulting in a 16% reduction (£34k) from the 2025/26 revenue allocation.

Not Applicable

Option 2
Alternatively, Members have the option to implement a condition threshold for action of 88%, meaning that, **in addition** to the works highlighted in Option 1, refurbishments will also take place at Ballyholme and Banks Lane W/Cs. By consequence, £246.8k will be included in the 2026/27 estimates for refurbishments, resulting in a 12% increase (£26k) over the 2025/26 revenue allocation.

Option 3
Alternatively, Members have the option to implement a threshold of 90%, meaning that, **in addition** to those works highlighted in Option 2, refurbishments would also take place at Mill St and The Commons W/Cs. By consequence, £348k will be included in the 2026/27 estimates for refurbishments, resulting in a 58% increase (£128k) over the 2025/26 revenue allocation.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council approves Option 2 above as its preferred option, subject to finalisation as part of the forthcoming 2025-26 budget estimates process.

Appendix 1: Table of Condition Scores

Type of Building	Building name	Location	Condition Score 2023	Percentage Score	Costs for Condition based works	Operational requests	Other Existing Budgets			Notes
							Energy saving initiatives	End of life M&E replacements	Capital works	
Public Conveniences	Whiterock WCs	Killinchy	7.9	98.75						
Public Conveniences	Main Road Car Park WCs	Cloughey	7.89	98.63						
Public Conveniences	Abbey Street WCs	Bangor	7.84	98.00						
Public Conveniences	Groomsport WCs	Groomsport	7.84	98.00						
Public Conveniences	Springvale Road WCs	Millisle	7.83	97.88						
Waste Recycling Centres	Ballygowan Road	Comber	7.81	97.63						
Public Conveniences	Castle Park WCs	Bangor	7.77	97.13						
Public Conveniences	Ward Park WCs	Bangor	7.76	97.00						
Public Conveniences	Islandhill WCs	comber	7.73	96.63						
Tourism	Cockle Row	Groomsport	7.72	96.50						
Tourism	Townhall	Newtownards	7.69	96.13		£ 18,000				Works to windows rear of building T/M required
Public Conveniences	Anchor Car Park WCs	Portavogie	7.68	96.00						
Public Conveniences	Kiltonga WCs	Newtownards	7.64	95.50						
Public Conveniences	Ballyhalbert WCs	Ballyhalbert	7.62	95.25						
Public Conveniences	Castle Street WCs	Comber	7.57	94.63						
Public Conveniences	Seapark WCs	Hollywood	7.47	93.38						
Waste Recycling Centres	Parsonage Road	Kircubbin	7.47	93.38						
Tourism	Tower House	Bangor	7.45	93.13						Windows need replaced in near future
Waste Recycling Centres	Moss Road	Ballygowan	7.43	92.88						
Waste Recycling Centres	Balloo HRC	Bangor	7.42	92.75					£ 70,000	Provision of toilet and extensive concrete repair works
Waste Recycling Centres	Quarry Heights	Newtownards	7.41	92.63						
Waste Recycling Centres	Waste Transfer Station	Bangor	7.38	92.25		£ 8,000				re sealing of syfonic down spouts works to channel in yard re-seating
Public Conveniences	Millisle WCs	Millisle	7.33	91.63						
Public Conveniences	Londonderry Park WCs	Newtownards	7.28	91.00						
Public Conveniences	Hibernia Street WCs	Hollywood	7.25	90.63						
Public Conveniences	South Pier WCs	Bangor	7.24	90.50			£ 20,000	£ 80,000	£ 65,000	Capital- Roof needs replaced - removal of urinals - removal of side toilet- new external cubical. End-of life repalcements- Extract system, pumping station. Energy savings- LED lights & water saving taps etc.
Waste Recycling Centres	Coach Road	Portaferry	7.22	90.25						
Waste Recycling Centres	Railway Street	Donaghadee	7.21	90.13						
Public Conveniences	Mill Street WCs	Newtownards	7.19	89.875	£ 36000					Removal of urinals - posiflush M&F - refloor - M&E works
Public Conveniences	The Commons WCs	Donaghadee	7.04	88	£ 52000					Including planning and sewer connection
Public Conveniences	Ballyholme WCs	Bangor	7	87.50	£ 28,000		£ 20,000			Removal of urinals - posiflush - refloor M&E works
Public Conveniences	Banks Lane	Bangor	6.93	86.63	£ 26,000		£ 20,000			Removal of urinals - posiflush M&F - refloor - M&E works
Public Conveniences	The Parade WCs	Donaghadee	6.62	82.75	£ 98,000		£ 30,000			Full refurb
Public Conveniences	Main Street WCs	Greyabbey	6.15	76.88	£ 40,000		£ 12,000			Including planning and sewer connection
Various	Other Buildings						£ 68,000	£ 20,000	£ 65,000	
Totals for other existing budgets							£ 170,000	£ 100,000	£ 200,000	

	<83%	£	138,000				
	Contingency (15%)	£	20,700				
	Total for threshold 90%	£	158,700	£	26,000	£	184,700.00
Recommended option	<88%	£	192,000				
	Contingency (15%)	£	28,800				
	Total for threshold 92%	£	220,800	£	26,000	£	246,800.00
	<90%	£	280,000				
	Contingency (15%)	£	42,000				
	Total for threshold 94%	£	322,000	£	26,000	£	348,000.00

Unclassified

ITEM 4

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Environment Committee
Date of Meeting	05 November 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Environmental Services
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Parks and Cemeteries
Date of Report	22 October 2025
File Reference	PCA144
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Section 75 Compliant	Yes ☒ No ☐ Other ☐ If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Strangford and Lecale Landscape Partnership (Update) (Landscape Connections HLF application)
Attachments	Appendix 1: Strangford and Lecale AONB Value for Money and Landscape Connections Briefing including Outputs Delivered for ANDBC 2023 onwards Appendix 2: Landscape Connections Outline Map

Background

Further to the report which was presented to the Environment Committee in October 2025 in relation to the proposed Strangford and Lecale Landscape Connections application being submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund, a recommendation was proposed as follows:

‘That the decision is deferred until next month’s Environmental Committee to enable a report to come forward outlining the previous benefits to Council that has arisen from membership of the Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership over the past 3 years; and to further outline the potential future benefits and opportunities to this Council area as part of the Landscapes Connections funding opportunity’.

Not Applicable

Furthermore, the Committee has been delegated authority to make a decision on this matter on behalf of Council as a response is required by 12 November 2025.

Designations and Management

The Strangford Lough and separately the Lecale Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) were initially designated under the Amenity Lands (NI) Act 1965 in the late 1960's and the boundaries were modified under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (NI) Order 1985 in 2010, forming the now existing Strangford and Lecale AONB. Under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (NI) Order 1985, it is incumbent on public bodies to manage these AONB's as follows:

Duty of Public Bodies

4.(1) In exercising functions relating to land under any statutory provision, public bodies shall have regard to the need to conserve the natural beauty and amenity of the countryside and the need to protect (so far as reasonably practicable) flora, fauna and geological and physiographical features of the countryside from any harmful effects which might result from the exercise of such functions.

(2) In paragraph (1) the expression "public bodies" includes government departments, district councils and statutory undertakers, and any trustees, commissioners, board or other persons who, as a public body and not for their own profit, act under any statutory provision for the improvement of any place or the production or supply of any commodity or service.

For the Strangford and Lecale AONB this is done so through the partnership agreement of the Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership (SLLP). The mechanism for the establishment of management agreements of AONB's is also included in the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (NI) Order 1985, as is the requirement for the Department (currently the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, DAERA) to make incidental and consequential provisions to the managers of the AONB's in the form of payments, which is currently done so through the Strategic Environment Fund, which runs on a five year cycle. The Strategic Environment Fund provides core funding for the management of the ANOB, and this is mainly administered by the AONB staff who are currently employed by Newry and Mourne District Council (NMDDC), with partial match funding from Ards and North Down Borough Council (ANDBC) of £24,500 per year. The SLLP ANOB staff work across the entire AONB including the section in the Ards and North Down Borough Council area.

Governance of the AONB

The SLLP is a partnership of ANDBC and NMADDC with DAERA plus the SLLP Advisory Committee, and it is managed by the AONB and Geopark team within NMDDC, who assume management of all three AONBs (Strangford, Lecale and Gullion). AONB support staff for the Strangford and Lecale AONB are based in Downshire Civic Centre with the AONB and Geopark Manager operating across all the AONB's.

An internal ANDBC officer group is in operation with participation from all relevant sections including biodiversity, heritage, community planning, tourism and outdoor recreation, officers from NMDDC from the relevant teams also participate in this group. This Officers Working Group provides a representative platform to engage

Not Applicable

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on AONB matters and ensure consistency, collaborative working and avoidance of duplication and best practice learning and so on.

There is also the SLLP Stakeholder Committee, this includes two ANDBC Elected Members, two Elected Members form NMDDC, as well as key Council officers from both Councils and continues to operate as an engagement/stakeholder group providing input on matters concerning the management of the AONB. Other partners on the Committee include, The Royal Yacht Association, Ulster Wildlife, National Trust, Landscapes NI, DAERA, Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Sport NI, County Down Rural Community Network, Portico of Ards, Northern Ireland Environment Link etc.

There is also a sub-Committee which focuses on the Strangford Lough Marine Protected Area (MPA).

SLLP Outputs

Attached is Strangford and Lecale AONB Value for Money and Landscape Connections Briefing that has been completed by the AONB and Geopark Manager in NMDDC. This outlines the current spend profile between the AONB's and the outputs delivered from 2023 to 2026. Also attached is the Outputs Delivered for ANDBC 2023 Onwards document which further details what SLLP have delivered in ANDBC.

Strangford and Lecale Landscape Connections

As previously reported in October 2025 Officers in the SLLP partnership are in the process of applying for funding to deliver a 10-year project called Strangford and Lecale Landscape Connections. Landscape Connections is a major funding initiative by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF). This programme aims to bring nature, heritage, and communities together across special protected areas like the Strangford and Lecale AONB.

The full details of the application are still being developed, and the delivery will be codesigned by local communities over the 10-year period of the project. If the application is successful, there will be a 2-year Development Phase from 2026 to 2028, where officers will work with communities through workshops, co-design, pilots, and testing ideas to create a detailed plan. From 2028 to 2034, the Delivery Phase will bring this plan to life over eight years, with ongoing opportunities for local people to be involved at every stage.

The total anticipated partnership project cost of **£12.425 million**, with projected funding as follows:

- NLHF grant: **£9.841m** (Development - £1.105m; Delivery - £8.3791m)
- DAERA grant: **£1.913m** (Development - £275k; Delivery - £1.638m)
- Partnership match funding - Development: £125k

It is anticipated that the match funding from Ards and North Down Borough Council will be:

- **£40k** in year 1 and 2 as part of the Development Phanse

Not Applicable

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- **£10k** per year in the delivery phase until the end of the project

The full project is anticipated to be completed by February 2035, subject to funding being secured.

This project seeks to reconnect people, nature and heritage across the landscape using water as the foundation for connection. There is a need to address current patterns of use that are not sustainable, encourage responsible participation among users and promote greater understanding of the fragile landscape and rich heritage.

The main themes of the project:

- **Connections to nature** – within the river catchments we can contribute to nature recovery through peatland/heathland restoration, hedgerow and tree planting and river and wetlands restoration to slow the flow, improve water quality and increase biodiversity.
- **Connections to communities** – reconnect people to their local community first, including those who sit outside but near the AONBs, then forge connections across the wider landscape and communities to improve inclusivity and encourage people to respect and stand up for the heritage of the landscape.
- **Connections to landowners** – engagement with landowners and farmers to explore areas of common interest and appetite for change, provide opportunities for upskilling and subsequent delivery of nature conservation works.
- **Connections across the organisations** – collaborative network between those caring for the landscape of the two AONB's to deliver efficiently and learn from each other.

The project aims to achieve the following outcomes by 2035:

Inclusion, access and participation (End unequal access)

- Reconnect people with the landscape

Protecting and restoring the natural environment (Restore nature)

- Transform our habitats into recovery
- Prioritising the protection of drinking water supplies within the drinking water catchment

Saving heritage (Inspire people to care and take action)

- Improve our connection to the heritage of the landscape

Organisational sustainability (Renew our ways of working)

- Develop a recommended sustainable management and governance structure

The project partners include SLLP, Ulster Wildlife, Newry Mourne and Down District Council and Ards and North Down Borough Council.

Officers for the project will be employed by Newry and Mourne District Council and Ulster Wildlife and will work across the entirety of the project area including that in

Not Applicable

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Ards and North Down Borough Council area. Any capital works will be procured and managed by Newry Mourne and Down District Council including those in the Ards and North Down Borough Council area.

The scale and ambition of the project, the opportunity it presents to support delivery of our Councils strategic priorities and the historic and continued lack of investment in landscape management in Northern Ireland, make this a significant and high-profile submission to NLHF.

This project will demonstrate success that will leverage further opportunities for the Borough and provide a catalyst for the development and delivery of other projects through the partnership. The interim outputs can be used to identify gaps and areas where other projects are require enabling these to be scoped and suitable funding sources identified to support future delivery.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council supports the application for this funding opportunity and the necessary match funding as outlined if the funding application is successful.

ITEM 4 APPENDIX

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Appendix 1

Strangford and Lecale AONB Value for Money and Landscape Connections Briefing

Executive Summary

Purpose

To provide Ards and North Down Borough Council with a concise overview of the value derived from its ongoing contribution to the Strangford and Lecale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and contained with – Strangford Marine Protected Area (MPA) for the years 2023/2024, 2024/2025, 2025/2026, and to outline the opportunity presented through the proposed £12 million *Strangford and Lecale Landscape Connections* funding bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Financial Overview

- Total AONB programme value (2023–2026): £1,483,666 million (Ring of Gullion – NMDDC £741,833 (50%); Strangford and Lecale NMDDC £370,916 (25%), Strangford and Lecale ANDBC £370,916 (25%)).
- Funded primarily by Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) (59% split evenly between both AONB), Newry, Mourne and Down District Council (25% split evenly between both AONB), ANDBC (5% only Strangford and Lecale AONB), and volunteer/in-kind contributions (11% split evenly between both AONB).
- ANDBC's annual contribution of £24,500 secures access to £118,148 per year in environmental and community delivery through matched funding and volunteer effort in the ANDBC part of Strangford and Lecale AONB; almost 1:5 return. By contrast in Strangford and Lecale NMDDC receive a 1:2 return.
- Every £1 invested by ANDBC leverages around £4.85 in delivery value, demonstrating exceptional return on investment. NMDDC leverages £1.94 for every £1 invested into Strangford and Lecale.
- Volunteer contribution estimated at £84,377 per year across the wider programme to date.

Staffing and Delivery

- The AONB programme employs seven core staff. One full-time officer works exclusively on the Strangford and Lecale AONB. Two additional officers are responsible for the Marine Protected Areas, currently focusing 90 percent of their time on Strangford as the Murlough and Carlingford MPAs are still in development. These three staff collectively represent around 2.8 full-time equivalent posts directly benefiting ANDBC.

ITEM 4 APPENDIX

- Additional shared staff, including management, administration, and communications officers, support delivery across both AONBs. Their combined input to Strangford and Lecale is estimated at a further 1.3 full-time equivalent. In total, approximately 58% of the programme’s staffing effort currently benefits Strangford and Lecale AONB or about 29% in the ANDBC section of the AONB and MPA.

Table 1. Staff Time Allocation and Delivery Effort

Role	FTE Allocation in Strangford and Lecale	Focus Area	% of time in ANDBC	% of time in NMDDC
AONB & Geopark Officer	1.0	Strangford & Lecale AONB	50%	50%
Marine & MPA Officer	0.9	Strangford, Murlough, Carlingford MPAs	45%	45%
Marine Project Officer	0.9	Strangford, Murlough, Carlingford MPAs	45%	45%
Desk Officer / Admin Support	0.4	Shared administration across both AONBs	50%	50%
Volunteer & Outreach Officer	0.5	Shared role across both AONBs	50%	50%
AONB & Geopark Manager	0.26	Shared management across both AONBs	30%	70%
AONB & Geopark Officer	0.0	Ring of Gullion AONB	0%	100%

Table 2. Financial Overview (2023/2024 – 2025/2026)

Funder	Total contribution	% of the Programme	Amount in Strangford and Lecale – Minimum spend	Amount in ANDBC – Minimum spend
NIEA	£882,579	59%	£441,289	£220,644
NMDDC	£366,445	25%	£183,222	£0
ANDBC	£73,500	5%	£73,500	£73,500

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Volunteer	£168,754	11%	£84,377	£42,188
TOTAL	£1,483,666	100%	£782,388	£336,332

Value for Money Analysis

- The combination of financial leverage, dedicated staffing, and measurable delivery outcomes demonstrates that ANDBC's contribution represents strong value for money. With an investment of £24,500 per year, the council secures over £118,000 worth of activity annually in its AONB area, along with direct social and environmental benefits.
- The shared management model avoids duplication, ensures specialist expertise, and delivers regional consistency across the marine and terrestrial landscapes of Strangford Lough. The council's involvement also maintains eligibility for external funding, access to national networks, and delivery of statutory and non-statutory environmental objectives.

Programme Delivery and Outcomes (2023–2026)

Delivery within the ANDBC section of the Strangford and Lecale AONB and MPA demonstrates extensive community, conservation, and educational impact.

• **Marine and Coastal Work:**

- Development and Implementation of the Strangford MPA Action Plan, focusing on public awareness, monitoring (citizen science), and sustainable recreation.
- Act as Secretariat for the Strangford Marine Protection Area.
- Development of the Advanced Mooring System pilot at Ballyhenry Bay, aimed at protecting seagrass and maerl habitats contributing to Blue Carbon capture.
- Delivery of Share the Shore awareness campaign addressing seal and seabird disturbance and encouraging responsible coastal recreation.
- Aids to Navigation Report commissioned, work on the Aids to Navigation have now been completed in the ANDBC section of Strangford Lough.
- Scoping study for the washdown facilities for Sailing clubs in Strangford Lough is underway to reduce the spread of invasive species, pilot project at Strangford Lough Yacht Club, Whiterock, Killinchy.
- Work with partners (National Trust) to manage and control the spread of Common Cord Grass, *Spartina anglica* and *Modiolus modiolus* across the 3 AONB's.
- Bioblitz at Portavogie being held in October.

Habitat and Species Conservation:

- Dune restoration collaboration to share expertise and improve coastal resilience.
- Support for red squirrel monitoring and biodiversity recording.

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- Ongoing partnership working with local landowners and conservation groups to improve habitat management.
- Monitor landscapes changes through fixed point photography.
- Increase woodland cover through community planting opportunities, annual tree giveaway.
- WISE Train the Trainer training events delivered in each AONB yearly.
- Applied for Environment Fund and was awarded funding for a Grillo machine to enable cut and lift at rewilding sites in ANDBC.
- Bird Box building at various locations.
- Dragons in the Hills projects delivered at Scrabo to improve habitat for Common Lizards.
- WeBS Training delivered.
- Facilitate 2 Strangford Lough Rangers meetings annually to enable shared learning between land managers around the Lough.

Community and Volunteer Action

- Over 2,000 volunteer hours recorded in clean-ups, habitat restoration, and citizen science monitoring/surveys.
- Active Coast Care and community-led environmental projects.
- Updated website signposting people to relevant sites for data recording etc.
- Engage with landowners to create and connect important features, increase local awareness and understanding of local species and habitats through workshops, community events and survey training.
- Officer sits on ANDBC Community Planning and Sustainable Tourism forums.

Youth and Education

- Training of 36 Youth Rangers and 12 Youth Leaders across the Strangford and Lecale AONB.
- Summer coastal learning sessions with local schools and youth groups.
- Shared Education Citizen Science activities delivered in St Columbas College, Portaferry and Strangford College Cloughey.

Access and Infrastructure

- Maintenance and replacement of AONB and Share the Shore signage across coastal access points.
- Collaboration with Outscape (formerly Outdoor Recreation NI) on access assessments and visitor management.
- Support for responsible recreation and sustainable tourism messaging through events and social media.

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Public Engagement and Promotion

- Development and implementation of the ANOB Management Plan.
- Annual AONB photography calendar celebrating ANDBC's coastal landscapes and contributing to community pride.
- Attendance at Portaferry Sails and Sounds Festival raising awareness and education on issues in the area.
- Public outreach through events.
- Assistance with development of the Moved by Nature Calendar in partnership with ANDBC, Sport NI, and the National Trust.
- Attendance/presentation at Sand Dune Conference Oct 2025.
- Act as Secretariat of the SLLP.
- Monthly E-Zine issued to all stakeholders and partners and members of the database.
- Annual hard copy Newsletter printed and available in many outlets across the ANOB.
- Interactive map now live on website showing locations for safe dog walking to minimise wildlife disturbance.
- Biodiversity walk at Movilla cemetery.

The Landscape Connections Funding Opportunity

As previously reported in October 2025, the *Strangford and Lecale Landscape Connections* project is a joint proposal between ANDBC, NMDDC and Ulster Wildlife (UW).

- Aims to restore habitats, build coastal resilience, engage communities, and connect people with heritage and nature.
- Would unlock up to £10 million of external investment across both council areas supporting practical restoration, access enhancement, skills training and community engagement.
- Requires a £120,000 contribution from ANDBC over 10 years to secure inclusion in the funding bid.

Strategic Importance and Recommendation

Supporting the Strangford and Lecale Landscape Connections bid aligns with ANDBC's corporate priorities on sustainability, biodiversity, and community wellbeing. It complements ongoing AONB and MPA activity and leverages substantial external investment.

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EFSS	42	District Council
Environmental Outcomes to be achieved by this project	Indicator/Targets, Baselines and Milestones (SMART) and Outputs to be delivered to achieve outcomes	Method of Assessment/ monitoring. Is this sufficient for DAERA to know it's achieved? If not, propose amends and agree these with the Applicant and list in this table?
Provision of management structure and secretariat for the management of X3 Marine Protected Areas (MPA) management groups.	Act as secretariat to all three MPA Management Groups	• Quarterly reports to the MPA Management Groups • Quarterly and annual reports to NIEA
	Report on the implementation of MPA Management Plans	
Management of Protected areas (Marine) Nature Recovery Networks (Blue Carbon) Invasive species (Marine)	Develop management plans for SL MPA	SL MPA Management Plan developed • Number of programmes developed and delivered • Number of groups, institutions and individuals engaged • Number of restoration projects

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	Develop an action plan for each of the three MPA which contribute to ecological coherence in the marine area; contribute to climate adaptation and increased resilience of our natural environment and put in place measures which support the environment sector to reduce its carbon footprint *Deliver (NMDDC to deliver only those actions attributed to NMDDC - all other partners are responsible for their own actions) an action plan for each of the three MPA. *Reporting on this target is detailed below	developed and delivered •Restoration projects mapped, area calculated •Restoration projects monitored using best practice at time of restoration development •Number of new species records submitted •Project reports •Quarterly and annual reports to NIEA •Quarterly reports to the councils •Quarterly reports to the AONB Partnership • Seagrass monitoring reports submitted with Spatial data uploaded to NIEA data shared annually. •Report on joint proposals for eco-moorings. •Workplan to be submitted to NIEA for signoff •Metrics and spatial data related to surveyed and treated areasto be uplifted into NIEA data share box annually •Wash down stations - trial ongoing at Strangford Lough Yacht Club
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	1. Community input Citizen science training and recording schemes through and with MPA partners. *See Strangford MPA Management Plan for specific detail	Whiterock •Quarterly report on progress on implementation of recommendations from the Aids to Navigation report, to NIEA.
	1.MPA Community input Protect seal haul outs from powered craft by convening interagency meetings when required, continue with online communications on website and social media. Continue to monitor effectiveness of online comms. 1.MPA Community input Recovery of threatened native species and habitats, including helping to reverse species decline through wildlife disturbance mitigation measures. Implement an annual and targeted priority species awareness programme to combat wildlife disturbance * See details of SLA with MHT - delivery partner. Reviewed quarterly.	

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	1.MPA Community input Develop measures with MPA Steering Group to tackle visitor pressures and threats to the natural environment. Deliver in partnership with Steering Group members and other stakeholders. Develop a Strangford Lough User Code – a voluntary charter.	
	1. Community input <u>Mobilising the MPA communities of interest</u> (coastal communities, outdoor recreation and the fishing and aquaculture industries) to help with restoration projects. (See Shared Island Project *Shared Island did not proceed) *See details of C-Map	

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	1. Community input Work with stakeholders to integrate MPA actions into existing formal/informal education programmes - opportunities for a range of organisations working around the lough. Signpost existing programmes via website, newsletter and social media. Leaders to support development of confidence and capacity to deliver environmental learning and engagement projects for the natural environment.	
	1. Community input Ensure that all species recording data is being directed to the correct sites; New Strangford and Lecale website, will provide direct links to reporting sites.	
	1. Community input Support lough communities to tackle marine litter.	
	2. Blue Carbon Monitor seagrass at the two AMS in Ballyhenry Bay.	

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	2. Blue Carbon Report on AMS and work with DAERA to prepare proposals for eco-mooring replacement scheme especially in areas of sensitive benthic habitats (seagrass etc). *See details of C-Map	
	2. Blue Carbon Further Blue Carbon restoration pilot projects – explore options for funding support and project development.	

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	2. Blue Carbon Creation, management, and improvement of 'nature networks' at a landscape scale of blue and green (coastal) spaces for habitats and species which will address habitat fragmentation, enhance habitat connectivity, enhance nature reserves, connect wildlife-rich habitats, and support higher species populations or greater species diversity by acting as wildlife corridors or 'steppingstones'. Pilot projects to scope and demonstrate delivery of the '30x30' target e.g., Advanced Mooring Systems*, Coastal erosion nature-based solutions** etc- see targets for further detail. See details of two trial AMS and C-Map above. **Linked to mobilisation of communities at Tyrella beach above	
	3. Invasive Species (Marine) Work with partners to manage and control the spread of the highly invasive species - Common Cord grass - Spartina anglica in the three MPA	
	3. Invasive Species Support recreational boaters in reducing the risk of the spread of non-native invasive species – implementation of recommendations for Scoping and Design of Suitable Washdown Facilities for Sailing Clubs in Strangford Lough.	

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	4. Research and Development Work with all stakeholders to implement recommendations from the Aids to Navigation report carried out in Winter 2023.	
Management of 2 AONB Management groups	Act as secretariat to both AONB Management Groups	• Quarterly reports to the AONB Management Groups • Quarterly and annual reports to NIEA • Client Officer or NIEA Rep; on management Structure
	Report on the implementation of AONB Management Plans	
Implement 2 AONB Management Plans) Nature and Climate Recovery: Building Ecological and Climate Resilience Landscape, water, habitats, species and earth science condition and extent maintained and improved Invasive species (Terrestrial)	1. Natural Heritage: Enhance natural heritage habitats, species and designated features across the AONB Landscape with a holistic and strategic approach through an engagement and delivery mechanism: <u>Connecting communities</u> with nature to conserve; increasing the area of suitable habitat by encouraging land owners to create and connect important features; increase local awareness and understanding of local species and habitats through <u>workshops, community events, and survey training</u> .	• Number of programmes developed and delivered • Number of groups, institutions and individuals engaged • Number of new species records submitted • Quarterly reports to the councils • Quarterly reports to the AONB Partnership • Quarterly and annual reports to NIEA • Number of restoration projects developed and delivered • Restoration projects mapped; area calculated* • Restoration projects monitoring using best practice at time of restoration development • Project reports
	1. Natural Heritage: Monitor landscape changes through a programme of “fixed point photography”.	

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	1. Natural Heritage: Work with stakeholders to increase woodland cover and woodland resilience through various planting schemes and community initiatives.	• Charter published and shared with NIEA • Fixed point imagery to be uploaded quarterly to NIEA Data Share Box (6 fixed point images uploaded 4 times annually) • Related spatial data matrices and imagery to be up lifted to NIEA data share box annually • Provision of 10 workshops annually • Provision of 10 community events annually with surveys and Household update booklets. • Provision of 20 survey training events annually
	1. Natural Heritage: Increase the appreciation of our special landscapes through the enhancement of natural heritage. * See all other natural heritage enhancement projects above and below. This will be measured through national surveys carried out by other external agencies.	

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	1. Natural Heritage: Targeted educational opportunity for 14-17. 24 young people per annum through the Youth Rangers Programme.	• WISE training undertaken (train the trainer) and annual WISE thereafter, • Leave no Trace training undertaken (train the trainer) and annual LNT thereafter. • Youth Rangers Training scheme. 24 trainees annually • Annual Adult Ambassadors Scheme 12 trainees, trained in social media training, presentations & communications, • Planting 10'000 trees per year minimum. Spatial Maps and reports to NIEA Annually* • Report on volunteer recruitment and effort to NIEA annually • Report number of hits, shares, and posts annually on social media sites to NIEA. • Monthly e-zine published. Regular press releases. Annual AONB Calendar (printed) • Annual newsletter (printed) • Up to date and well maintained AONB interpretation panels available to view. *Digitised mapping with matrices uploaded annually as Data Share with NED & records forwarded to CeDAR where appropriate.
	1. Natural Heritage: Develop and implement a targeted <u>programme of habitat restoration and species improvement</u> through an Urban Landscapes and Connectivity Programme working with community's, businesses, households and other urban landowners (hedgehogs, frogs and newts, bats, pollinators, squirrels and pine martens, swifts, woodland and hedgerow birds)	

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	1. Natural Heritage: Provide a strategic and targeted Conservation Volunteer Service throughout the AONB and Geopark Experts; working with all NMDDC Dept and other external partners. There will be a weekday and weekend volunteering opportunity in the AONB and Geopark every week of the year budget.	
	1. Natural Heritage: Monitor, improve and expand on the “Don’t Mow, Let it Grow” and Wildflower sites within NMDDC and ANDBC sites.	
	2. Outdoor Recreation: Increase the range of outdoor recreation opportunities and improve access to green and blue spaces and the countryside which will be mainly carried out through the implementation of the Outdoor Recreation Action Plan when need and opportunity arise. Develop access opportunities from both Outdoor Recreation Action Plans and the Strangford Lough Audit of Access.	

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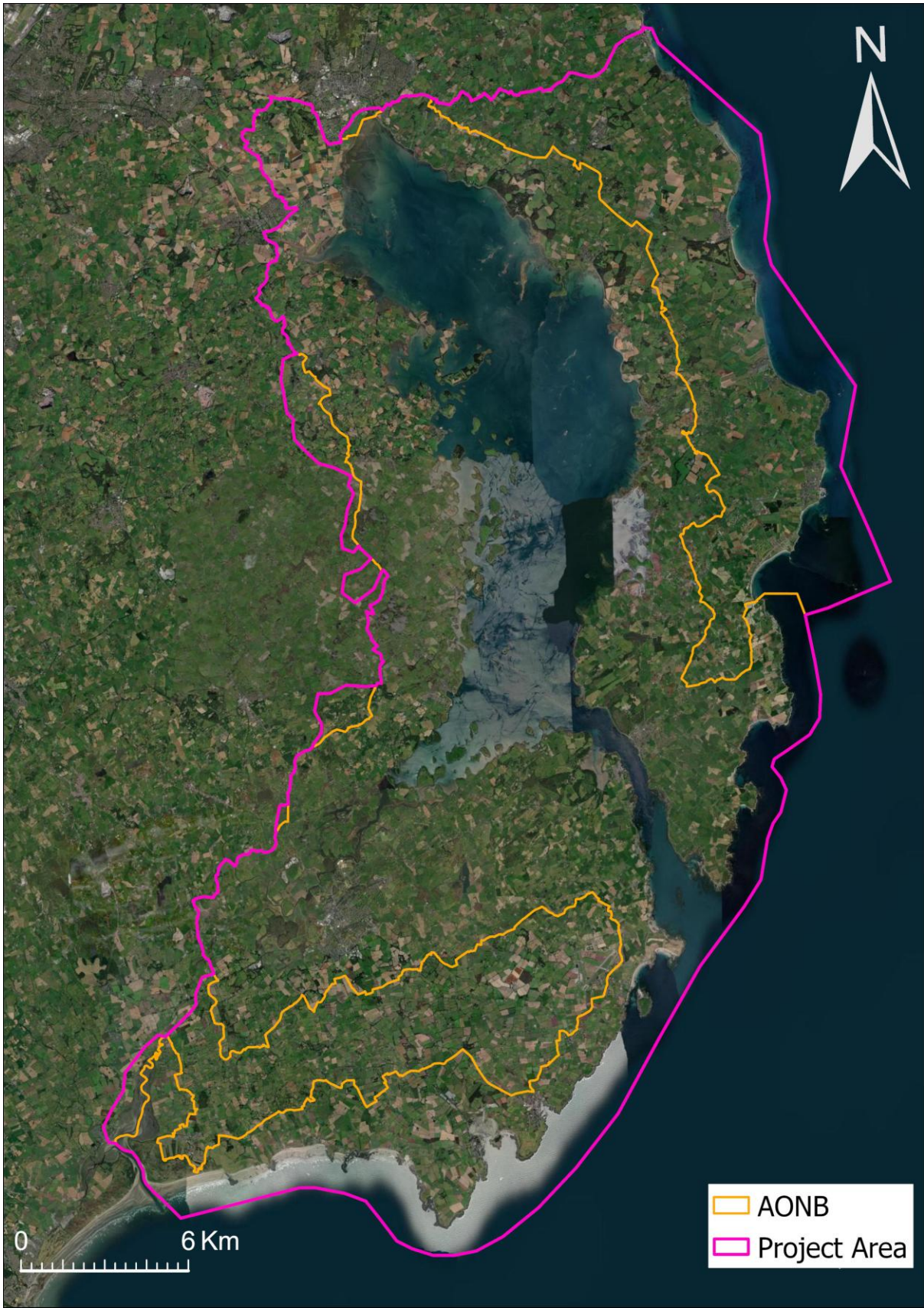
	2. Outdoor Recreation: Targeted mitigation towards recreational users to manage access in a way that mitigates against wildlife disturbance and user conflict. (WiSe training and Awareness raising programme). *this is reported on above in the MPA section	
	3. Management and comms: Remain engaged, open and transparent in the implementation of both AONB Management Plans. Annual Reports to partnerships, funders and other stakeholders	
	3. Management and comms: Develop 10-year strategy (2023-2032) and 5-year AONB Management Plan (2028- 2032) in line with all other relevant strategies and management plans.	
	3. Management and comms: Secure appropriate funding to support the AONB Partnerships and develop actions for the implementation of the AONB Management Plan.	
	3. Management and comms: Put in place plans for secure legacies for any outcomes for this EF and improve future plans where applicable.	

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	3. Management and comms: Facilitate the Partnership, the Strangford Lough Rangers Network and other stakeholders taking part in knowledge sharing, and networking; strategically network with relevant bodies; and engage and inform relevant individuals and groups about the AONB; and build capacity among partners; network with relevant bodies. (Landscapes NI, NIMTF, Better Beaches Forum, NI Outdoor Recreation Forum).	
	3. Management and comms: Communicate to the Partnership, strategic stakeholders and to the wider public in order to positively and effectively promote the AONBs, avoid duplication and displacement, and have a coordinated approach to the management of the AONBs and Geopark.	
	3. Management and comms: Increase understanding and involvement in the protection of nature, landscape character and earth science through targeted communications and community involvement in communications: Manage <u>social media channels with regular posts, monthly eZine, regular press releases, annual AONB Calendar (printed), annual newsletter (printed) up to date and well maintained AONB interpretation panels.</u>	

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	3. Management and comms: Staff, stakeholder and community training: Annual Ambassadors 12 trainees, social media training, presentations and communications, WISE (train the trainer) and annual WISE thereafter, Leave no Trace (train the trainer) and annual LNT thereafter.	
	3. Management and comms: Continually improve the Partnership and our ways of working in contributing to the coordination and facilitation of the management of the AONBs through regular reviews - once p.a.	



Unclassified

ITEM 5

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Environment Committee
Date of Meeting	05 November 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Environmental Services
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Parks and Cemeteries
Date of Report	20 October 2025
File Reference	PCA92
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Section 75 Compliant	Yes ☒ No ☐ Other ☐ If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Let's Grow Together Strategy Benchmark Review
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Let's Grow Together Strategy Benchmark Review Report

The purpose of this report is to update Members on the recent benchmark review of the Let's Grow Together Strategy.

The Parks and Cemeteries Service has completed a benchmark review of the Let's Grow Strategy, supported by a placement student from Queen's University Belfast and Community Garden Support (previously Social Farms and Gardens NI).

This review provided the first comprehensive baseline of current community growing activity across the Borough. Baseline analysis indicates 31,601m² of community food growing space across allotments, gardens, and orchards.

Applying the benchmark of 1,250m² per 1,000 households, as set out in the Corporate Plan 2024 – 2028, suggests a recommended provision of 84,000m², revealing a shortfall of over 52,000m². Current provision therefore meets approximately 38% of the benchmark.

Not Applicable

The review identified land suitable for future projects and culminated in a successful skills-sharing event that brought together local groups to exchange knowledge and experience.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes the benchmark review of the Let's Grow Together Strategy to date and continue to support future initiatives to enhance provision of community growing space in line with the Strategy Action Plan.

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Let's Grow Together Strategy Benchmark Review Report 2025**Executive Summary**

This report has been prepared by the Parks and Cemeteries Service to provide an updated baseline of community food growing provision across Ards and North Down. It forms part of ongoing work to support delivery of the *Let's Grow Together Strategy 2021–2032* and responds to the continuing growth in demand for access to land for food growing. The Strategy established a strong vision for community growing within the Borough, but since its adoption new challenges and opportunities have emerged which now require review and an updated evidence base.

Community food growing is no longer viewed simply as a leisure activity for a small number of residents. The Covid-19 pandemic, coupled with wider concerns around food security, climate change, and the rising cost of living, has created a renewed interest in local food production and community-based growing initiatives. This demand is particularly visible in Ards and North Down, where allotment sites are heavily oversubscribed and local community gardens continue to attract new participants. Existing provision cannot meet the scale of current or future need.

In this context, the report provides Council with a baseline assessment of existing facilities and opportunities for expansion. It is designed to inform departmental planning, provide a clear evidence base for decision-making, and guide the next phase of work under the *Let's Grow Together Strategy*. By aligning local provision with regional benchmarks and national best practice, the Council can ensure that residents are provided with fair and equitable opportunities to take part in community food growing.

The report has been informed by a Queens University placement project within Parks and Cemeteries Service, which combined:

- Research into local, regional and national best practice examples.
- GIS review of current food growing database, and mapping of Council-owned land, with a particular focus on the grounds of community halls and other underutilised sites.
- Data collation of existing provision into a Community Mapping Spreadsheet, creating a live baseline resource for monitoring and planning, connecting with groups currently delivering or interested in community growing projects.
- Review of existing strategy documents alongside the *Social Farms and Gardens NI Benchmark Report (2020)* to assess alignment and identify areas where updates are needed.

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This work has provided evidence on the extent of existing provision, current pressures, and emerging opportunities. It highlights where the *Let's Grow Together Strategy* remains relevant, and where its objectives and action plan should be refreshed to reflect present-day circumstances and projected future demand.

The purpose of this report is to summarise current community food growing provision in the Borough, identifying existing assets, programmes, and levels of demand; to analyse opportunities and challenges in expanding provision, with reference to local conditions, sector benchmarks, and regional best practice; and to recommend practical next steps for updating and delivering on the commitments within the Let's Grow Together Strategy 2021–2032.

2. Strategic Background and Context

2.1 The Growing Importance of Community Food Growing

Community food growing has evolved from a niche leisure pursuit into an essential part of modern urban and rural life, recognised for its social, environmental, and economic benefits. In Ards and North Down, community growing supports Council priorities around health and wellbeing, climate adaptation, biodiversity, and strong, connected communities.

Engaging in gardening and tending local plots promotes physical activity, healthier diets, and mental wellbeing, directly supporting Big Plan Outcome 6 (active and healthy people), the Corporate Plan's Community and Wellbeing priorities, and the Five Steps to Wellbeing: Be Active and Take Notice. Growing locally also contributes to climate action and environmental sustainability by reducing food miles, encouraging composting, and enhancing biodiversity, advancing Big Plan Outcome 4 (vibrant, sustainable borough) and the Parks and Cemeteries Service Plan commitments to the Let's Grow Together Strategy and Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

Community growing fosters social connections, volunteering, intergenerational learning, and inclusion, strengthening Big Plan Outcome 5 (socially sustainable communities), supporting the Service Plan objective on Volunteering and Participation, and encouraging the Five Steps to Wellbeing: Connect and Give. Even small-scale initiatives can stimulate local economic activity, support social enterprise, and create opportunities for skill development, reinforcing civic pride and lifelong learning (Five Steps to Wellbeing: Keep Learning).

2.2 Local Drivers for Action

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted vulnerabilities in food systems, while the cost-of-living crisis has increased demand for affordable, accessible fresh produce. This has

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generated heightened public interest in allotments, community gardens, and school growing projects.

In Ards and North Down, oversubscribed allotment waiting lists and growing participation in community-led initiatives demonstrate this demand. Ensuring equitable access to growing spaces remains a key challenge for the Council.

2.3 Strategic Context – Let's Grow Together 2021–2032

The Let's Grow Together Strategy, adopted in 2021, provides a framework for expanding food growing opportunities across the Borough. Its vision is that:

"Ards and North Down will be a place where everyone has the opportunity to take part in food growing, improving health, wellbeing, and community life."

The Strategy's objectives remain relevant, focusing on developing new growing spaces, raising awareness of benefits, promoting sustainable practices, supporting education and skills development, and encouraging economic activity, volunteering, and social enterprise. Three years on, baseline data is outdated, and targets need to be refreshed to reflect increasing demand and updated benchmarks.

2.4 Benchmarking and Sector Context

The Social Farms and Gardens NI Benchmark Report (2020) provides a clear regional context for community growing. It recommends that councils aim for 1,250 sqm (0.3 acres) of community growing space per 1,000 households, implement proportionate asset transfer processes, provide dedicated staff resources, and embed growing spaces into planning frameworks in relation to housing, health, and climate policy.

Benchmarking against this standard shows that while Ards and North Down has excellent examples of community gardens and orchards, overall provision remains modest relative to demand. With the benchmark now referenced in the Corporate Plan, this shortfall underscores the need to update the Let's Grow Together Strategy and identify opportunities for expansion to meet corporate commitments.

2.5 Summary

Community food growing is not a standalone issue but one that intersects with multiple Council priorities. It delivers measurable benefits for health, wellbeing, climate resilience, social cohesion, and local economic activity. By ensuring the Let's Grow Together Strategy remains current and ambitious, the Council can maximise these benefits, meet growing public demand, and deliver on its strategic commitments to a healthier, more sustainable, and socially connected Borough.

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Work Undertaken During Placement

This baseline report is grounded in the activities and outputs of a twelve-week student placement undertaken within the Parks and Cemeteries Service, with support from Community Garden Support (Social Farms and Gardens NI). The placement was designed to provide both practical support for the implementation of the *Let's Grow Together Strategy* and a review of its progress to date. Work was structured around four key strands: research, GIS-based land assessment, data collation, and strategy review.

3.1 Best Practice Research

During the initial phase of the placement, a review of best practice at local, regional, and national levels was undertaken. This identified trends and tested the relevance of the current Strategy. Key themes and illustrative case studies are summarised below.

Partnership delivery models – Case study: Acorn Farm Project, Derry~Londonderry

A partnership between Derry City and Strabane District Council and the Community Foundation NI is transforming a disused site at St Columb's Park into a £6.2 million “urban food growing hub” with polytunnels, a bioreactor, ovens and green skills workshops. It will support 260 families with mentor-led growing and an “I Can Cook” programme linking food growing and nutrition.

This case demonstrates that multi-agency partnerships can combine council land assets with external funding and expertise to deliver flagship food growing hubs at a potentially lower cost. Adopting a similar approach in Ards and North Down could unlock comparable opportunities.



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Use of “meanwhile” land – Case study: Magpie Ladies Garden, North Belfast

Local women reclaimed a derelict dumping ground in Ballysillan at the start of Covid-19 by making and selling planters to fund soil, seeds and mulch. The garden now produces vegetables donated to elderly residents, flowers, youth summer activities and community events. It shows how small, easily ignored plots can be repurposed at low cost in deprived areas.

This example shows that temporary licences on underused sites can unlock immediate community benefits. It suggests that piloting “meanwhile use” agreements on small parcels of land identified could be an effective way to meet short-term demand.



Multi-functional spaces – Case study: Incredible Edible Cloughmills, NI

On the site of a disused mill, the community created a multifunctional hub with allotments, orchards, wildlife zones, a men’s shed, outdoor kitchen, community fridge, library of things and workshops for families. This model combines growing, skill-sharing and resource-sharing, showing how a garden can become a holistic centre.

The Cloughmills model shows that encouraging “hybrid” models may help ensure sustainability of projects beyond food production, making them centres for health, learning and community resilience in Ards and North Down.

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Policy integration and innovation – Case study: Global Generation “Skip Garden”, King’s Cross, London

Global Generation started in 2004 bringing nature into inner-city London using portable “skip gardens” on development sites. What began as four movable beds on building land is now a permanent “Triangle Site” with training courses and paid opportunities. It demonstrates how planning policy and flexible land use agreements can bring food growing to dense urban areas of social deprivation.

The London example suggests that embedding community growing requirements into development agreements and creating clear pathways for temporary or portable growing initiatives on Council land could help mainstream food growing locally.



3.2 GIS Mapping of Council Assets

A major part of the placement was the use of GIS (Geographic Information Systems) to identify potential new spaces for food growing. This was a detailed, multi-step process:

1. **Dataset Assembly** - Council’s asset database was cross-referenced with Ordnance Survey maps to identify all land parcels in Council ownership.

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2. **Filtering Criteria** - Parcels were filtered for size (sufficient to host a garden or orchard), accessibility (close to residential areas, transport, and footpaths), and current usage (vacant or underused).
3. **Community Halls Focus (Existing Land)** - A particular focus was placed on land adjacent to community halls, as these sites are already community focal points and often include grassed areas that are not heavily used.
4. **Spatial Analysis** - GIS layers such as population density and deprivation indices were overlaid to identify priority areas where community growing could address both demand and social need.

The outputs included a map layer of candidate sites, which can be used as a working resource by Council. Early analysis suggests that several community hall sites have real potential for small gardens or orchards, provided that community demand exists.

This method not only identified opportunities but also created a replicable framework for ongoing assessment of land. The Council now has a tool that can proactively guide site identification rather than relying solely on ad hoc community requests.

3.3 Community Mapping Spreadsheet

To compliment GIS, a detailed spreadsheet was created to collate all known examples of food growing provision in the Borough. This resource records:

- The type of site (allotment, community garden, orchard, school-based project).
- The managing group or organisation.
- The approximate size and facilities.

The spreadsheet is not a static product but a baseline monitoring tool that can be updated annually. It provides a central record that avoids duplication, supports transparency, and allows easy reporting to both management and community stakeholders.

3.4 Review of Strategy and Benchmarks

The placement also included a structured review of the *Let's Grow Together Strategy* in light of new benchmarks. Particular attention was paid to the Social Farms and Gardens NI Benchmark Report (2020), which sets out recommended provision levels and policy guidance.

The review identified several opportunities to strengthen the Strategy:

- The 2021 Strategy remains forward-looking, with a clear vision and objectives, but updating baseline data would help reflect current demand and context.
- Introducing measurable targets would support monitoring progress and demonstrating impact.

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- Explicitly referencing regional benchmarks, such as the 1,250 sqm per 1,000 households standard, could help align local provision with wider best practice.
- Developing more detailed guidance for community groups on requesting land, and for Council in assessing and releasing land, would support consistent implementation.

Overall, the Strategy continues to provide a strong framework for community growing in Ards and North Down. Updating the action plan and embedding these refinements will enhance its effectiveness and support delivery of Council priorities.

4. Key Findings

Analysis from research, mapping, and strategy review produced several key insights, presented thematically below.

4.1 Demand and Participation

Demand for allotments and community gardens significantly exceeds current provision. With only 34 Council owned allotment plots across the Borough and a waiting list of over 90 residents, access is limited, creating inequity based on availability rather than need. Community gardens indicate a strong public appetite for shared growing spaces, yet many residents remain unaware of existing opportunities. These findings highlight the potential to expand provision and raise awareness to meet demonstrated community interest.

4.2 Access and Equity

Provision of community food growing opportunities across Ards and North Down is uneven. Areas such as Bangor and Comber benefit from established projects, including Bangor Walled Garden, Bryansburn Allotments, Comber Community Garden, and the Branch Out Community Group. Other parts of the Borough have smaller-scale initiatives such as Millisle Community Garden, Portaferry Community Orchard, Hollywood Co-Farm, and various Men's Sheds, many of which are at capacity or have limited visibility. Rural settlements, including Portavogie, Ballygowan, and Ballywalter, show interest through small community associations but lack dedicated food growing spaces comparable to larger towns.

This distribution demonstrates that access is influenced by geography as well as demand. Residents in less-served areas, particularly those without private transport, face practical barriers to participation. Older people, families with young children, and individuals on lower incomes are especially affected. Expanding provision and improving accessibility through transport or local connections will be key to achieving the aims of the Let's Grow Together Strategy.

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4.3 Sustainability of Projects

Community gardens often rely on small groups of volunteers. Where key individuals step back, projects can become vulnerable. There is limited long-term funding to support infrastructure such as polytunnels, compost bays, or storage facilities. Few gardens have succession planning in place, and groups can struggle to establish new growing spaces due to funding and resource constraints. Supporting these groups with capacity-building, infrastructure, and governance guidance will enhance sustainability and resilience.

4.4 Policy and Governance

Current provision in Ards and North Down falls short of the Social Farms and Gardens NI benchmark of 1,250 m² per 1,000 households. While the Strategy outlines broad objectives, mechanisms to ensure delivery—measurable targets, integration with planning policy, and clear Council processes for community asset requests—could be strengthened.

Emerging “Right to Grow” legislation could provide communities with a legal entitlement to access public land. Hull City Council passed a Right to Grow motion in 2023, mapping unused council land and opening it to community cultivation, while Southwark Council in London adopted a similar approach by publishing an online map of suitable sites and streamlining free leases for local groups. These examples demonstrate that mapping land and clarifying access procedures can rapidly expand provision without significant expenditure.

4.5 Strategic Opportunity

Council-owned land represents a significant untapped resource for expanding community food growing. The GIS mapping undertaken during the placement has already identified multiple sites that could host new community gardening initiative, including areas adjacent to existing facilities. This presents an opportunity to build on the Council’s current initiatives, such as the network of community orchards and the support already provided to local “Friends of...” groups who help manage parks and green spaces. By aligning future growing projects with these established networks, Council can strengthen community ownership while reducing ongoing maintenance pressures. There is also strong potential to link food growing with wider Council programmes, including health and wellbeing initiatives, biodiversity projects and Schools Growing Clubs.

4.6 Benchmark Comparison and Provision Gap

Baseline analysis indicates 31,601 m² of community food growing space across allotments, gardens, and orchards. Applying the benchmark of 1,250 m² per 1,000 households suggests a recommended provision of 84,000 m², revealing a shortfall of

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over 52,000 m². Current provision therefore meets approximately 38% of the benchmark.

Bridging this gap represents an opportunity for a sustained programme of new allotments, gardens, and orchards, alongside optimising existing land assets, to meet both community demand and strategic objectives.

5. Analysis of Strategy Alignment

The Let's Grow Together Strategy 2021–2032 sets out a clear ambition to increase opportunities for food growing across the Borough. Baseline analysis from this placement indicates that current provision totals 31,601 m², compared with the 84,000 m² recommended by the Social Farms and Gardens NI benchmark. Introducing measurable targets would support tracking progress and ensure that community demand continues to be met effectively.

5.1 Areas of Strength

The Strategy provides a strong vision and narrative, positioning community growing within the Council's broader agenda. It has supported initiatives such as orchards and educational outreach through the Schools Growing Club, enhanced community awareness, and created a foundation of engagement and support for further development.

5.2 Areas for Improvement

The review identifies several opportunities to strengthen the Strategy. Introducing clear targets for land provision, such as specifying the number of allotments or the total square metres of community gardens, would provide a tangible framework for measuring progress. Incorporating regional benchmarks would further support comparative assessment, allowing the Council to track achievements against recognised standards.

Enhancing clarity around procedures for community groups to request land would improve accessibility and transparency, ensuring that all residents can engage confidently with available opportunities. Finally, embedding robust mechanisms for monitoring and reporting on outcomes would help demonstrate the impact of the Strategy over time, reinforcing accountability and guiding future development.

5.3 Strategic Implications

Updating the Strategy offers an opportunity to move from aspiration to delivery, reinforcing the Council's leadership and commitment to community growing. Clear targets and alignment with regional standards would support responsive management

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of demand pressures, such as waiting lists, and help maintain public confidence. The baseline work undertaken during this placement provides a platform to maximise benefits across health, wellbeing, sustainability, and community engagement.

Following the review of the Strategy and the baseline analysis undertaken during the placement, a refreshed action plan is proposed (See Appendix 1). It sets measurable targets and practical steps for the Council to move from the current 31,601 m² of provision towards the 84,000 m² benchmark by 2032. Actions are grouped by timeframe to provide a clear roadmap for delivery and are designed to align with both the Council's Corporate Plan and emerging Right to Grow legislation.

Suggested Action Plan Updates

Short-Term Priorities (0–12 months)

In the immediate term, annual milestones should be set to track progress towards the remaining 49,399 m² target. At the same time, the GIS layer and Community Mapping Spreadsheet developed during the placement should be used and reviewed to provide up-to-date information on provision and demand and to support annual reporting to management.

Building on the success of recent skill-sharing and networking activities, including a borough-wide skill-sharing event hosted with multiple community groups, feedback from these events should be used to inform the development of future skill-sharing opportunities and training. This approach will help identify community needs, highlight what is working well, recognise local expertise, and support the development of potential new groups, ensuring the Council's growing strategy is responsive and inclusive.

In preparation for PEACEPLUS funding commencing in 2026, short-term priorities should also include establishing partnerships with local organisations and community groups to build the foundations of the "Your Place, Reimagining Our Space, Allotments/Men and Hen Sheds" programme. This could involve mapping existing community gardens, allotments, men's sheds, and hen's sheds to create a network for learning, advice, and support in advance of project delivery.

Medium-Term Priorities (1–3 years)

Over the next one to three years, the Council should identify and pilot at least four new growing sites on its own land, with a focus on underused grounds of community halls, and develop a transparent and proportionate process to allow community groups to request land or licences, aligned with the principles of emerging Right to Grow legislation. As part of these pilots, it is recommended that four new community gardens be established with Council support through additional training and networking opportunities.

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As PEACEPLUS funding becomes available, these medium-term actions can be aligned with the programme objectives. This includes:

- Establishing the learning network across all existing community gardens, allotments, and men's/hen's sheds.
- Delivering intergenerational activities to engage approximately 200 participants with 24 hours of purposeful engagement, and 100 participants with 4 hours of engagement, over the 2-year programme.
- Organising training sessions covering food growing, foraging, biodiversity, wildlife, Good Relations, and diversity, supporting Peace and Reconciliation outcomes.
- Organising opening and closing events to raise awareness and celebrate achievements, as well as cross-border site visits and "World of Culture" events to enhance learning and exchange.

These activities will complement the Council's broader community training sessions, ensuring ongoing knowledge-sharing, skills development, and capacity-building across the borough.

Additionally, the Council should continue to work with the Planning Service to embed community food growing into the Local Development Plan, ensuring that future developments make provision for growing space or contribute to off-site provision.

3+ Year Plan to 2032

Over the next several years, Council should focus on supporting and sustaining existing community food growing projects. This could include small-grants schemes, training for governance and volunteer management, and guidance on accessible design such as raised beds and paths.

PEACEPLUS funding can further enhance these longer-term objectives by providing structured support and additional capacity for the "Your Place, Reimagining Our Space" programme, including:

- Creation of up to 6 new spaces for practical growing activities.
- Establishing 4 new community gardens and 2 new men's/hen's sheds, alongside support for existing sites.
- Hosting borough-wide skill-sharing and learning events to consolidate networks and build sustainability.

Looking further ahead, the Council could develop training and social enterprise opportunities linked to food growing, working with organisations such as Community Garden Support and The Conservation Volunteers (TCV). By 2032, the aim is to approach the 84,000 m² benchmark, achieve a more even distribution of sites across the Borough, and integrate community growing into health, climate, and economic

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programmes, while maximising the benefits of PEACEPLUS funding for community empowerment, learning, and wellbeing.

Conclusion

This baseline review confirms that community food growing is a vital and growing priority for Ards and North Down. Current provision of 31,601 m² falls short of the benchmark of 84,000 m², highlighting a clear gap between community demand and available spaces. Opportunities are unevenly distributed across the Borough, and many projects face sustainability challenges due to limited resources, volunteer capacity, and variable governance structures.

Evidence gathered through GIS mapping, community mapping, and best-practice research demonstrates significant untapped potential on Council-owned land, particularly around community halls and other underused sites. Updating the Let's Grow Together Strategy presents an opportunity to set measurable targets, align with regional benchmarks, and embed community food growing into wider Council priorities, including health, climate resilience, biodiversity, and community cohesion.

By implementing the proposed Action Plan, establishing clear monitoring mechanisms, and providing structured support to both new and existing initiatives, the Council can strengthen community food growing as a structured, equitable, and sustainable programme. The forthcoming PEACEPLUS funding offers an additional platform to expand participation, develop networks of community gardens, allotments, and men's and hen's sheds, and enhance learning and engagement across the Borough.

Adopting this approach will ensure that all residents have meaningful opportunities to participate, maximising the benefits of community food growing for health, wellbeing, and resilience while reinforcing the Council's leadership and commitment to inclusive, sustainable communities.

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Link to Council Let's Grow Together Strategy [Grow - Ards and North Down Borough Council](#) and extract of Action Plan below:

The table below shows the *Let's Grow Together Strategy* action plan as developed in 2021. It outlines the strategic objectives, specific actions, delivery leads, timescales, and resources identified at that time to support and expand community food growing across the Borough.

Strategic Objectives	Actions	Delivered by	Timescale	Resources
Creating More Spaces – develop new sites where suitable locations are identified and there is recognised local demand.	Develop an agreed plan for the delivery of allotments and community gardens across the Borough.	Lead: Parks and Cemeteries Service; Partners: Community Garden Support	2021 - 2032	Officer time
	Engage with Planning Department to ensure full consideration is given to the provision of growing spaces or allotments in new developments, within the Development Plan and associated policies.	Lead: Parks and Cemeteries Service; Partners: Planning Section	2021 - 2032	Officer time

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	Work with partner organisations to support, promote and enhance growing opportunities throughout the borough.	Lead: Parks and Cemeteries Service; Partners: Community Garden Support, Community/volunteer groups and relevant council departments	2021 - 2032	Officer time
	Identify community growing spaces within Council owned land.	Lead: Parks and Cemeteries Service	2021 - 2032	Officer time
	Respond positively to communities wanting a community growing project by creating a procedure to assess suitability.	Lead: Parks and Cemeteries Service	2021 - 2032	Officer time
	Develop new allotment and community garden sites at agreed locations.	Lead: Parks and Cemeteries Service; Partners Community Garden Support, NIHE, PHA, Community/Volunteer Groups	2021 - 2032	Officer time
Awareness Raising – promote the	Promote the benefits of community	Lead: Parks and Cemeteries Service; Partners: Community	2021 - 2032	Officer time

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benefits of community food growing to improve quality of life outcomes for local residents.	growing within the local community through media, events, and engagement with partners.	Garden Support Community/volunteer groups		
	Link with national and local growing programmes and strategies to guide promotion of local growing initiatives.	Lead: Parks and Cemeteries Service; Partners: Local and National growing partners/initiatives	2021 - 2032	Officer time
	Deliver education programmes through schools, charities, and communities to raise awareness of the wider benefits of nature for health and wellbeing.	Lead: Parks and Cemeteries Service; Partners: Community/volunteer groups, Education Authorities, Local schools and colleges	2021 - 2032	Officer time
Environmental Awareness – support sustainable food growing that improves biodiversity.	Support new sustainable local sites for growing by developing a framework to identify, assess, and	Lead: Parks and Cemeteries Service; Partners: Community Garden Support	2021 - 2032	Officer time; Annual budget setting process; External

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	select new sites considering health, social, and environmental impact.			funding applications
	Promote sustainable growing practices through media promotions, events, and engagement with partners.	Lead: Parks and Cemeteries Service	2021 - 2032	Officer time
	Promote integration of green space and food growing provision through engagement with Planning Department.	Lead: Parks and Cemeteries Service; Partners: Planning Department	2021 - 2032	Officer time
	Promote Local Biodiversity Action Plan links to food growing and the positive impact on the environment.	Lead: Parks and Cemeteries Service	2021 - 2032	Officer time
	Promote active travel to community	Lead: Parks and Cemeteries Service; Partners: Local	2021 - 2032	Officer time

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	growing spaces (walking, cycling) for physical and mental health benefits.	community, Leisure, PHA		
Education and Learning – engage the community in food growing as an educational tool.	Promote and develop a programme of funding opportunities tailored to community growers.	Lead: Parks and Cemeteries Service	2021 - 2032	Officer time
	Provide information, expert advice, and support for schools to begin growing initiatives and achieve the Eco Schools Green Flag Award.	Lead: Parks and Cemeteries Service; Partners: Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful, Local Schools and Colleges	2021 - 2032	Officer time
	Provide information, expert advice, and resources to local communities to support their growing initiatives.	Lead: Parks and Cemeteries Service; Partners: External community support organisations, Community and Volunteer Groups	2021 - 2032	Officer time

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	Deliver educational events to promote growing and skills development where gaps and training needs are identified.	Lead: Parks and Cemeteries Service; Partners: Community/volunteer groups, local schools and colleges, external training providers	2021 - 2032	Officer time
	Promote and support volunteer opportunities by creating events that encourage involvement and networking.	Lead: Parks and Cemeteries Service; Partners: Community/volunteer groups, local schools and colleges	2021 - 2032	Officer time
	Work with growing partners to establish a support network of inter-generational community growers.	Lead: Parks and Cemeteries Service; Partners: Community/volunteer groups, local schools and colleges	2021 - 2032	Officer time
Economic Driver – encourage the development of the social economy and provide	Support opportunities for people to gain new skills through community horticulture	Lead: Parks and Cemeteries Service; Partners: Community/volunteer groups, local schools	2021 - 2032	Officer time

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training/skills development for employability.	activities, helping understanding of the sector.	and colleges, Social Farms and Gardens		
	Support opportunities for social enterprise development in food growing initiatives and promote community ownership.	Lead: Parks and Cemeteries Service; Partners: Community/volunteer groups, local schools and colleges, Social Farms and Gardens	2021 - 2032	Officer time

Unclassified

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ITEM 6**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Environment Committee
Date of Meeting	05 November 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Environmental Services
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Finance
Date of Report	27 October 2025
File Reference	FIN45 / 40012
Legislation	Section 5 of Local Government Finance Act (NI)2011
Section 75 Compliant	Yes ☐ No ☐ Other ☒ If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Environmental Services Directorate Budgetary Control Report - September 2025
Attachments	None

The Environmental Services Budgetary Control Report covers the 6-month period 1 April 2025 to 30 September 2025 and it reflects the recent Organisational changes. The net cost of the Directorate is showing an overspend of £115.6k – box A on page 3.

Explanation of Variance

The Environmental Services budget performance is further analysed on page 3 into 3 key areas:

Report	Type	Variance	Page
Report 2	Payroll Expenditure	£238.3k favourable	3
Report 3	Goods & Services Expenditure	£451.2k adverse	3
Report 4	Income	£97.3k favourable	3

Not Applicable

57

The Directorate's overall variance can be summarised by the following table (variances over £25k): -

Type	Variance £'000	Comment
Payroll	(238)	- Waste and Cleansing (£99k) – vacancies within Waste Collection - Estates (£122k) – vacancies within Property Operations and Fleet Management. - Parks and Cemeteries (£17k) – small underspends
Goods & Services		
Waste and Cleansing	(93)	Mainly due to waste disposal haulage costs being less than anticipated (£107k).
Estates	533	- Technical and Maintenance - £449k. Storm damage repairs at Bangor Aurora £602k (total expected costs are £830k but this is subject to an insurance claim). Other Maintenance – (£67k) Utilities – (£49k) - Harbours - £16k – Groomsport and Donaghadee (diesel and equipment) - Transport running costs - £59k – vehicle maintenance costs.
Income		
Parks and Cemeteries	(106)	- Cemeteries income (£51k) - Outdoor Leisure (£40k) - Franchise income (£6k)

Not Applicable

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REPORT 1 BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT					
Period 6 - September 2025					
	Year to Date Actual	Year to Date Budget	Variance	Annual Budget	Variance
	£	£	£	£	%
Environmental Services					
4100 Environmental Services HQ	106,588	105,800	788	214,700	0.7
4200 Waste and Cleansing Services	8,945,219	9,137,200	(191,981)	15,164,200	(2.1)
4300 Estates	5,004,349	4,584,200	420,149	9,595,400	9.2
4400 Parks & Cemeteries	2,833,382	2,946,700	(113,318)	5,925,700	(3.8)
Total	16,889,539	16,773,900	A 115,639	30,900,000	0.7
REPORT 2 PAYROLL REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Environmental Services - Payroll					
4100 Environmental Services HQ	90,119	90,000	119	180,500	0.1
4200 Waste and Cleansing Services	5,156,301	5,255,200	(98,899)	10,451,900	(1.9)
4300 Estates	1,195,894	1,318,000	(122,106)	2,658,100	(9.3)
4400 Parks & Cemeteries	2,580,075	2,597,500	(17,425)	5,048,100	(0.7)
Total	9,022,389	9,260,700	B (238,311)	18,338,600	(2.6)
REPORT 3 GOODS & SERVICES REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Environmental Services - Goods & Services					
4100 Environmental Services HQ	16,469	15,800	669	34,200	4.2
4200 Waste and Cleansing Services	4,662,093	4,755,300	(93,207)	8,936,200	(2.0)
4300 Estates	4,421,618	3,888,600	533,018	8,170,100	13.7
4400 Parks & Cemeteries	760,732	750,000	10,732	1,645,800	1.4
Total	9,860,912	9,409,700	C 451,212	18,786,300	4.8
REPORT 4 INCOME REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Environmental Services - Income					
4100 Environmental Services HQ	-	-	-	-	-
4200 Waste and Cleansing Services	(873,175)	(873,300)	125	(4,223,900)	0.0
4300 Estates	(613,162)	(622,400)	9,238	(1,232,800)	1.5
4400 Parks & Cemeteries	(507,425)	(400,800)	(106,625)	(768,200)	(26.6)
Totals	(1,993,762)	(1,896,500)	D (97,262)	(6,224,900)	(5.1)

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes this report.

Unclassified

ITEM 7

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Environment Committee
Date of Meeting	05 November 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Environmental Services
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Waste and Cleansing
Date of Report	17 October 2025
File Reference	56050
Legislation	Local Government Act (NI) 2014
Section 75 Compliant	Yes ☐ No ☐ Other ☒ If other, please add comment below: N/A
Subject	NI Amenity Council 'Best Kept' Awards 2025
Attachments	

Council Members will be aware that the Northern Ireland Amenity Council’s ‘Best Kept’ Awards promote cleaner greener communities, and to reward efforts across local towns and villages that are made to protect and enhance outdoor environments. A number of the service teams across the Council, including waste and cleansing, property maintenance, neighbourhood environment, parks and community development, work in partnership with local communities on an ongoing basis in a bid to impress the NI Amenity Council judges.

Not Applicable

60



This year, at the Best Kept Awards ceremony held at the Burnavon Arts Centre, Cookstown, Holywood was runner up for Best Kept Medium Town, Bangor was runner up for Best Kept City and Newtownards was a finalist for Best Kept Large Town.

Donaghadee was the winner for Best Kept Small Town, its second time achieving this award, with judges noting the strong sense of business and community involvement. Groomsport was the winner for Best Kept Large Village, the first time it has won this category. Judges praised the village's impressive floral displays and overall presentation.

This is a heartening achievement and hopefully augurs well for future success in the maintenance and improvement of our local towns and villages, as Council's new service delivery arrangements are bedded in and we develop more effective working arrangements with various sectors of the local community to achieve positive environmental outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes the report.

ITEM 8

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Environment Committee
Date of Meeting	05 November 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Environmental Services
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Estates
Date of Report	09 October 2025
File Reference	65369
Legislation	Local Government Act (NI) 2014
Section 75 Compliant	Yes ☒ No ☐ Other ☐ If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Off-Street Parking Activity Report January - September 2025
Attachments	

Members will be aware that Council has a vast car park estate, currently operating 22 pay and display car parks in Bangor, Holywood and Newtownards, and managing a further 27 car parks with the Ards and North Down Off-Street Parking (Public Car Park) Order 2024.

This report aims to update members on income and PCNs generated at each of the car parks in the period January 2025 to September 2025. Expenditure for the current financial year has also been added to this report.

Table 1: Income from Ticket Sales

	1 January 2025 - 31 March 2025	Previous year 1 January 2024 - 31 March 2024
Income from ticket sales	£202,554.49	£249,207.55

Not Applicable

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	1 April 2025 - 30 September 2025	Previous year 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024
Income from ticket sales	£372,848.17	£366,228.81

Table 2: PCN's Issued

	1 January 2025 - 31 March 2025	Previous year 1 January 2024 - 31 March 2024
Total	970	1018
	1515*	

	1 April 2025 - 30 September 2025	Previous year 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024
Total	1754	1653
	2258**	

*Enforcement to control misuse in three additional carparks (Aurora Aquatic and Leisure Complex, Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex and Londonderry Park Car Parks) included in Ards and North Down Off-Street Parking (Public Car Parks) Order 2024 occurred during this period and is included in this figure.

** Enforcement to control misuse in a further car park (Eisenhower Pier Car Park) included in Ards and North Down Off-Street Parking (Public Car Parks) Order 2024 occurred during this period and is included in this figure in August – September.

Officers continue to monitor compliance with Ards and North Down Off-Street Parking (Public Car Parks) Order 2024 and work with our enforcement partner to ensure compliance across our car park estate. It is anticipated that enforcement will commence at Spafield, Holywood within this financial year.

Table 3: Expenditure

	1 April 2025 - 30 September 2025
Enforcement	£78,535.10
Maintenance	£80,791.43
Grounds Maintenance	£3190.50
Signage	£3493.99
Total	£166,011.02

Not Applicable

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RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes this report.

Unclassified

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ITEM 9

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Environment Committee
Date of Meeting	05 November 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Environmental Services
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Parks and Cemeteries
Date of Report	22 October 2025
File Reference	CW30
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Section 75 Compliant	Yes ☐ No ☐ Other ☐ If other, please add comment below:
Subject	North Down Coastal Path Working Group Minutes for 30 June 2025
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Minutes of the North Down Coastal Path Working Group held on 30th June 2025

The meeting of the North Down Coastal Path Working Group was held on 30 June 2025.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes the attached minutes.

ITEM 9 APPENDIX**65****ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL**

A Meeting of the North Down Coastal Path Working Group of Ards and North Down Borough Council was held in Church Street, Newtownards, on Monday 30th June 2025 at 6:00 pm.

PRESENT: Councillor Brady (Chairman, as nominated in first item of business)
Alderman Graham
Councillor Holywood
Councillor Irwin
Councillor McKee
James Hunter (Greenspaces)
Marianne Kennerley (Boom Incl/ Boom Studios)
Stephen McCrory (Ards and North Down Cycle Campaign Group)
Alison McQueen (For Another Path)
Mr Frank Shivers (Bangor Chamber of Commerce)

Officers: Head of Administration (A Curtis), Park & Cemeteries Development Manager (J Bettes) and Democratic Services Officer (S McCrea)

The meeting commenced at 18:02. As there was no current chair of the working group, the Head of Administration advised that she would act as Chair for the meeting until such times as the working group selected a new Chair.

1. APOLOGIES

None received

NOTED.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest notified.

NOTED.

3. ELECTION OF WORKING GROUP CHAIRPERSON

Proposed by Councillor Holywood, seconded by Councillor McKee that Councillor Brady be installed as the new Chair of the North Down Coastal Path Working Group

NOTED.

4. MINUTES OF NORTH DOWN COASTAL PATH WORKING GROUP MEETING DATED 31ST MARCH 2025

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Minutes of the North Down Coastal Path Working Group meeting dated 31st March 2025

Alison McQueen advised of a correction in the previous minutes within Any Other Notified Business where 'Ballymacormick Point' had been referenced when it should have read 'Orlock Point'.

NOTED.

5. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailed as follows:

Proposed by Councillor McKee, seconded by Councillor Hollywood that the minutes be noted.

6. UPDATE REPORT AND PRESENTATION

The Park & Cemeteries Development Manager spoke on aspects of the report and gave a presentation highlighting some areas.

He advised that barriers were being replaced and vegetation would be cut back during the autumn time. The finance and budget allocated to 2024/25 would also be in effect for 2025/26. Remote controlled lawnmowers had been purchased which were recognised as being more environmentally friendly. Meanwhile, mobile urban sweeping vehicle had been delivered and were utilised between the coastal path and also at ward park.

With regard to the planning package, most surveys that were required had been completed. Alison McQueen recalled how the approach to any path works were to be carried out with minimal interventions. In relation to clearing preparations, she had reservations regarding mass ground works required. The Park & Cemeteries Development Manager advised that there was a lot of work to be carried out, especially shoreside but that any preparation works would be reflected in the finished product and its durability.

The full route had been divided into 33 sections which were shown on the slide presentation. As an example, the stretch of path beside the golf course, abutted by a stone wall had vegetation overgrowth spreading from the wall's base onto the pathway. Its removal would increase the path width. With regard to the path finish, quarry dust had been used in some areas but officers were cognisant of the need for any investment to be long lasting. The problem with quarry dust was that it would eventually find its way beneath the mud whether that was due to adverse weather conditions or foot traffic. In addition, past experience had shown that in those areas

where quarry dust had been used, grass and weeds were quick to grow at the path verges, thus reducing the path width.

The slides showed imagery of proposed lines of tarmac to replace dirt paths, some of which were in fact elephant trails, where people create new pathways for shortcuts or scenery. In widening these pathways, it would allow for users to pass each other. Whilst Alison McQueen received confirmation that the old stone archway on the pathway would remain, the Park & Cemeteries Development Manager suggested that it may be wise to take members of the Working Group through each section in a separate meeting. Alison McQueen noted how some of the pathways looked like creeping greenways, advising that the move from this style of path to one that was asphalted had been an issue that people were against at the beginning when the original application was submitted. The Park & Cemeteries Development Manager clarified that to-scale drawings existed and that shoreside works would be as minimalist as possible. The pathway beside the golf club had been discussed some months ago where it had been confirmed that if no works were carried out, the pathway would eventually cease to be given its 1-1.5m undermining.

The effects of these works raised concern amongst the group with regard to trees and other vegetation that would have to be removed in the event of path widening. Despite that, Frank Shivers thought the pathway was an underutilised asset with less footfall in the winter months. With the path being widened, it may create more interest in using the pathway.

Alderman Graham asked the group if they believed the pathway would mostly be used by walkers and cyclists, for if that were to be the case then there would be some need to increase width in certain locations to allow users to pass one another. It was also important to remember that any works carried out had to be of a particular quality, as failing to do so would mean regular upkeep or repairs in the future. James Hunter agreed that there was need to widen the path in particular areas but was cognisant that the general public may feel it would set a precedent for the rest of the path. As such, it would be wise to ensure such concerns were assuaged with confirmation that no major landscape changes would occur and that the general character of the coastal path was maintained. Frank Shivers recalled the Comber Greenway and the positive footfall made by cyclists with local shops on Sundays.

With concern amongst the group regarding some of the sections, The Park & Cemeteries Development Manager advised that the decision could be postponed to give Officers the chance to discuss matters further with individual members of the group. It was noted that decisions will be required by/at the next meeting in order to meet the 2026/27 budget preparation deadline.

It was agreed that discussions with members of the group regarding the different pathway sections would be external to the tri-monthly working group meeting.

Frank Shivers referred to issue with signage and asked if the Council had permission to change signs and their location. The Park & Cemeteries Development Manager agreed to get back to him and clarify the matter.

The Park & Cemeteries Development Manager advised the group of recent and upcoming events and promotions such as:

- the bioblitz's that took place on the 13th May (Seapark to Bangor) and 30th May (Pickie Park to Brompton and Carnalea)
- the upcoming Heritage Walk one on 1st July (Groomsport to Bangor)
- the upcoming Summer Play in the Park at Seapark on the 6th August.
- the Brompton rewilding site would be cut at the end of the season.

Other updates included the Centre of Environmental Data and Recording (CEDAR) at the bioblitz and that Cycling Friendly Borough would continue to work with DfI on the Active Travel Strategy.

The Helens Bay headland route, just past the end of Crawfordsburn Beach in a Westerly direction had been a concern for some time regarding safe passage for users. There had been a plan to circumnavigate this one section of the coastal path by making an alternative route via Sheridan Drive. There had been some initial confusion as to land ownership of the pathway between Sheridan Drive and the coastal path which had now been established. It was partly owned by the Clandeboye Estate and DAERA with initial conversations being positive. If agreement was to be reached, there would have to be a local engagement exercise. In answer to Councillor McKee's queries on failing to reach agreement and alternative pathways, The Park & Cemeteries Development Manager agreed that there would be further investigations such as toward the railway cottages or Crawfordsburn Country Park.

NOTED

7. FUTURE MEMBERSHIP OF WORKING GROUP

All members of the group were content for membership to remain as it was for a further year.

NOTED

8. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

There were no items of notified business.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

NDCPWG 30.06.25

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The next meeting of the North Down Coastal Path Working Group was scheduled to take place on the 7th October 2025, 1800hrs at Church Street Council Chamber, Newtownards. The Park & Cemeteries Development Manager advised of further dates being the 5th January 2026, 6th April 2026, 29th June 2026 and 28th September 2026.

CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 1901hrs.

Unclassified

ITEM 10

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Environment Committee
Date of Meeting	05 November 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Environmental Services
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Parks and Cemeteries
Date of Report	20 October 2025
File Reference	CW4
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Section 75 Compliant	Yes ☒ No ☐ Other ☐ If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Play and Recreation Annual Update 2025
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Play and Recreation Annual Update 2025

The purpose of this report is to update Members on the annual progress of Play and Recreation within Parks and Cemeteries.

The Play Strategy was launched in March 2021. The purpose of the Play Strategy is to recognise the importance of play; the many benefits it affords us and the increasingly important role it can play in mitigating negative effects of mental health.

The strategy is required to ensure the Council’s limited budget is focused on positive play programmes and managing fixed play sites. A full review of the Play Strategy will be completed in early 2026.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes the progress of the Play Strategy to date and continue to support future initiatives.

ITEM 10 APPENDIX

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Parks and Cemeteries Play & Recreation
Annual Update Report
November 2025

1.0 Introduction

This report updates Elected Members on the progress of the Parks and Cemeteries Play and Recreation programme. In the last twelve months the Service has continued to grow a wide-ranging programme of activities undertaken to promote the work of the Play and Recreation Strategies agreed by Council. In July 2024 Council employed a new role of 'Development Officer (Play and Recreation)' with the aim to:

- Effectively implement the Play Strategy
- Promote diverse, non-fixed approaches to play provision across the Borough.
- Create Play Champions and delivering play training across the Borough.
- Engage with the public, children and young people to get their input on play in the Borough
- Deliver various types of play that are inclusive and for all ages.
- Keep up to date and respond to emerging themes and best practice in play.

2.0 The Importance of Play

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states, "*that every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child*" (Article 31).

Play is recognised as being a fundamental element in the development of children and young people. It supports their physical and mental health, develops their social and cognitive skills, resilience and connects them with their surrounding community. However, in today's society there are barriers to play with issues such as:

- lack of time
- competing activities
- low play value infrastructure
- lack of inclusive play
- lack of challenge and encouragement and parental aversion to risk

Being key aspects of this.

3.0 Alternative Play

It is part of the Development Officers role to implement the Alternative Play element of the Play Strategy and to incorporate more play into children's and young people's lives, different approaches to play provision, beyond the traditional equipped play areas, have been delivered by the through 2024/2025. A variety of play activities were integrated into the overall play provision across the Borough. It was also important to ensure that when providing any type of play provision, the play value was carefully considered to ensure the maximum opportunity for different types of play was

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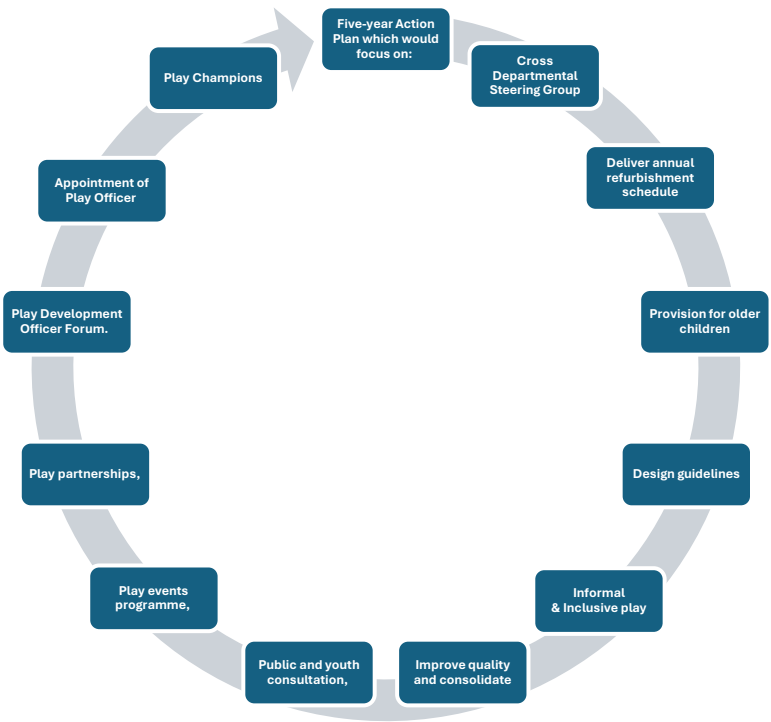
provided. Inclusive play has become an increasingly relevant element, and this need was met in all types of play provision that were offered.

4.0 The Play Strategy

An elected members workshop was held on 16th September 2025 to begin the process of reviewing the play strategy. Input from other stakeholders will continue and a report will be brought back with recommendations on how the Play Strategy might be updated in 2026 for Councils decision on a way forward.

The Play Strategy (2021-2032) at present has a full list of all Council owned and maintained outdoor play facilities within the Ards and North Down Borough area and recommendations as determined at he time it was launched for the delivery of fixed and non-fixed play provision in the Borough. This is a key feature that the current review is focusing on.

Within the Play Strategy there is a 5-year Action Plan which outlines the key priorities. This will be reviewed and updated in advance of the Play Strategy reaching its 5th year (June 2026) in order to ensure the aspirations of the Play Strategy are delivered. To date 12 out of the 13 action points have been delivered with the aid of the Development Officer.



Action Plan

- a. **Cross-departmental Steering Group for Play:** A steering group consisting of the relevant Council Officers across the various departments meets quarterly to ensure that the importance of play is recognised and our portfolio of play assets are well maintained.

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- b. **Deliver the Annual Refurbishment Schedule:** Using the annual Independent Inspectors Assessment, a targeted list of play areas to be refurbished is identified each year. The lowest scoring playgrounds will be prioritised for refurbishment.
- c. **Provision for Older Children and Young People:** Provision is being developed for the 13 -17 year old age group and a range of play areas for their use, including MUGA's, skate parks, pump tracks and teen shelters and play events are being delivered.
- d. **Design Guidelines:** To ensure a consistent approach to the delivery of fixed play provision in the Borough it should be in accordance with the design guidelines outlined in the Play Strategy and is applied by the contractors who install play areas in the Borough and should be used by 3rd party developers wishing to work in partnership with Council.
- e. **Inclusive Play:** It is recognised that the ability to play should be available to all regardless of age, gender and ability. The delivery of fixed and non-fixed play provision should ensure that all needs are catered for. Every new play park has as a minimum 30% of inclusive equipment and the events being delivered by the Development Officer are suitable for a wide range of user abilities.
- f. **Improve the Quality and Consolidate the Fixed Play Provision:** This action will be updated in the Play Strategy review to reflect decisions on future play provision.
- g. **Public and Youth Consultation:** Ensure that Public Consultation, including consultation with the Youth Forum or similar, is central to the delivery of the recommendations of the Play Strategy. Council has been conducting consultations with schools local to where play parks are due to be refurbished to get input from the local children. Council has also undertaken wider consultations on play to discover emerging trends in play from a young persons perspective.
- h. **Appointment of a Play Development Officer:** A dedicated Development Officer (Play and Recreation) was appointed in July 2024. Since then, the Officer has successfully delivered over 100 events, ensuring the effective implementation of the Play Strategy and promoting diverse, non-fixed, alternative approaches to play provision. Looking ahead to the remainder of the Play Strategy period through to 2032, the focus will shift toward creating Play Champions and delivering play training across the Borough, while continuing to deliver a wide range of events.
- i. **Play Events Programme:** The celebration of the Annual National Playday in August has been recognised annually through events to mark it each year. A Play Events schedule has been developed and delivered to increase the variety of play provision in the Borough.

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- j. **Play Partnerships:** The possibility of partnership working continues to be explored with steps already taken to work with young people and their schools and social groups to co-design new facilities.
- k. **Develop Informal Play:** Play in the natural environment and the public realm continues to be explored by assessing what resources we already have to facilitate this, in existing play areas, parks and open spaces and when installing new public realm facilities. A new play trail has recently been installed at Cairn Wood as one example of how the natural environment can be used to enhance play engagement.
- l. **Play Development Officers Forum:** Council are now represented on the Play Development Officers Forum, which is hosted by Playboard NI in order to keep up to date with current developments and best practice. In June 2025 the Council hosted the Forum meeting in Bangor and organised a visit to the newly refurbished Ward Park play park.
- m. **Appointment of a Play Champion:** In order to ensure the successful delivery of the Play Strategy, support is needed in the form of a Play Champion, selected from local play providers, youth leaders and Elected Members, to hold Council accountable for meeting the play needs of the Borough and to provide insight and feedback to Council from the public's perspective. This should be on an annual basis.

5.0 Play Events

A key aim of the Play Strategy is to actively engage and collaborate with the community in valuing play as a vital community asset. Council has delivered and will continue to commit to a series of events and promotional initiatives that will enhance the profile of play, promote diverse, non-fixed approaches to play (alternative play), provide educational opportunities and encourage community participation. These events were also designed with inclusivity and access needs being considered. Events also catered for younger and older children including teenagers. The events were held across the entire Borough, in multiple locations to ensure all residents could avail of what was being offered. These events and promotions are in line with local and national campaigns, such as Love Parks Week and National Play Day. Some themes and events for 2025-26 are outlined below. Below is an overview of the 100 diverse events held throughout 2024/2025 which were programmed and delivered by the Council, highlighting participation levels, event types, and locations. The events focused on promoting outdoor activities, biodiversity, community engagement, and youth participation across various venues.

Summary of Event

1. Love Parks Week 2024 and 2025 - Multiple activities including Kids Park Art at Ballymenoch Park, Nature Skills, Tree and Plant ID, Family Biodiversity Walks, and Building Playscapes at Cairn Wood.

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2. National Play Day 2024 and 2025 - August 2024 at Ballywalter Beach with Field Studies Ireland delivering beach workshops. Londonderry Park and Bangor Castle hosted nature based activities with Clondeboy Nature rangers.

- August 2025 celebrated in Seapark, Holywood and The Green, Kircubbin with a circus theme for 400 young people.

3. Play Park Launches – In 2024: Helens Bay, The Green, Kircubbin, New Harbour Road, Portavogie & in 2025: Ward Park, Bangor, Londonderry Park, Newtownards and Seapark, Holywood.

4. End of Summer Pop-up Play Series - September 2024 in Bangor and Comber the launch of the Summer Play in the Parks series was delivered. Both events had great success and families and children took part in a number of family fun lawn games and were encouraged to bring their picnics and blankets.

5. Shorelife Festival 2024 - Notably large attendance of 4,000 people at Castle Espie on 5th October, where a story teller read the story of Scrabo the Seal and Ameila the Brent Goose.

6. Halloween Trail 2024 - A major event at Bangor Walled Garden over 9 days, attracting approximately 10,000 visitors. Using items upcycled and natural materials to create a pumpkin patch and spooky trail for families to enjoy.



7. Christmas Event - In December, Bangor Walled Garden hosted a 12-day Christmas Trail with an estimated 4,000 attendees. Families enjoyed time with the elves and their Christmas messages.



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8. Winter Play Programmes - Held in Redburn, Carrowdore and other venues, with participation ranging from 20-30 per event. These events gave families an hour of play with their families during the winter months.

9. Educational and Community Engagement events - Bird Identification Workshops in January at Bangor Walled Garden. Teaching staff and pupils from local primary schools spent the day identifying birds and playing nature games. National Bird box week saw pupils from Castle Gardens Primary school using tools to build boxes and making bird feeders. Shared Education programmes in March and April. Secondary school children from St Columbas, Portaferry and Strangford College learned about the impact of humans on sand dunes at Cloughey Beach. Play consultations and community workshops were also carried out across various locations, engaging around 60-90 participants each.



Photo taken with pupils from Castle Gardens Primary

10. Trail of the Easter Bunny - The Easter bunny went on a road trip around the Borough. Each venue had the same event. Families had to follow the 10 clues and embarked on a magical adventure to uncover sweet treats hidden by the Easter Bunny. A free event for families across the Easter Holidays.



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11 . Special Events - Bloom Awards at Clandeboye Lodge with 90 attendees including 20 young people. A lovely event celebrating local areas, growing flowers and looking after their communities and schools. Bike Week events at Ards Blair Mayne Pump Track and Comber Skate Park saw teens getting on BMX bikes and taking part in taster sessions.

12. Upcoming Initiatives - Launch of outdoor gyms at The Commons, Donaghadee and Millisle. - Teens Provision MUGA launches planned for Kircubbin, Holywood and Ballygowan. Continued Play in the Parks programmes, festivals, and seasonal trails scheduled throughout 2026.

6.0 Calendar of Events 2025/2026 (additional events to be confirmed)

July 2025	Love Parks Week Play in the Parks Summer series
August 2025	National Play Day Wild Days out Teens on Wheels
September 2025	Autumn Play Programme
October 2025	Haunted Harvest Trail
November 2025	Autumn Programme
December 2025	Jingle Bell Trail
January 2026	Winter Play Programme
February 2026	Children's Mental Health Week
March 2026	Trail of the Easter Bunny
April 2026	Spring Programme
May 2026	National Walk week
June 2026	National Bike Week

7.0 Supporting the Big Plan 2017-2032

The Council's Play Strategy helps deliver the outcomes and priorities of The Big Plan for Ards and North Down (2017–2032). Council promotes inclusive, accessible and high-quality play opportunities, which links into the strategy, contributing to the wellbeing, resilience, and prosperity of children, families, and communities across the Borough.

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The Play Strategy aligns with the Big Plan's five outcomes, supports key workstreams, and contributes to broader public health and economic goals.

Big Plan Outcome 1 - All people in Ards and North Down benefit from opportunities to fulfil their lifelong potential.

The Play Strategy fosters participation by creating inclusive spaces where children and families can engage in unstructured, creative, and social play. Outdoor play encourages children to develop social skills, creativity, and confidence, key components of lifelong learning and personal development. The Play Officer has been a key resource to delivering on this Outcome. Play spaces can serve as community hubs, encouraging intergenerational interaction and civic pride.

- The Play Strategy promotes inclusive, accessible, and high-quality play that supports early childhood development, creativity, and learning.
- It aligns with the Big Plan's 'Participation' priority by involving children and young people in shaping their play environments, fostering civic engagement from an early age.

Big Plan Outcome 2 - All people in Ards and North Down benefit from being equipped to enjoy good health and wellbeing.

Play is a cornerstone of physical and mental health. The Play Strategy through the provision of play activities, helps address childhood obesity and mental health challenges, contributing to long-term health equity.

- The Play Strategy supports the Whole Systems Approach to Healthier Weight by encouraging outdoor physical activity and reducing sedentary screen time.
- It integrates the Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing through nature play, play trails, and play events that promote connection, activity, mindfulness, learning, and giving.

Big Plan Outcome 3 - All people in Ards and North Down benefit from communities where they are respected, are safe and feel secure.

The Play Strategy contributes to welcoming spaces by designing inclusive, safe, and accessible play environments that reflect the needs of all children, including those with disabilities or from diverse backgrounds. Outdoor play builds resilience by allowing children to take risks, solve problems, and develop independence. Council, through more consultation with children on young people has enabled a children led design process.

- By creating welcoming, intergenerational play spaces, the Strategy contributes to community cohesion and safety.
- It addresses anti-social behaviour through thoughtful design, visibility, and community ownership of play areas.

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Big Plan Outcome 4 - All people in Ards and North Down benefit from a prosperous and inclusive economy.

A high-quality play infrastructure is a strategic asset in attracting and retaining young families and a skilled workforce to the Borough. Families consider quality of life factors, including access to parks and play areas, when choosing where to live and work. Investment in play facilities supports inclusive economic growth by:

- Creating jobs in design, construction, and maintenance.
- Supporting local tourism and hospitality through attractive public spaces.
- Enhancing the borough’s appeal to potential investors and employers seeking vibrant, family-friendly communities.

Big Plan Outcome 5 - All people in Ards and North Down benefit from an environment that is valued, well-managed and accessible.

The Play Strategy supports environmentally sustainable communities by integrating natural play elements and promoting outdoor recreation. Play parks designed with green infrastructure contribute to climate resilience and biodiversity. Council has held numerous events in our Parks and Open Spaces to promote these areas and focus on environmental themes.

- The Play Strategy promotes sustainable outdoor recreation, nature play, and green infrastructure, aligning with the Big Plan’s environmental goals.
- Initiatives like wild play and play trails support the “Moved by Nature” workstream and encourage responsible use of natural spaces.

8.0 Meeting the Corporate Plan Objectives

This suite of play events and activities aligns closely with the overarching goals outlined in the Ards and North Down Borough Council’s Corporate Plan 2024-2028, which emphasises creating a sustainable, vibrant, and inclusive community. Specifically:

- a. **Promoting Wellbeing and Quality of Life:** Many events, such as outdoor festivals, play programmes and biodiversity activities, support physical and mental wellbeing by encouraging outdoor activity and community participation.
- b. **Supporting a Green and Sustainable Environment:** Play activities themed on trees and plants, biodiversity activities and the Shorelife Festival directly contributed to environmental awareness and sustainability objectives.
- c. **Encouraging Community Engagement and Inclusion:** Play events designed as community workshops, school programmes and shared education initiatives foster active community involvement, promoting social cohesion and inclusivity.

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- d. **Enhancing Education and Lifelong Learning:** School focussed Play programmes reinforce the council's commitment to lifelong learning and environmental stewardship.
- e. **Economic Vitality and Tourism:** Large-scale events like the Christmas and Halloween Trails attract visitors, supporting local businesses and boost the local economy.

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9.0 Meeting the Service Plan Objectives for Parks and Cemeteries:

The events and activities detailed in this report support the core objectives outlined in the Parks and Cemeteries Service Plan, which aims to maintain and enhance Parks and Cemeteries as accessible, safe, and vibrant community assets. Key alignments include:

- a. **Enhancing Accessibility and Engagement:** Events at various parks and open spaces, such as play park launches, biodiversity activities and outdoor festivals encourage community access and active use of parks.
- b. **Promoting Health and Wellbeing:** Activities like bike events, and play programmes promote physical activity, contributing to healthier lifestyles.
- c. **Environmental Stewardship:** Educational workshops, tree planting, and biodiversity activities support conservation efforts, aligning with parks' role in fostering sustainability.
- d. **Supporting Community Cohesion:** Community-led events and volunteer opportunities foster social inclusion and local pride, ensuring parks serve as focal points for community life.

Overall, the 2024-2025 play events programme actively supports the Council's vision of developing a Sustainable Borough by fostering community resilience, promoting environmental sustainability, and enhancing the quality of life for residents and visitors alike.

This year the Parks and Cemeteries Development Team has successfully delivered a diverse range of community events and activities across parks and cemeteries, promoting active engagement and social connection. The initiatives have been strategically aligned with the Public Health Agency's 5 Steps to Wellbeing—Take Notice, Keep Learning, Connect, Keep Active, and Give, ensuring holistic benefits for individuals and communities alike.

10.0 Embedding the 5 Steps to Wellbeing

Take Notice: Mindfulness and awareness activities were incorporated into the events, encouraging participants to appreciate their surroundings and foster a sense of calm.

Keep Learning: Workshops and educational sessions on outdoor play, safety, and community gardening were organised, promoting continuous learning.

Connect: The events facilitated social interaction among diverse groups, strengthening community bonds and fostering inclusivity.

Keep Active: Play sessions, were held regularly, encouraging physical activity for all ages.

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Give: Volunteer-led initiatives and community-led projects empowered residents to contribute actively, fostering a sense of ownership and pride.

In programming these events there was collaboration with other departments, such as Community Development, Health & Wellbeing, and Environmental Services, to ensure the widespread uptake of these initiatives both internally and externally. This collaboration has enhanced resource sharing, broadened outreach, and maximised impact across our community.

11.0 Participation and Consultation with Children

The Play Strategy places strong emphasis on engagement and consultation with children and young people, recognising their right to be heard under Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which affirms every child's right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them.

The Play Strategy and subsequent play activates helps the Council meet its obligations under the Children's Services Co-operation Act by:

- Promoting the wellbeing of children and young people through coordinated, cross-sectoral planning.
- Ensuring that play is recognised as a right and a developmental necessity, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- The Council uses innovative, age-appropriate methods to gather children's views on the design and themes of new play parks. This approach ensures that play spaces are relevant, engaging, and inclusive and that children feel a sense of ownership and pride in their local environment.

This participatory model also supports the Big Plan's Citizen Engagement workstream and strengthens Ards and North Down Borough Council's commitment to co-designing public services with the community.

Why Participation Matters

- **Empowerment:** Involving children in decision-making fosters a sense of ownership, confidence, and civic responsibility.
- **Better Outcomes:** Children are experts in their own play. Their insights lead to more engaging, inclusive, and relevant play spaces.
- **Equity and Inclusion:** Consultation ensures that the voices of all children—including those with disabilities or from underrepresented communities—are heard and valued.

12.0 Consultations

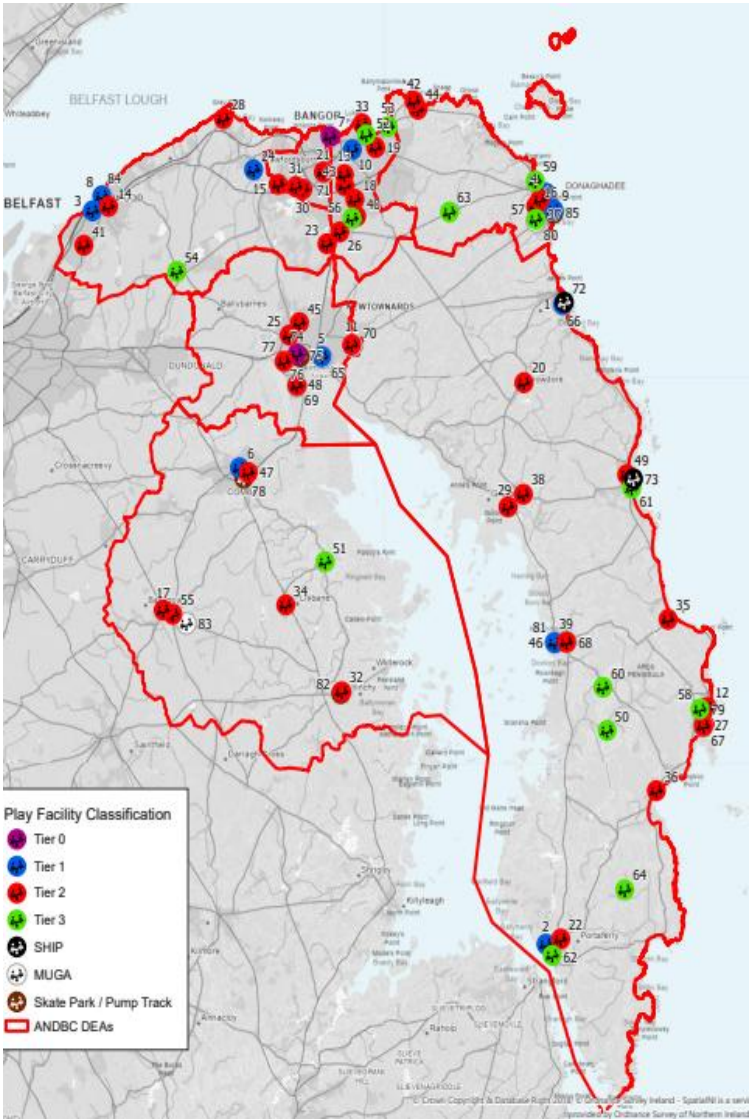
As an action of the Play Strategy, Council has undertaken consultation exercises during 2024/2025 in Ballygowan, Holywood, local primary and secondary schools as well as Summer Schemes. Findings showed that young people enjoy various types of

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play including Play Parks, Physical (Active) Play, Constructive Play, Competitive Play, Sensory Play, Nature Play and Technology Play.

Council has also engaged with local school children in primary schools that were close to where it was proposed to refurbish the local play park (Groomsport, Donaghadee and Greyabbey). The children were able to choose the theme of the play park and pick some of the equipment, they were also asked about their preferences in general related to play.

Below is a map and table of all the Fixed Play sites including play parks, skate and pump tracks and MUGAs across the Borough. In 2024/2025 there have been several play park refurbishments completed, which are noted below. Refurbishments for 2025/2026 have been approved and are noted below.



Area	Location	Notes
Ballygown	2 Play Parks 1 Multi Use Games Area (MUGA)	Teens MUGA to be constructed in 2025/26

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Ballyhalbert	1 Play Park	
Ballywalter	2 Play Parks 1 Ship	
Bangor	15 Play Parks 1 MUGA	Ward Park refurbishment complete 2025
Carrowdore	1 Play Park	
Cloughey	1 Play Park	
Comber	2 Play Parks 1 Skate Park	
Conlig	2 Play Parks (including Green Road)	
Craigtlet	1 Play Park	
Crawfordsburn	1 Play Park	
Donaghadee	6 Play Parks 1 MUGA (Partial MUGA, Hunts Park)	Northfield to be refurbished 2025/2026
Greyabbey	2 Play Parks	Islandview to be refurbished 2025/2026
Groomsport	2 Play Parks	Seafront to be refurbished 2025/2026
Helen's Bay	1 Play Park	
Hollywood	4 Play Parks 1 MUGA	Sea Park refurbishment complete 2025 Teens MUGA to be constructed in 2025/26, subject to planning
Killinchy	1 Play Park 1 Pump Track	
Kircubbin	3 Play Parks (including Ballycranbeg) 2 MUGA's (1 partial MUGA at Parsonage Road)	
Rubane	1 Play Park	
Lisbane	1 Play Park	
Ballydrain	1 Play Park	
Millisle	1 Play Park 1 MUGA 1 Ship	
Newtownards	7 Play Parks 3 MUGAs 1 Skate Park 1 Pump Track	Londonderry Park refurbishment complete 2025
Portaferry	4 Play Parks (including Tullymalley)	
Portavogie	3 Play Parks 1 MUGA 1 Skate Park	

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- Requiring that at least 30% of equipment in fixed play areas is inclusive, supporting children with disabilities and diverse needs.
- Promoting non-fixed and informal play in areas where traditional infrastructure may be limited, such as rural villages or low-income neighbourhoods.
- Encouraging community-led play initiatives and partnerships with schools, housing associations, and the third sector to expand access and reduce barriers.

By embedding equity into the design, delivery, and governance of play provision, the Strategy helps ensure that every child, regardless of background or ability, has the opportunity to play, grow, and thrive. Council has ensured that, through the consultation process and in the delivery of the events programme, that these inequalities are being addressed.

Outcomes

- Increased participation in community events and activities.
- Greater community cohesion and social connectedness.
- Enhanced awareness and adoption of the 5 Steps to Wellbeing within our service and partner organisations.
- Achievement of community and corporate goals through targeted initiatives.

Looking Ahead

Building on this year's successes, Council will continue to embed the 5 Steps to Wellbeing into all aspects of our service, exploring new partnerships and innovative approaches to promote health, wellbeing, and community resilience. The events held to date and going forward demonstrate strong alignment with the Council's strategic objectives as detailed in the Corporate Plan. They have successfully engaged diverse audiences, promoted sustainability, and contributed to a vibrant, inclusive community. Moving forward, these initiatives will continue to underpin the Council's commitment to a sustainable and thriving borough. The 2024-2025 period demonstrated strong community engagement across a broad spectrum of outdoor and educational play activities. The high attendance at the events underscores the community's enthusiasm for outdoor recreation, biodiversity, play and environmental education. Future plans aim to build on this momentum with new facilities and ongoing seasonal programmes. These initiatives exemplify the Council's commitment to delivering high-quality, accessible parks and open spaces that support health, wellbeing, and community development.

Unclassified

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ITEM 11

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Environment Committee
Date of Meeting	05 November 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Environmental Services
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Parks and Cemeteries
Date of Report	20 October 2025
File Reference	PCA146
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Section 75 Compliant	Yes ☒ No ☐ Other ☐ If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Parks and Cemeteries Engagement Update 2025
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Parks and Cemeteries Engagement Update Report 2025

The purpose of this report is to update Members on the annual progress of the Parks and Cemeteries Engagement Programme. In the last twelve months the Service has continued to grow a wide-ranging programme of activity focused on volunteering, community participation, environmental stewardship, and wellbeing. This work has included the expansion of Friends of Groups, support for community and school growing projects, delivery of inclusive public events, and the development of educational and biodiversity initiatives that strengthen community identity and civic pride.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes the progress of Parks and Cemeteries Engagement to date and continue to support future initiatives.

ITEM 11 APPENDIX

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Parks and Cemeteries Community Engagement
Annual Update Report
November 2025

1.0 Introduction

This report updates Elected Members on the progress of the Parks and Cemeteries Service Engagement programme. In the last twelve months the Service has continued to grow a wide-ranging programme of activity focused on volunteering, community participation, environmental stewardship, and wellbeing. This work has included the expansion of Friends of Groups, support for community and school growing projects, delivery of inclusive public events, and the development of educational and biodiversity initiatives that strengthen community identity and civic pride.

Key achievements in 2024–25 include supporting school growing projects, expanding Friends of Groups, delivering large-scale inclusive events such as the Chilli Festival (5,000 attendees), Awake the Garden (3,000 attendees) and Love Parks Week (more than 400 participants across 18 activities), and facilitating citizen science workshops, community growing activities and biodiversity projects with over 2,000 school children and volunteers. Together, these initiatives have engaged over 10,000 people across the Borough, strengthening community identity, enhancing biodiversity, encouraging healthier lifestyles, and fostering civic pride.

The Engagement Programme contributes directly to the Council's strategic priorities, aligning with the Big Plan for Ards and North Down, the Corporate Plan 2024–28, the Parks and Cemeteries Service Plan, and the Public Health Agency's Five Steps to Wellbeing.

Looking ahead, the Service will continue to grow inclusive volunteering, community-led projects, and educational initiatives, ensuring that parks and green spaces remain accessible, vibrant, and environmentally sustainable assets for all.

2.0 Context

The work of the Service contributes directly to the Council's strategic objectives by aligning with:

- **The Big Plan for Ards and North Down (2017–2032)**
Delivering across all five outcomes – lifelong potential, health and wellbeing, safe communities, a prosperous economy, and a valued environment.
- **Corporate Plan 2024–2028**
Creating a sustainable, vibrant, and inclusive community.

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- **Service Plan for Parks and Cemeteries**
Ensuring parks and cemeteries remain safe, accessible, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable.
- **Public Health Agency's Five Steps to Wellbeing**
Take Notice, Keep Learning, Connect, Be Active, and Give.

Key Achievements 2024–2025

3.0 Let's Grow Together Strategy and Community Growing

In 2024, the Service completed a review of the Let's Grow Strategy, supported by a placement student from Queen's University Belfast and Community Garden Support (previously Social Farms and Gardens NI). This review provided the first comprehensive baseline of current community growing activity across the Borough. It identified land suitable for future projects and culminated in a successful skills-sharing event that brought together local groups to exchange knowledge and experience.

Alongside the review, the Service continued to provide direct support to community gardens and allotments. This included practical advice, connecting groups to resources, and encouraging sustainable practice. An Allotment Celebration Day in October strengthened links between plot holders, while summer meetings in June and August provided opportunities to share ideas, improve communication, and lay the foundations for further on-site engagement.

The findings of the review are captured in the Community Growing Report, which sets out progress to date. The finding will also be used to build on this momentum and ensure the benefits continue to meet the objectives of the Let's Grow Together Strategy.

3.1 Community Impact

Community growing helps to build food resilience, promote healthier lifestyles, and strengthen neighbourhood connections. By supporting local gardeners and allotments, Council is empowering communities to take greater ownership of their green spaces and contribute to environmental sustainability. The Let's Grow Together Strategy review has created a clear evidence base, allowing future planning to be more strategic, responsive, and community-led. Events such as the skills-sharing workshop and allotment gatherings have not only built practical networks but also fostered pride and a strong sense of belonging among participants.

3.2 Strategic Outcomes

This activity directly contributes to Outcomes 1, 2, and 5 of the Big Plan, as well as the Parks and Cemeteries Service delivery objective of reporting annually on progress towards the Benchmark Standard for Community Growing and Allotment Provision. By providing and supporting community growing spaces, the Service fosters lifelong

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learning, promotes healthy and sustainable lifestyles, strengthens neighbourhood cohesion, and enhances the borough's green infrastructure, supporting both biodiversity and food resilience.



Photo of Community Growing Skill Sharing Event at Helen's Bay Organics.

This aligns with the strategic performance measure *"100% of available allotments utilised Service Led Year-End"*. Work continues to support allotment holders who are not fully utilising their plots, ensuring that all spaces are effectively managed and contributing to vibrant, active community gardens.

It also relates to *"Providing annual report of progressing corporate action of 1,250sqm (0.125ha) of community growing space per 10,000 households by 2028 Service Led Year-End"*, with ongoing monitoring and reporting to ensure delivery of the Borough's community growing ambitions.

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3.3 Looking Ahead

The next steps are to complete the Let's Grow Together Action Plan and to explore the new land identified through the review for potential projects. Further work will also focus on strengthening allotment associations to encourage sustainable practice and community engagement, while expanding the skills-sharing event into an annual programme that continues to grow knowledge and collaboration across the Borough.

4.0 Schools Growing Clubs

In 2024/25, five schools took part in the Schools Growing Club: Alexander Dickson Primary School, Killard House, Kircubbin Integrated Primary School, St Patrick's Primary School, Ballygalget, and Loughries Primary School. In total, 100 pupils were directly involved in the programme. This year's theme was "pizza gardens," a playful and engaging way to help pupils learn where food comes from while building practical food-growing skills. Ongoing support was also provided to schools that had participated in previous years, ensuring the benefits of the programme extended beyond a single growing season.



4.1 Community Impact

Schools Growing Clubs give children the opportunity to connect directly with nature, understand the food cycle, and develop hands-on gardening skills. They encourage healthier lifestyles and build awareness of sustainable food, while also creating opportunities for pupils to share their learning at home. The programme strengthened the link between schools, families, and communities, embedding positive habits that support both wellbeing and environmental responsibility.

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4.2 Strategic Outcomes

This activity directly contributes to Outcomes 1, 2, and 5 of the Big Plan, as well as the Parks and Cemeteries Service delivery objective of creating educational and inclusive opportunities in outdoor spaces and delivery objective of engaging a set number of schools each year. The programme engages children with practical skills and environmental education, builds awareness of healthy eating, fosters connections to nature, and strengthens links between schools and the local community.

4.3 Looking Ahead

The programme will continue to expand into a wider schools network, creating opportunities for peer learning and idea-sharing across the Borough. Plans include developing partnerships with local organic farmers to give pupils first-hand experience of working farms, and strengthening links between schools and community groups to provide ongoing support. The programme will also be adapted for Key Stage 2, Key Stage 3, and youth organisations, ensuring it is relevant to a broader age range.

5.0 Volunteering

5.1 Strategic Outcomes

These activities directly contribute to Outcomes 1, 2, 3, and 5 of the Big Plan, as well as the Parks and Cemeteries Service delivery objectives of embedding volunteer pathways, supporting Friends of Groups, widening participation, and providing work experience and skills development. Through volunteering and Friends groups, residents gain practical skills, build confidence, strengthen social networks, and take stewardship of green spaces, fostering inclusive, resilient communities. Tailored opportunities for young people and under-represented groups ensure equitable access and engagement, while apprenticeships and placements provide hands-on learning, enhance employability, and strengthen the capacity of the Service to deliver impactful, community-focused projects.

This aligns with the strategic performance measure *“Establish five ‘Friends of’ Groups Service Led Year-End”*. Progress is underway with several Friends of Groups already established, including Friends of Linear Park, Hunts Park, Bryansburn Allotments and Ballymenoch Park, building community ownership of green spaces.

These activities also align with the performance measure *“Embed 5 Steps to Wellbeing into all aspects of our Service with 5 (internal & 15 externally focussed) information sessions, activities and programmes delivered”*.

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5.2 Opportunities

The Service has made progress in advancing volunteering through the delivery of a volunteering programme. Over the past year, a wide range of opportunities were created and promoted, supporting both individuals and groups to get involved in their local green spaces. Existing volunteer programmes in the Walled Garden were strengthened, with volunteers contributing over 2,800 hours between September 2024 and September 2025. These efforts supported day-to-day operations, events, and specialist horticultural activities, generating considerable social value for the Borough.

New approaches were trialled, including the Volunteer Now “Be Collective” management platform, piloted during Love Parks Week, and the promotion of opportunities through the Economic Development Conference. The Service also developed corporate volunteering days, organised one-off family and youth volunteering activities, and partnered with disability



organisations to create accessible, inclusive opportunities. Collectively, these initiatives broadened the reach of volunteering and provided new pathways for participation.

5.3 Community Impact

Volunteering strengthens communities, improves wellbeing, and develops valuable skills. It empowers local people to directly shape and enhance the green spaces they use while creating pathways into training and employment. The substantial hours contributed in the Walled Garden alone illustrate the depth of commitment from volunteers and the tangible benefits generated for the Service and the wider community.

5.4 Looking Ahead

The next phase of development will focus on removing barriers and widening accessibility.

Following a recent review, it is clear that investment is required to ensure volunteering is well-managed and sustainable. The current volunteer management policy is out of date, and a full review is scheduled. To support this, the Service requires budget provision for volunteer management systems, secure databases (Be Collective), volunteer expenses, and uniforms. Alongside this, induction processes, role descriptions, and overall management procedures will be updated to provide a

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professional, safe, and accessible volunteering experience. These measures will strengthen volunteer engagement, expand participation, and ensure long-term programme success.

Current actions and plans include the development of volunteer management handbook, and training key staff through ILM Level 3 Award in Volunteer Management. Work is also underway to develop tailored corporate volunteering packages focused on biodiversity and climate action, as well as creating new specialist roles such as Tree Rangers in partnership with the Tree and Woodland Officer.

6.0 Under-represented Communities and Young People

The Service partnered with YMCA, Orchardville, and the Youth Justice Agency to make volunteering more inclusive. Orchardville participated in tree-planting days and subsequently secured funding through the Seed2Tree programme. YMCA's Empower Peace Plus project supported volunteering at events, invasive species clearance and orchard clean-ups. Conversations with the Youth Justice Agency continue to design tailored opportunities, looking at best practice examples from other council areas.

6.1 Community Impact

Inclusive volunteering reduces barriers, builds confidence, and ensures everyone has the chance to contribute. It fosters belonging and helps under-represented groups connect with their local environment.

6.2 Looking Ahead

Plans include developing a Green Skills Youth Programme with partners, embedding volunteering pathways into youth employability and inclusion programmes, and piloting intergenerational projects linking young people with allotment holders and gardeners.

7.0 Apprenticeships and Placements

The Service created hands-on opportunities for apprentices and students, including placements supporting the Let's Grow Strategy and Love Parks Week.

7.1 Community Impact

Apprenticeships and placements provide real-world experience, build skills, and enhance employability while increasing team capacity.

7.2 Looking Ahead

Tailored opportunities will be developed in biodiversity, community engagement, and event delivery. Work placement opportunities will be further expanded, but a formal,

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approved process for administering expenses is required to enable full participation. Establishing this process is essential to attract and support students and apprentices, ensuring they can engage in practical experience without financial barriers, while building skills, confidence, and pathways into employment.

8.0 Friends of Groups

Two new Friends of Groups have so far been established at Linear Park and Hunts Park, both of which organise clean-ups, biodiversity activities, and family events.

8.1 Case Study - Linear Park Friends Group

What began as an orchard clean-up in May has developed into a thriving group. With support from the Parks and Cemeteries Development team, residents went on to deliver a Love Parks event for over 200 people, tripling their membership, hosting further clean-ups, and preparing to formally constitute as a community association. This momentum will inspire other areas to consider forming similar groups.



8.2 Community Impact

Friends of Groups empower local residents to take ownership of their green spaces, fostering pride, energy, and creativity. They provide hands-on opportunities for community engagement, encourage social interaction, and contribute directly to environmental improvements. By organising biodiversity activities and clean ups, these groups strengthen local knowledge of environmental stewardship and inspire wider participation in sustainable practices.

8.3 Looking Ahead

Building on current success, the Service will support Friends of Groups to expand their impact through innovative projects. For example, Linear Park Friends Group plan to improve signage, install raised beds for community growing, and deliver general enhancements to the park. In addition, the development of pollinator trails is being explored, featuring pollinator-friendly planting, interpretive signage, and citizen science opportunities. These initiatives will provide visible, engaging ways for

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communities to enhance biodiversity while offering educational and volunteering opportunities for local schools and groups. The Service will continue to mentor new groups and facilitate networking between established and emerging Friends of Groups, sharing best practice and supporting community-led initiatives across other sites.

9.0 Events Programme



The Service delivered and supported over 90 events and activities, engaging over 10,000 participants. Highlights included the Chilli Festival (5,000 attendees in 2024) recognised by the Irish Times as one of Ireland's top 25 food festivals, Awake the Garden (3,000 attendees in April 2025), and Love Parks Week (18 events with over 400 participants), including dementia-friendly activities in partnership with

Alzheimer's Society, Dementia NI, South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, and Libraries NI, and a women and girls outdoor empowerment event with Nexus NI and Women's Aid. The Service also hosted the Northern Ireland Green Flag Awards at Bangor Castle Walled Garden and supported council tourism and events at Comber Earlies and Taste at the Castle.

9.1 Community Impact

Council events highlight the Borough's green spaces, strengthen community identity, and promote healthy, active lifestyles. They also support tourism, foster partnerships with local groups and charities, and enhance the Borough's social and cultural capital.

9.2 Strategic Outcomes

This activity directly contributes to Outcomes 2, 3, 4, and 5 of the Big Plan, as well as the Parks and Cemeteries Service delivery objective of delivering inclusive, high-quality events that encourage participation in parks and open spaces. Events strengthen community identity, promote physical and mental wellbeing, attract tourism and regional audiences, build partnerships with local groups and charities, and provide opportunities for public feedback to improve Council parks.

This aligns with the strategic performance measure *"70 Community Projects Organised"*, relating to the delivery of 70 events and activities. Events continue to engage communities, promote wellbeing, and encourage inclusive participation. This also aligns with the strategic performance measure *"Embed 5 Steps to Wellbeing into all aspects of our Service with 5 (internal & 15 externally focussed) information sessions, activities and programmes delivered"*.

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9.3 Looking Ahead

The programme will continue to expand inclusive events for women, girls, and under-represented communities, while flagship seasonal events will attract regional audiences and raise the profile of the Borough. These events provide safe, welcoming spaces for participants to connect, build confidence, and engage in outdoor activities. They also generate valuable feedback to inform improvements to parks and green spaces and have already sparked ongoing conversations with partners such as Nexus NI, Women's Aid, and PSNI to explore further collaborative opportunities. This approach strengthens community partnerships and encourages broader participation in healthy, inclusive, and environmentally positive initiatives.



10.0 In Bloom

The In Bloom programme continued to enable communities across the Borough to transform their local spaces. This year, 19 grants were awarded from 21 applications, and competitions engaged residents, businesses, and community groups, supporting 92 community gardening projects that brought people together, improved local environments, and promoted sustainable planting. The annual awards event held on the 4th November 2024 celebrated the achievements of participants and showcase the creativity, commitment, and pride of local communities, this year's event will take place on 23rd October 2025.



10.1 Community Impact

In Bloom empowers communities to take ownership of their local green spaces, boosting civic pride, strengthening neighbourhood identity, and enhancing biodiversity. By encouraging pollinator-friendly and sustainable planting, the programme supports environmental stewardship while fostering active community engagement and collaboration across the Borough.

10.2 Strategic Outcomes

This activity directly contributes to Outcomes 1, 2, and 5 of the Big Plan, as well as the Parks and Cemeteries Service delivery objective of supporting community gardening

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projects, competitions, and sustainable planting initiatives. In Bloom encourages civic pride, fosters environmental stewardship, develops practical skills, and enhances biodiversity across the Borough.

This aligns with the strategic performance measure *“Investment of £26,000 in funding for In Bloom Projects Service Led Year-End”*, which has supported community gardening projects, enabling residents, businesses, and groups to actively improve their local environment.

It also aligns with *“Achieve four Bloom/ Best Kept Awards Service Led Year-End”*, supporting recognition of civic pride, sustainable planting, and local engagement, with Comber recognised as a finalist in the Large Town category at Best Kept Awards 2025 and Medium Town winner in 2024. Donaghadee were successful in achieving finalist in the Britain in Bloom competition and awaiting final results.

10.3 Looking Ahead

In 2026, the programme will build a peer network of In Bloom groups to share expertise, inspire new projects, and strengthen community connections. Targeted engagement with underrepresented communities, will increase participation and ensure inclusivity. Information sessions will be delivered to encourage grant applications, while stronger promotion of sustainable and pollinator-friendly planting will ensure lasting social and environmental benefits.

11.0 Biodiversity and Education Engagement

This year, the Service introduced 80 pupils from St Columba’s and Strangford College to coastal citizen science at Cloughey Beach. Activities combined hands-on habitat surveys with classroom debates and creative exercises such as poster design, helping students understand climate change, sand dune ecology, and local biodiversity.

11.1 Community Impact

These programmes inspire young people and communities to value and actively protect biodiversity. By linking practical outdoor experiences with learning, participants develop scientific skills, connect meaningfully with nature, and contribute directly to conservation initiatives such as sand dune restoration. Collaboration with schools, community groups, and environmental partners such as Field Studies Ireland, Ulster Wildlife Trust and The Conservation Volunteers fosters environmental stewardship, strengthens community connections, and provides inclusive opportunities for under-represented groups. This engagement supports the Council’s Local Biodiversity Action Plan, enhances civic pride, and demonstrates leadership in accessible and innovative biodiversity education.

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Photo of posters designed by students in classroom; photo of students on Cloughey beach.

Additional highlights included a North Down Coastal Path Bioblitz, tree planting and orchard clean-ups, bird identification workshops, nest box building, and International Dawn Chorus Day activities.



Photo taken with pupils from Castle Gardens Primary

11.2 Strategic Outcomes

This activity directly contributes to Outcomes 1, 2, and 5 of the Big Plan, as well as the Parks and Cemeteries Service delivery objective of delivering educational programmes and citizen science initiatives that increase environmental awareness. Activities inspire young people and communities to value and protect biodiversity,

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develop scientific and ecological skills, connect with nature, and support Council conservation goals, including sand dune restoration and coastal habitat enhancement.

This aligns with the strategic performance measure *“70 Community Projects Organised”*, relating to the delivery of 70 events and activities. Events continue to engage communities, promote wellbeing, and encourage inclusive participation.

This also aligns with the strategic performance measure *“Embed 5 Steps to Wellbeing into all aspects of our Service with 5 (internal & 15 externally focussed) information sessions, activities and programmes delivered”* as well as a number of LBAP actions.

11.3 Looking Ahead

Moving forward, the Service will expand coastal and sand dune engagement projects in partnership with schools, community groups, conservation organisations and internally with Parks and Cemeteries Development team. Programmes will integrate practical environmental stewardship projects with citizen science monitoring and will strengthen partnerships with local and regional conservation groups to scale engagement opportunities, ensuring more people—particularly young people and under-represented groups—can take part in hands-on biodiversity activities. These collaborative projects will link education, volunteering, and environmental stewardship, providing a pathway for participants to contribute meaningfully to habitat protection, sand dune restoration, and the Council’s broader biodiversity objectives.

12.0 Green Flag Awards

The Borough successfully retained Green Flag status for seven sites, including Ballymenoch Park, Castle Park and Bangor Castle Walled Garden, Linear Park, Londonderry Park, Kiltonga Nature Reserve, Clandeboy Cemetery and Cairn Wood. Bangor Castle Walled Garden was also recognised as a finalist in the Pollinator Award category, highlighting its commitment to supporting pollinators and promoting biodiversity. This recognition demonstrates to residents and visitors that these sites are safe, well-managed, and environmentally sustainable.

Hosting the Northern Ireland Green Flag Awards at Bangor Castle Walled Garden further showcased the Council’s leadership in park management and highlighted the Borough as a flagship example for others.

Task and Finish Groups have reviewed site action plans and undertaking site visits to ensure continuous improvement in maintenance, biodiversity, and visitor experience.

12.1 Community Impact

Green Flag recognition reinforces community confidence in the quality and safety of the Borough’s parks and green spaces. It highlights the Council’s commitment to

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environmental stewardship, inclusive access, and high standards of management. Maintaining and celebrating these awards strengthens civic pride, encourages public use of green spaces, and inspires local volunteer groups to engage in their development and care.

12.2 Strategic Outcomes

This activity directly contributes to Outcomes 2, 3, and 5 of the Big Plan, as well as the Parks and Cemeteries Service delivery objective of maintaining and enhancing quality standards for parks and open spaces. Green Flag recognition reassures residents and visitors that parks are safe, well-managed, and environmentally sustainable, while promoting continuous improvement through action plans, site management reviews, and best practice sharing.

This aligns with the strategic performance measure *“Seven Green Flag Awards Obtained Service Led Year-End”*. We have achieved seven Green Flag Awards this year, reflecting the quality and standard of the Borough’s parks and green spaces.



Photo of Parks and Cemeteries Staff at the Green Flag Awards hosted in Bangor Castle Walled Garden

12.3 Looking Ahead

Building on this success, priority actions identified in site management plans will be implemented to further enhance environmental, recreational, and educational value. Collaboration with Friends of Groups and operational teams through the Task and Finish Group will continue, ensuring community-led initiatives are integrated into site improvements. Opportunities will also be explored to extend Green Flag recognition

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to additional sites, promoting biodiversity, sustainability, and civic engagement across the Borough.

13.0 Memorial Benches, Display Beds and Tree Planting

13.1 Memorial Benches

Memorial benches provide families and individuals with meaningful, permanent spaces to remember loved ones. Beyond their personal significance, each bench contributes to creating welcoming, well-maintained public areas that foster a sense of care and pride in local communities. In 2025, 20 memorial benches were installed, further reinforcing the Borough's commitment to creating welcoming and cared-for green spaces. This policy is under review.

13.2 Celebration Display Beds

Celebration Display beds enhance the appearance and accessibility of parks, cemeteries, and other green spaces, providing year-round greenery and visual interest. Designed for longevity, these beds offer a sustainable alternative to seasonal planting and serve as focal points that strengthen community pride and engagement. This year, the display bed policy was reviewed to increase the sustainability and impact of this work.

13.3 Memorial Tree Planting

Memorial tree planting offers a living, lasting alternative to benches and display beds. For example, Orchardville participated in tree-planting days and subsequently applied for Seeds4Trees funding, illustrating the combined benefits of community involvement, environmental stewardship, and ecological enhancement.

13.4 Community Impact

Together, these initiatives foster civic pride, promote environmental sustainability, and enhance biodiversity across the Borough. Memorial benches provide personal connections, display beds improve the visual and ecological quality of public spaces, and tree planting creates enduring habitats that support pollinators and local wildlife. Collectively, these projects encourage community engagement, inspire stewardship of green spaces, and create welcoming environments for all residents.

12.5 Strategic Outcomes

This activity directly contributes to Outcomes 2 and 5 of the Big Plan, as well as the Parks and Cemeteries Service delivery objective of managing civic and commemorative assets. Memorial benches provide meaningful spaces for remembrance, display beds enhance the beauty and accessibility of green spaces, and tree planting projects support biodiversity, environmental education, and

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community involvement, contributing to civic pride and sustainable landscaping across the Borough.

13.6 Looking Ahead

Future priorities include expanding sustainable planting in display beds, introducing durable metal frames, and removing PVC banners to enhance environmental responsibility.

Commemorative tree planting will continue to be encouraged in accordance with policy for local groups and organisations.

The Service will continue to support and guide community groups in participating in these initiatives, ensuring they strengthen biodiversity, foster civic pride, and deepen connections between residents and the Borough's green spaces.

14.0 Conclusion

The Service continues to make significant strides in embedding volunteering, expanding Friends of Groups, delivering community and educational events, and promoting environmental stewardship across the Borough. These activities have strengthened social networks, increased civic engagement, and supported sustainable management of parks, cemeteries, and green spaces. By fostering participation and community citizenship, the Service is enhancing the quality, accessibility, and vibrancy of the Borough's green infrastructure.

Looking ahead, the Service will build on these achievements through innovative projects, expanded biodiversity initiatives, and continued skills development, ensuring that parks, cemeteries and open spaces continue to deliver tangible social, environmental, and wellbeing benefits while supporting the Council's strategic objectives.

Unclassified

ITEM 12

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Environment Committee
Date of Meeting	06 November 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Environmental Services
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Estates
Date of Report	17 October 2025
File Reference	65373
Legislation	Harbours Act 1970
Section 75 Compliant	Yes ☒ No ☐ Other ☐ If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Six Monthly Audit of Marine Safety Management System
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Auditors Report - Orcades Marine

Members will recall that under the Port Marine Safety Code, our Marine Safety Management System (MSMS) calls for a six-monthly audit to be completed by the Councils independent “Designated Person”.

Orcades Marine conducted independent Port Marine Safety Code Audit in September 2025 at Groomsport, Donaghadee, Ballywalter, Ballyhalbert and Cook Street, Portaferry. The Harbour Master was in attendance to assist the Auditor over a two-day period and was happy to provide a tour of the facilities and allow access to relevant documentation. The attached report details the findings of the audit.

Summary of Findings

Good practices were observed across operations during the auditors visit and a comprehensive Marine Safety Management System (MSMS) is in place with records up to date in compliance with the PMSC.

Not Applicable

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Due to the update of the PMSC in April 2025, the Aide Memoire has been revised and the checklist for the new Guide to Good Practice has been utilised for this audit.

The gap analysis findings can be found in section 2.3 Port Marine Facilities Code – Gap Analysis recommendations.

The Harbour Master and his team have closed out all actions from the previous audit except for two which have been actioned as per the Table 2.1 “Summary of Close Out from the previous audit” on Page 5 of the report.

ANDBC Harbours have demonstrated a strong commitment to the PMSC and its continual improvement of its MSMS.

Remaining Actions:

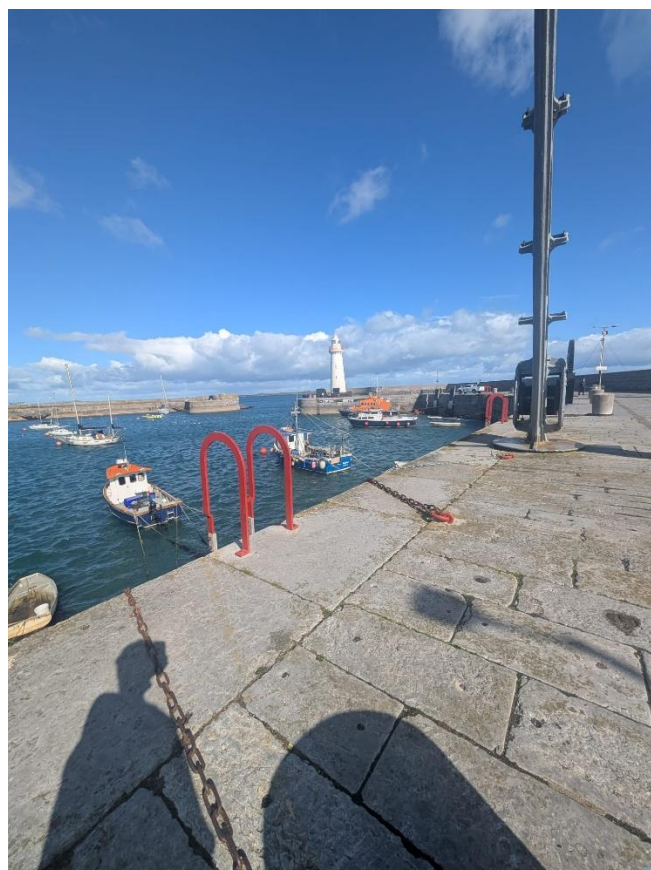
- Individual names/job roles of Duty Holder (Environment Committee) should be defined in the MSMS
- Complete the transfer for incident and accident reporting to electronic system.
- It is not known whether any of the Duty Holders have any maritime related experience. This should be identified and included within the MSMS if applicable. (Not applicable)
- Procedure for dynamic risk assessment should be documented within MSMS and should be discussed during toolbox talks.
- Procedure for monitoring the tidal regime should be documented within the MSMS including if there is a requirement to promulgate such information to UKHO.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes the findings of the six-monthly audit, and that officers will update the MSMS accordingly.



Port Marine Safety and Facilities Code Audit



OP-587



**Ards and
North Down**
Borough Council

Commercial in Confidence

This report is issued to:	
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Revision Number	Issue Date	Revision Details	Distribution List Index Number
1.0	02/10/2025	First Issue	1, 2, 3

Distribution List Key		
Company	Responsible Person	Distribution List Index Number
ANDBC	William Angus	1
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1. Introduction

An independent Port Marine Safety Code Audit was carried out by Orcades Marine Management Consultants Ltd. on the 15th and 16th of September 2025 at ANDCB harbours; Groomsport, Donaghadee, Ballywalter, Ballyhalbert and Cooke Street, Portaferry. The Harbour Master was in attendance to assist the Auditor over a 2-day period and was happy to provide a tour of the facilities and allow access to relevant documentation. The following report details the findings of the audit.

2. Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of an independent assessment of ANDBC harbours compliance with the Port Marine Safety and Facilities Code (PMSC). Good practices were observed across operations during the auditors visit and a comprehensive Marine Safety Management System (MSMS) is in place with records up to date in compliance with the PMSC.

Due to the update of the PMSC in April 2025, the Aide Memoire has been revised and the checklist for the new Guide to Good Practice has been utilised for this audit. The gap analysis findings can be found in section 2.3 Port Marine Facilities Code – Gap Analysis recommendations.

The Harbour Master and his team have closed out all actions from previous audit except for two which have been actioned as per the below table 2.1 Summary of close out from previous audit.

ANDBC Harbours have demonstrated a strong commitment to the PMSC and its continual improvement of its MSMS.

2.1 Summary of Close out From Previous Audit

Finding	Action	Closed Out
The MSMS should be updated to include the new Designated Person contact details	3.1.5 Designated Person has been updated to include the Designated Person contact details and role.	Yes
Individual names/job roles of Duty Holder should be defined in the MSMS	Not sighted	In progress
Section 3.1.2 should include a statement that the duty holder cannot assign or delegate their accountability for compliance with the code on the ground that they do not have particular skills.	3.1.2 The Duty Holder section has been updated to include the statement as recommended. (05/2025)	Yes
Complete the transfer for incident and accident reporting to electronic system.	The decision on which application to be used is still under discussions. All logs are still being appropriately maintained on paper records.	In progress
Recommend reviewing Marine Safety Policy (last signed 2018) to ensure relevance.	Policy reviewed and updated along with the MSMS.	Yes

2.2 Summary of Recommendations for Current Audit

The findings from the previous audit have been actioned as per the above table 2.1 Summary of close out from previous audit. Due to the new issue of the Port Marine and Facilities Safety Code (April 2025) we have undertaken a gap analysis to ensure continued compliance. Recommendations details within the following section 2.3.

2.3 Port Marine Facilities and Safety Code – Gap Analysis Recommendations

Question	Finding	Recommendation
Do any of the Duty Holder have relevant maritime experience, and if so, do they function as the initial point of contact for the Designated Person?	It is not known whether any of the Duty Holder have any maritime related experience.	This should be identified and included within the MSMS if applicable.
Does the organisation place an emphasis on dynamic risk assessment and is this promulgated to staff in training/briefing.	Not mentioned within the MSMS.	Procedure should be documented within MSMS and dynamic risk assessment should be discussed during toolbox talks.
Is the tidal regime, monitored, understood and promulgated (including via UKHO)	Not mentioned within the MSMS.	Procedure should be documented within the MSMS including if there is a requirement to promulgate such information to UKHO.

3. Port Details

3.1 Groomsport

3.1.1 Description:

Groomsport Harbour is a small amenity harbour that has an inshore fishing fleet of 2 boats under 10m, berthed annually on fore and aft moorings and up to 80 pleasure craft 8 meters and under. The Harbour is tidal with a maximum speed limit of 4 knots. The harbour facilities offer;

- ⚙ Slipway
- ⚙ Drying out berth
- ⚙ Hard standing
- ⚙ Electricity
- ⚙ Water
- ⚙ Waste collection
- ⚙ Waste oil collection
- ⚙ Recycling on site
- ⚙ Public toilets
- ⚙ Locked storage

3.1.2 Address and Entrance Position

54°40'39.26"N 5°37'3.06"W

Groomsport Harbour Office, Harbour Road, Groomsport. BT19 6JP.



Figure 1 Groomsport Harbour

3.2 Donaghadee

3.2.1 Description

Donaghadee Harbour is a small amenity harbour that has an inshore fishing fleet of 6 boats under 10m, berthed annually on fore and aft moorings and up to 50 pleasure craft 12 metres and under.

The majority of pleasure craft are berthed on swinging moorings with a few fore and aft against the quay wall. The harbour also accommodates a Trent class lifeboat on behalf of the RNLI.

The harbour is non-tidal with a maximum speed limit of 4 knots. Facilities:

- ⚙ Slipway
- ⚙ Refuelling station
- ⚙ Electric
- ⚙ Water
- ⚙ Waste collection
- ⚙ Waste oil collection (by prior arrangement)

3.2.2 Address and Entrance Position

54° 38.707' N, 005° 31.860' W

Donaghadee Harbour Office, 44 The Parade, Donaghadee, BT21 0HE.

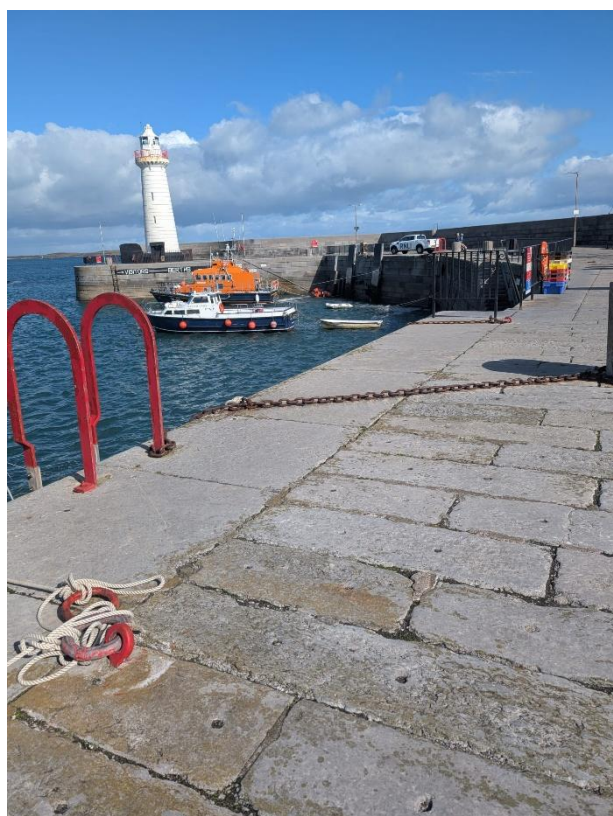


Figure 2 Donaghadee Harbour

3.3 Ballywalter

3.3.1 Description

Ballywalter Harbour is a small amenity harbour that has an inshore fishing fleet of up to 5 fishing boats 10 metres and under, berthed annually alongside the quay wall. The harbour can also accommodate approximately 20 pleasure craft 8 metres and under, berthed annually on swinging moorings.

The harbour is tidal with a maximum speed limit of 4 knots. Facilities:

- ⊗ Slipway
- ⊗ Drying out berth
- ⊗ Hard standing
- ⊗ Electric (additional cost)
- ⊗ Water
- ⊗ Waste collection
- ⊗ Waste oil collection (by prior arrangement)
- ⊗ Berth holder car park
- ⊗ Recycling facilities on site

3.3.2 Address and Entrance Position

54° 32.799' N, 005° 28.576' W

Ballywalter Harbour, C/O Donaghadee Harbour Master, Donaghadee Harbour Office, 44 The Parade, Donaghadee, BT21 0HE.

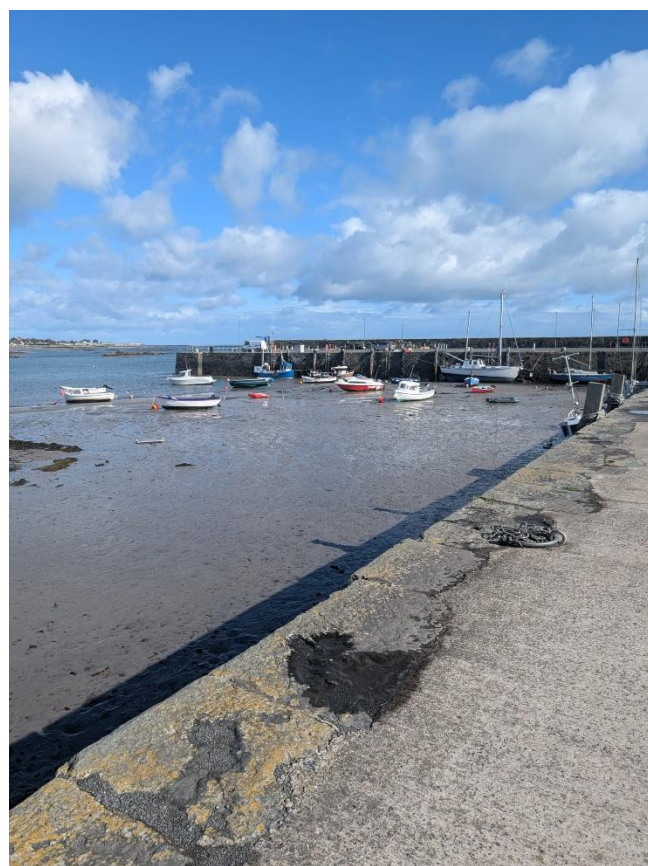


Figure 3 Ballywalter

3.4 Ballyhalbert

3.4.1 Description

Ballyhalbert Harbour is a small amenity harbour that can accommodate up to 10 pleasure boats up to 12 metres in length, berthed annually alongside the quay wall.

The harbour is tidal with a maximum speed limit of 4 knots.

Facilities:

- ⊗ Slipway
- ⊗ Electric (additional cost)
- ⊗ Water
- ⊗ Waste collection
- ⊗ Waste oil collection (by prior arrangement)
- ⊗ Public car park adjacent to the harbour
- ⊗ Public Toilets

3.4.2 Address and Entrance Position

54° 29.456' N, 005° 26.420' W

Ballyhalbert Harbour, C/O Donaghadee Harbour Master, Donaghadee Harbour Office, 44 The Parade, Donaghadee, BT21 0HE.

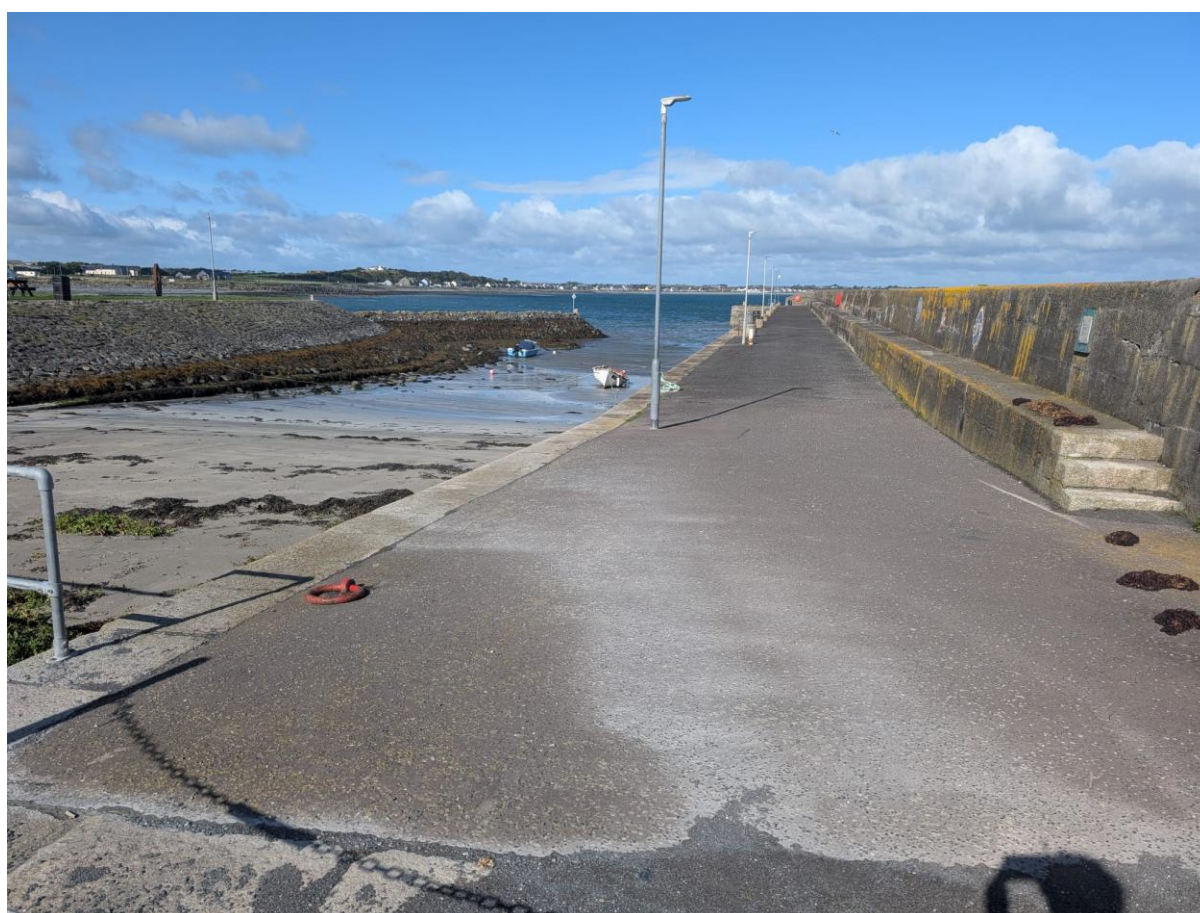


Figure 4 Ballyhalbert

3.5 Cook Street Portaferry

3.5.1 Description

Groomsport Harbour is a small amenity harbour that has an inshore fishing fleet of 2 boats under 10m, berthed annually on fore and aft moorings and up to 80 pleasure craft 8 metres and under.

The harbour is tidal with a maximum speed limit of 4 knots.

Facilities:

- ☑ Slipway
- ☑ Drying out berth
- ☑ Hard standing
- ☑ Electric
- ☑ Water
- ☑ Waste collection
- ☑ Waste oil collection (by prior arrangement)
- ☑ Recycling on site
- ☑ Public Toilets
- ☑ Locked Storage (by prior arrangement)

3.5.2 Address and Entrance Position

54° 22' 28.91" N, 005° 32' 47.0" W

Cook Street Jetty, C/O Donaghadee Harbour Master, Donaghadee Harbour Office, 44 The Parade, Donaghadee, BT21 0HE.

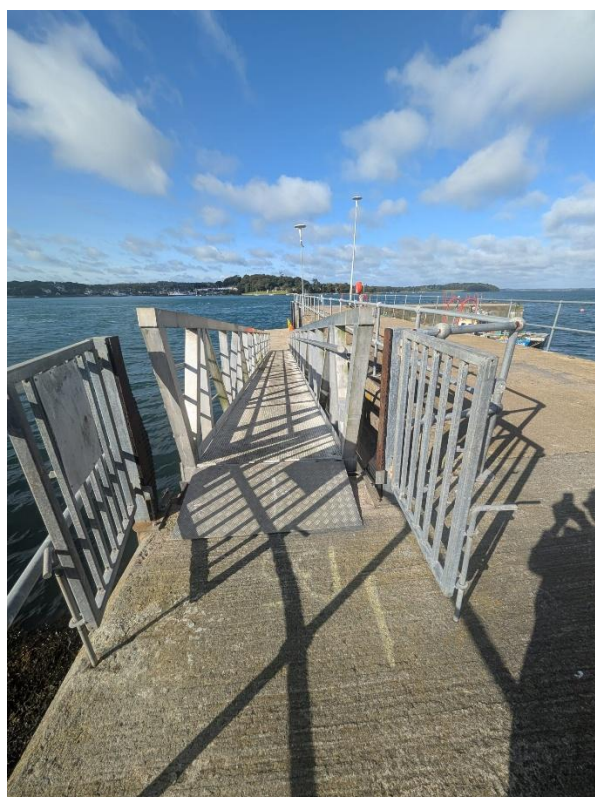


Figure 5 Cook Street - Portaferry

3.6 Organogram

Please see the below organogram showing the management structure of the Harbours along with clear lines of communications.

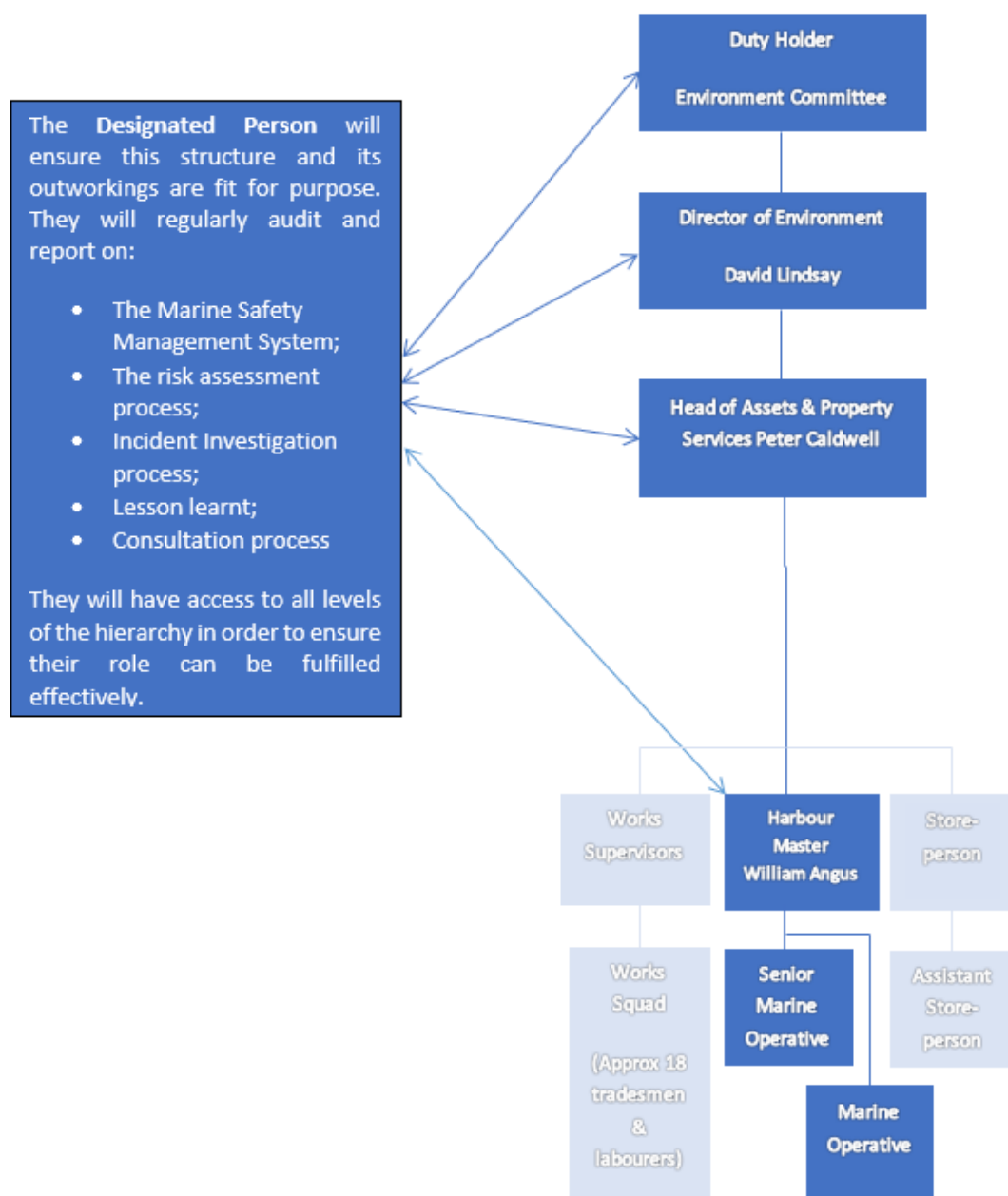


Figure 6 Organogram

4. Audit Detail

The following sections provide the checklist and responses as per the Port Marine Safety and Facilities Code, Guide to Good Practise 'Aide Memoire' updated April 2025.

5. Duty Holder

PMSC / Guide Ref	Requirement	Y / N / NA
1.2 Guide	Has a Duty Holder been appointed?	Y
SMS Ref	3.1.2 Duty Holder	
Comments	Duty Holder – The Environmental Committee. See Figure 2 – Organogram.	
1.2 Guide	Is a Designated Person Appointed?	Y
SMS Ref	3.1.5 Designated Person	
Comments	Orcades Marine Management Consultants Ltd.	
1.2 Guide	Has the Duty Holder made a clear published commitment to comply with the standards laid down in the PMSC?	Y
SMS Ref	3.1.2 Duty Holder	
Comments	As per MSMS section as above.	
1.2 Guide	Have operational responsibilities for marine safety been clearly assigned, and are those entrusted with these responsibilities appropriately trained, qualified, and experienced?	Y
SMS Ref	9.1 Marine Personnel (training)	
Comments	Training plan sighted for 2024/2025.	
1.3 Guide	When was the last review of existing powers based on local and national legislation undertaken and did this confirm with duties and powers under existing legislation?	Y
SMS Ref	2.2 Marine Safety Policy	
Comments	ANDBC commit to discharge its duties and powers within the above policy. Review of powers is undertaken during review of the MSMS. May 2025 last revision.	
1.3 Guide	Is there a process of risk assessment including eliminating/reducing risk to ALARP?	Y
SMS Ref	5.3 Risk Assessments	
Comments		
1.3 Guide	Is a Marine Safety Management System in place and maintained to control marine ops?	Y
SMS Ref	ANDBC Marine Safety Management System	
Comments		
1.3 Guide	Do staff hold appropriate standards of qualification and training?	Y
SMS Ref	9.1 Marine Personnel (Training)	
Comments		
1.3 Guide	Is audit used to measure policies, procedures and compliance with the code?	Y
SMS Ref	2.4 Policy Development and Review	

Comments	The audit schedule is as follows: 1 year (minimum) - Internal audit (by Designated Person) 3 years- External Audit (by Council's appointed auditors) 5 years- complete review of all plans, policies and procedures.	
1.6 Guide	How does the Duty Holder maintain insight and understanding of the organisation's marine activities?	Y
Doc Ref	OP-587 _ANDBC_ PMSCPresentation_02.04.2025	
Comments	Through presentations and issuing of internal audit reports from the Designated Person. Also updates	
1.6 Guide	Does the Duty Holder receive PMSC training/briefing specific to their role?	Y
SMS Ref	OP-587 _ANDBC_ PMSCPresentation_02.04.2025	
Comments		
1.6 Guide	Do any of the Duty Holder have relevant maritime experience, and if so, do they function as the initial point of contact for the Designated Person?	Not known
SMS Ref	3.1.2 The Duty Holder	
Comments	<i>It is not known whether any of the Duty Holders have maritime related experience.</i>	
1.6 Guide	How does the Duty Holder ensure that adequate resources are provided to manage marine operations effectively and to adhere to the stated marine and navigation policies, procedure and systems?	Y
SMS Ref	3.1.2 The Duty Holder	
Comments	The Duty Holder commits to 'ensure adequate financial, material and personnel resources are available for the discharge of all duties' as per above MSMS section. Resources required are discussed at each harbour meeting	
1.9 Code	When was the last statement of compliance submitted to the MCA?	Y
Doc Ref	Declaration of Compliance	
Comments	01/12/2023	

6. Designated Person

PMSC / Guide Ref	Requirement	Y / N / NA
2.1 Guide	Does the DP provide independent assurance directly to the Duty Holder that the Marine SMS is working effectively in ensuring compliance with the code?	Y
SMS Ref	3.1.5 Designated Person	
Comments	The duty holders are provided a copy of the audit reports, and a presentation is given to the Duty Holder by the Designated Person on what is required to be actioned and provides details of any changes to legislation/codes of practise.	
2.2 Guide	Does the DP have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the requirements of the Code (and the GTGP) and associated marine legislation?	Y
SMS Ref	3.1.5 Designated Person	
Comments	Competency checks of the appointed Designated Person have been reviewed by the Duty Holder during quotation/procurement process.	
2.2 Guide	How does the DP monitor and audit the effective and consistent application of the Marine SMS on port and marine / facility operations?	Y
SMS Ref	3.1.5 Designated Person	
Comments	6 monthly auditing (aide memoire template) GTGP	

7. Legislation

PMSC / Guide Ref	Requirement	Y / N / NA
3.3 Guide	What is the legislation that is applicable to the organisation in terms of port marine safety?	Y
SMS Ref	4.0 Implementation	
Comments	Detailed within section 4.0 of the MSMS.	
3.3 Guide	When did the organisation last carry out a review of its applicable legislation?	Y
SMS Ref	4.0 Implementation	
Comments	May 2025.	
3.4 Guide	Can the organisation issue Special Directions and is there provision for this responsibility to be delegated to other persons other than the HM?	Y
SMS Ref	4.2 The ability to enforce the law	
Comments	HM only.	
3.5 Guide	Can the organisation issue General or Harbour Directions?	Y
SMS Ref	4.2 The ability to enforce the law	
Comments		
3.7 Guide	Does the organisation have any byelaws?	Y
Doc Ref	4.3.2 Statutory Documents	
Comments		
3.8 Guide	Does the organisation have any licencing powers?	N/A
SMS Ref		
Comments		
3.9 Guide	Does the organisation have and publish an enforcement policy?	Y
SMS Ref	4.2 the ability to enforce the law	
Comments	As detailed in section 4.2 of the MSMS.	
3.10 & 3.14 Guide	Does the organisation have mechanism for consulting and communicating with port marine stakeholders, contractors and marine staff, e.g. port user groups and employee forums/committees?	Y
SMS Ref	4.5.1 Stakeholder Engagement	
Comments		
3.12 Guide	Does the organisation have a mechanism for consulting with port marine stakeholders when reviewing risk assessments?	Y
SMS Ref	4.5.1 Stakeholder engagement	
Comments	If appropriate.	

8. Duties and Powers

PMSC / Guide Ref	Requirement	Y / N / NA
4.5 Guide	Is a pilotage service provided and if so when was the last pilotage review?	N/A
SMS Ref		
Comments		
4.5.5 Guide	Is bridge team and resource management principles included in the pilot training syllabus?	N/A
SMS Ref		
Comments		
4.5.7 Guide	Are pilots subject to regular assessment such as peer review assessment?	N/A
SMS Ref		
Comments		
4.5.9 Guide	Are there procedures that prescribes the process of reporting ship deficiencies to MCA?	N/A
SMS Ref		
Comments		
4.5.13 Guide	Are pilotage directions available and regularly reviewed?	N/A
SMS Ref		
Comments		
4.5.14 Guide	Are there robust procedures in place that prescribe arrangements for pilot boarding and landing and pilot boat certification and operations?	N/A
SMS Ref		
Comments		
4.5.14 & 15 Guide	Are there robust procedures, SSOW and risk assessment In place that prescribe arrangements for pilot boarding and landing? And is the embarkation and disembarkation of pilots code or practise referenced?	N/A
SMS Ref		
Comments		
4.5.19 Guide	Are procedures and records available for authorization of pilots?	N/A
SMS Ref		
Comments		
4.5.21 Guide	Is there a policy in place for revalidation of pilots and PEC holders?	N/A
SMS Ref		
Comments		
4.5.23 Guide	Are there processes and procedures in place to manage PEC holders?	N/A
SMS Ref		
Comments		

4.5.25 Guide	Are there procedures in place that support the safe and efficient rostering of pilots and do they ensure fatigue management is considered when assigning act of pilotage?	N/A
SMS Ref		
Comments		
4.6.1 Guide	Are towage guidelines and associated risk assessments in place concerning towage and do they include limits for towage in restricted visibility and details of tug master and pilot/ship master exchange of information including ship's speed through the water when making fast?	N/A
SMS Ref		
Comments		
4.6.1 Guide	Is the Pilots' Pocket Guide and Checklist made available to pilots?	N/A
SMS Ref		
Comments		
4.6.1 & 4.7.6 Guide	Is there a process in place for tug / workboat operator approval?	N/A
SMS Ref		
Comments		
4.6.6 Guide	Is training between tugs crews, and pilots supported?	N/A
SMS Ref		
Comments		
4.7.3 Guide	Is there a process for management/licensing of small commercial vessels and their crew (whether owned or operated by the organisation or not)?	Y
SMS Ref		
Comments	MCA Small Vessel Commercial Code.	
4.8 Guide	Is there a process for regulation and management of commercial diving?	Y
SMS Ref	6.7 Diving Operation	
Comments	Diving Permit to Work system in place.	
4.9 Guide	Are emergency plans in place, up to date and regularly exercised?	Y
SMS Ref	6.8 Emergency Preparedness and Response	
Comments		
4.9.11 Guide	Is an oil spill contingency plan approved and in place and are MCA returns submitted?	Y
Doc Ref	OPRC and annual return record	
Comments		

9. Risk Assessment

PMSC / Guide Ref	Requirement	Y / N / NA
5.2 Guide	Is a formal navigational risk assessment in place, regularly reviewed (including by appropriate stakeholders) on a planned basis or after an incident has occurred?	Y
Doc Ref	Risk register for marine operation 2024	
Comments	Next review date 2026	
5.6 Guide	Is a system of task-based risk assessments in place considering marine tasks undertaken by staff?	Y
SMS Ref	5.3 Risk assessments	
Comments		
5.7 Guide	Does the organisation place an emphasis on dynamic risk assessment and it this promulgated to staff in training / briefing?	N
SMS Ref	<i>Not mentioned within MSMS.</i>	
Comments		

10. Marine Safety Management System

PMSC / Guide Ref	Requirement	Y / N / NA
6.0 Guide	Is there a safety management system in place which includes procedures, policies and staff roles and responsibilities?	Y
SMS Ref	Ards and North Down Borough Council MSMS	
Comments		
6.6 Guide	Is there a process for measuring the Marine SMS performance?	Y
SMS Ref	8.1 Monitoring Performance of the Safety Management System	
Comments		
6.7 Guide	Is there a process for audit and review of the Marine SMS?	Y
SMS Ref	3.1.5 Designated Person	
Comments	The Designated Person carries out an audit every 6 months.	
6.8 Guide	Does the organisation sit within or adjacent to a neighbouring organisation where consideration of overlapping areas of responsibility should be considered, such as bridging documents or MOU?	Y
SMS Ref	N/A	
Comments	Not applicable, contractors who work on site are familiarised with the MSMS and sign off.	
6.9 and 6.9.6 Guide	Does the organisation have incident reporting (including near miss) and investigation procedures in place?	Y
Doc Ref	5.5 Accidents, Incident and Defect Reporting	
Comments		
4.5.9 Guide	Does the organisation have procedures in place to ensure that ship deficiencies that may adversely affect navigation and reported to the MCA?	Y
SMS Ref	5.5 Accidents, Incident and Defect Reporting	
Comments		
6.9.10 Guide	Are lessons from investigations published and shared within the organisation with a view to preventing a recurrence?	Y
SMS Ref	5.5 Accidents, Incident and Defect Reporting	
Comments	Completed Incident Form 18/02/2025 sighted.	

11. Review and Audit

PMSC / Guide Ref	Requirement	Y / N / NA
7.1 Guide	Is an annual internal audit and accompanying annual report statement undertaken and published to confirm that the Marine SMS is being operated effectively?	Y
SMS Ref	3.1.5 Designated Person	
Comments	The Designated Person carried out an audit every 6 months	
7.1 Guide	Is an external audit and accompanying marine safety plan undertaken and published against the organisations performance of the PMSC and the previous version of the marine safety plan at least every 3 years?	Y
Doc Ref	Marine Safety Plan (3 years)	
Comments		

12. Competence

PMSC / Guide Ref	Requirement	Y / N / NA
8.10 Guide	Is there a published training policy in place?	Y
SMS Ref	9.1 Marine Personnel	
Comments		
8.3 Guide	Are National Occupational Standards referenced as a basis for recruitment and development of staff?	Y
SMS Ref	9 National Occupational Standards (NOS)/ Training	
Comments		
8.10 Guide	Is a marine training matrix available that describes all of the organisations marine personnel and what their training, experience and qualification requirements are (including any refresher training)?	Y
Doc Ref	ANDBC Harbours Training 2024/2025	
Comments		
8.10 Guide	Are training records maintained and reviewed (course completion certification)	Y
Doc Ref	ANDBC Harbours Training 2024/2025	
Comments		
8.10 Guide	Are records of assessment/training maintained (training record books, on the job training records) and used to ensure staff have met the required competencies before being taking on roles and responsibilities?	Y
Doc Ref	ANDBC Harbours Training 2024/2025	
Comments		

13. Plan

PMSC / Guide Ref	Requirement	Y / N / NA
9.1 Guide	Is a marine safety plan published every 3 years?	Y
Doc Ref	Marine Safety Plan (3 years)	
Comments		
9.1 Guide	Has a report detailing an assessment of the organisations performance against the safety plan been published?	Y
SMS Ref	Appendix 1	
Comments	KPIs monitored and discussed at harbour review meetings and subsequently minuted.	
9.1 Guide	Were stakeholders consulted as part of drafting the plan?	Y
SMS Ref	4.5.1 Stakeholder Engagement	
Comments	No comments made on the revision of the MSMS.	

14. Conservancy Duty

PMSC / Guide Ref	Requirement	Y / N / NA
10.3 Guide	Does the organisation provide regular updates on depth of water and other relevant information to UKHO?	Y
SMS Ref	6.1 Conservancy	
Comments		
10.4 Guide	Is timely information on prevailing and forecast meteorological conditions such as wind, tide and other factors made available to users?	Y
SMS Ref	6.1.4 Navigational Warnings	
Comments		
10.5 Guide	Does the Marine SMS make appropriate provision for safe anchorages?	Y
SMS Ref	5.1 Port Marine Operations	
Comments		
10.11 Guide	Does the Marine SMS refer to the identification, management and marking of wrecks?	Y
SMS Ref	6.1.5 Wrecks and Salvage	
Comments		
10.14 Guide	Does the Marine SMS refer to the management of harbour works? (permissions, licenses, Notice to Mariner)	Y
SMS Ref	6.1.6 Regulating Harbour Works	
Comments		
10.8.9 Guide	Is there a hydrographic survey plan in place and are the results of these surveys promulgated on a regular basis?	Y
SMS Ref	6.1 Conservancy	
Comments	5 yearly. Records sighted of current hydrographic survey records.	
10.8.5 Guide	Is the tidal regime, monitored, understood and promulgated (including via UKHO)?	N
SMS Ref	-	
Comments	<i>Not sighted within MSMS.</i>	
10.10.4 Guide	Are local Notice to Mariners issued?	Y
Ref	6.1.4 Navigational Warning	
Comments		
10.10.1 Guide	Does the organisation have Local Lighthouse Authority responsibilities?	Y
SMS Ref	7.2 Aids to Navigation	
Comments		
10.12 Guide	Has the organisation considered any appropriate actions or procedure around managing abandoned or the salvage of vessels?	Y
SMS Ref	6.1.5 Wrecks and Salvage	
Comments		
10.15 Guide	Are there procedures in place to support the maintenance and provision of aids to navigation?	Y
SMS Ref	7.2 Aids to Navigation	
Comments		

10.15.7 and .8 Guide	Are there procedures in place to support safety of navigation and provide where necessary consistent procedures for those managing LPS or VTS?	Y
Doc Ref	Marine Navigational Risk Assessment	
Comments		