

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

22 December 2025

Dear Sir/Madam

You are hereby invited to attend a hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of the Place and Prosperity Committee of the Ards and North Down Borough Council which will be held in the Council Chamber, 2 Church Street, Newtownards, on **Thursday 8 January 2026** 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
3. Deputation – Donaghadee Community Development Association

Reports for Approval

4. Event proposals August 2026 – Fleadh Belfast and RSPBANI Ulster Pipe Band Championship (report attached)

Reports for Noting

5. Taste AND - Food and Drink Development Annual Update Report 2025 (report attached)
6. Arts and Heritage Panel Minutes – September and November 2025 (report attached)
7. Bangor Waterfront Public Engagement Update (report attached)
8. Any Other Notified Business

IN CONFIDENCE

Reports for With Delegated Authority for Approval

9. Delegated Authority to Place and Prosperity Committee 8 January 2026 –
Variance Request - Ballywalter Pathway - Small Settlements Programme Update
and Recommendation (report attached)

Reports for Approval (In Confidence)

10. Innovation Hub Site (report attached)
11. Extension of Tourism Event Contracts 2026-27 (report attached)

MEMBERSHIP OF PLACE AND PROSPERITY COMMITTEE (16 MEMBERS)

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

Unclassified

3

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

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	08 January 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Tourism, Arts and Heritage
Date of Report	12 December 2025
File Reference	TO/EV139
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below: Screening number 416
Subject	Event proposals August 2026 – Fleadh Belfast and RSPBANI Ulster Pipeband Championship
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Summary of Proposed Activity

Background

Belfast will host Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, the world's biggest celebration of Irish music and culture, from Sunday 2 August 2026 to Sunday 9 August 2026. Qualifying competitors from all over the world will showcase the very best of traditional music, song, dance and language in All-Ireland competitions. With a minimum of 700,000 visitors from across the world, it is anticipated to be the biggest cultural event held in Belfast. It was reported by Belfast City Council that 20% out of state were visitors to the Wexford event in 2025. It is anticipated that this figure will be higher for Fleadh Belfast as participants/attendees will be visiting from ROI.

It is reported that The Fleadh in Wexford generated an estimated €60 million into the local economy, attracting over 800,000 visitors and Tourism NI estimates the 2026 Fleadh will bring £60 million into the Northern Ireland economy.

[Fleadh Belfast 2026 | Culture in Belfast](#)

Not Applicable

4

[Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026](#)

Ards CCÉ is the host branch for Fleadh Belfast (bid partner with Belfast City Council). Formed in 1976 it promotes traditional music, song and dance throughout Belfast and the North Down and Ards area and 2026 will mark their 50th anniversary. Due to the local connection, Belfast City Council colleagues have been in contact with the Chief Executive to inform on planning stages of the event and to highlight the opportunities that will be afforded to the Borough due to the proximity of the event. As set out in the Borough Events Strategic Direction (2021-2028), international bid events bringing participants and spend, is an area which the Borough should maximise.

On 8 August 2025 Belfast City Council hosted a familiarisation trip for interested parties to attend the Fleadh Cheoil in Wexford on one of its competition days. Three officers attended to review event delivery and logistics, visitor servicing and marketing. Key learnings from the trip included:

- The 2025 Fleadh Cheoil in Wexford was a highly successful and well-managed event, balancing organised programming with an informal, organic atmosphere.
- The pedestrianisation of Wexford's town centre enabled excellent visitor flow and provided a safe, vibrant platform for both formal performances and ad hoc sessions.
- Visitor servicing in a central location provided a necessary source of information and support for participant/visitor orientation.
- Accommodation stock is booked well in advance and additional facilities such as camp sites are a requirement with attendees willing/having to travel beyond the immediate competition area.
- Budget friendly accommodation is attractive for larger groups and family participants and attendees.
- There are clear opportunities to enhance and promote Fringe programming across the wider Belfast City Region. This has strong potential to extend visitor dwell time, showcase local attractions, and distribute economic benefits more widely.
- Visit Belfast ran a pop-up Welcome Centre prominently located in Wexford town centre and confirmed high levels of early interest in accommodation bookings and broader visitor enquiries. This visitor servicing presence in Wexford already ensured that AND was front of mind to Fleadh 2025 attendees and those planning their Belfast 2026 visit with AND literature and digital information distributed throughout the event. VB is a vital partner to Belfast City Council in supporting visitor servicing, marketing and early bookings.
- Broader learnings, applicable to other or future Council large scale events not specifically related to this event, included traffic management measures, pedestrianised zones, orientation signage, communications and hospitality delivery.

Not Applicable

Visit Belfast (VB) has been appointed as Belfast City Council's lead partner and key promotional agency for Fleadh Belfast 2026. VB's responsibilities include providing visitor information and services through their welcome centre, as well as at key venues and points of entry. In addition, VB also manage a dedicated event website on behalf of Belfast City Council, which includes information about the borough and links to the Council's Visit Ards and North Down website. Visit Belfast has been a long-standing strategic partner of the Council through the Regional Tourism Partnership (RTP) since 2015, through which the Borough is prominently positioned for the Fleadh's visitor audience.

The Opportunity

As previously stated, Fleadh Belfast presents a significant opportunity for Belfast City, with potential benefits for the wider Belfast City Region, particularly in terms of family-friendly accommodation and attractions. It is expected that particularly AND based self-catering accommodation sector will benefit.

Officers have met with Ards CCÉ representatives to explore the development and timing of any potential programming in AND that may complement the core Fleadh programme, and/or fit into any Fleadh Fringe activity. Based on these discussions, a Fleadh Fringe event in the Holborn Square car park, Bangor is proposed on Saturday 1 August 1.00pm- 9.00pm. This area has recently been refurbished with a view to this being a potential event site with kerbs removed etc. It also has the advantage of being central within Bangor and has two well established bars having beer gardens backing onto the site, alongside additional hospitality businesses on High Street and nearby Main and Abbey Streets. In the Event Manager's view this concept would be very similar to a popular and well attended element of the Wexford event that Officers experienced (it should be noted that Officers attended the main competition site on a competition day in Wexford but Ards CCÉ representatives are confident that participants will be arriving pre competition days and will wish to enjoy activity locally). It is also anticipated that this would be complementary to the Fringe programme being delivered pre and during the event in Belfast.

A budget of up to £40,000 is estimated to deliver the event with c.10% allocated to marketing. A procurement exercise would be undertaken to appoint suitably qualified professionals to organise and manage the delivery of the event, as the Council wider events team will be supporting the Pipe Band event on the same date.

A requirement in the brief would be to include a performance by Ards CCÉ, other local artists, and that programming would be done in discussion/agreement with the Council and Ards CCÉ representatives to ensure quality of performance. The vision is for an event area with a stage, seating and a range of local food options to complement those in nearby streets. The event would be free to attend and it is hoped that it could achieve visitor numbers of up to c.4-5,000 throughout the course of the day/evening. The aim of the event is to maximise on the opportunity to attract the many visitors to Belfast to also spend time in and attract additional spend to the city.

Local hospitality providers will be encouraged to stage similarly themed entertainment to attract visitors to their premises once the event in Holborn Square

Not Applicable

has finished at 9.00pm and maintain spend within the city centre. A working group has been set up by Bangor Chamber to identify opportunities for this.

As stated earlier in the report and previously reported to Place and Prosperity Committee, the Council has been offered the opportunity to host the 73rd Ulster Championships of the Pipe Bands by the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association NI (RSPBANI) on the same date, Saturday 1 August 2025. The date for this event is significant as bands are preparing for the World Championships being held in mid-August.

The event attracts approximately 50 bands. Recent site visits, including Council Officers and officials from the RSPBANI, have indicated that in line with the current rotational system that the Pipe Band event is due to be held in Bangor, Ward Park is the most suitable site to fully accommodate band gazebos, tuning spaces along with coach parking.

The financial contribution requested from the Council to host the event by the RSPBANI Branch is £20k. This amount is within the 2026 projected event budget at £36,700, which also covers other Council direct costs such as traffic management, stewarding, park and ride and infrastructure. Costs are based on previous similar events of this type at this location.

Officers have asked that as part of this event that there will be a parade element throughout the city centre. Exact route is to be confirmed and subject to further planning.

As the 2026 All Ireland Championships will be held in ROI in 2026, the Ulster Championship will probably be the largest contest being held in North Ireland. The RSPBANI will be inviting attendees from RSPBA HQ, Irish Pipe Band Association and Ulster-Scots Agency, along with their Honorary Members, with the intention of hosting a small dinner afterwards in the local area to thank the Stewards and Committee on the day.

The combination of both events offers the opportunity for the city to present a day of traditional musical excellence, which is hoped will be attractive to visitors to both the Fleadh event, the Ulster Championships of the Pipe Bands and more broadly.

Additional Activity

Officers will work with the local Chamber to create sympathetic consumer activity to attract visitors to eat, drink and spend in our local shops. This could be an extension of the current successful passport scheme, window dressing or hospitality deals, maps etc.

Further exploratory work with Translink to enable good traffic management and sustainability access, which may include park and ride options to the events, will start early 2026.

The annual Creative Peninsula Festival programmed by the Arts Service will be taking place as normal from 1-9 August 2026. The annual event showcases the wealth of artists and makers living and working in the Borough. Though

Not Applicable

7

predominantly art and craft based, Officers will endeavour to incorporate the theme of the Fleadh where appropriate, for example in the addition of traditional live music at the popular Creative Peninsula in the Square event on Friday 7 August. Officers are also investigating the inclusion of locally made musical instruments in demonstrations at the Heritage Craft Day at North Down Museum. An existing budget of £2,000 can be dedicated to weaving the theme of the Fleadh into existing Creative Peninsula events. The suggested inclusions will be subject to the availability of artists and musicians during this period.

Local accommodation providers will be promoted to prospective participants and attendees through Visit Belfast visitor servicing and channels. The proposed local Fringe event and Fleadh Belfast event activity will be promoted via Belfast City Council's dedicated Fleadh promotional channels which are managed on their behalf by Visit Belfast.

The following programme attached as Appendix 1 is proposed as an opportunity to animate the Borough in and around the Fleadh Belfast period to maximise opportunities for additional visits and spend.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council approves the outline programme as presented in the report including:

1. the proposed Fringe Fleadh event at a budget of £40,000 subject to the Rates Setting process and a successful procurement exercise;
2. the hosting of the Ulster Championship Pipe Band event at Ward Park, Bangor with the existing projected 2026 event budgets and
3. other related activity where partners and performers can be secured.

Appendix 1

Summary of Proposed Fringe Fleadh Activity, August 2026

The following programme is proposed as an opportunity to animate the borough in and around the Fleadh Belfast period to maximise opportunities for additional visits and spend.

Date	Event/Activity	Budget	Note
1 August 2026	Fringe Fleadh, Bangor	£40,000	Subject to Rates Setting and procurement
1 August 2026	Ulster Championship of the Pipe Bands, Bangor	£36,700	Within existing projects budgets
7 August 2026	Creative Peninsula (themed elements)	£2,000	Within existing projected budgets
2 or 9 August 2026 tbc	Heritage Craft Day (themed)		Within existing projected budgets
1 or 2 August 2026	Themed at Cockle Row Cottages		Within existing projected budgets
August dates tbc	Ards VIC – themed exhibition		Within existing projected budgets
August dates/locations tbc	Passport Activity		Within marketing budget allocation to Fringe Fleadh event
August dates tbc	Local supplementary offering		Subject to individual business participation

Unclassified

9

ITEM 5**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	08 January 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Tourism, Arts and Heritage
Date of Report	04 December 2025
File Reference	TOTD/182
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Taste AND - Food and Drink Development Annual Update Report 2025
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Food and Drink Award Winners 2025

Introduction

This year has once again been successful for network members and AND businesses at both national and international awards. Although the cost of living is still an issue for business, the general picture for the local industry is reported as more settled, with more stable economic conditions, coupled with a more constant energy market benefitting the sector. Issues that remain challenging include staffing due to previous budget implications and a continued lack of skilled labour. It is not yet known, how the recent budget statement on the increase in minimum wage will exacerbate this further. Concerns around food and drink education has been identified recently as a major national concern at a Food NI workshop focusing on DAERA's Food Strategy Framework. The food, drink and hospitality sector continues to innovate, appealing where possible to new customers, increasing collaboration, and diversifying outside of the 'day-to-day' business - for example delivery of tourism experiences.

Not Applicable

10

Taste AND Food and Drink Destination Development Plan (FDDDP) 2023-2027

The following highlights the activity and key achievements year to date.

1. Food and Drink Network

Following the introduction of amended criteria in 2024, to better structure membership, the Network currently sits at 75 members. The membership fee was £35 for 2025.

2. Business Training Programme

Throughout 2025, training sessions facilitated for businesses have ranged from basic first aid to trade show presentation skills and social media to photography sessions. Early 2026 will see menu master class sessions for hospitality businesses taking place. Working with colleagues in Economic Development, December marked the beginning of Council's 'Food and Drink Business Support Programme'. Ten local businesses who responded to an Expression of Interest will complete a series of workshops focusing on Marketing and Sales, Branding, Packaging and Labelling, Staff Retention and Recruitment, Implementation and Getting Things Done, alongside a learning journey which will roll out over the next four months. These are further complemented with one-to-one business mentoring sessions.

3. Hospitality Careers Day

An annual focus of the plan is to deliver a food and drink careers engagement event signposting careers in the sector to local school children. On 25 February 2025, working with industry specialists Springboard, Tourism Officers delivered a "*Hospitality and Tourism Take Over Day*" at the Culloden Hotel and Spa. SERC Culinary Arts, Tourism NI and local hospitality representatives joined to play a key role in delivery. 70* students from five schools attended (all secondary schools in the Borough were invited to attend). Feedback from students included 98% stating they knew more about roles in the industry and 100% saying they would attend a similar event. All teachers stated they believed their students were more aware of the opportunities in hospitality and would return with another cohort.

**Numbers registered were 96 but unfortunately one school cancelled at the last minute.*

4. Trade Shows

In 2025, there have been a total of 22 partially or fully subsidised spaces for industry at trade shows and events outside the borough.

- March: Love Your Food Show, Ekon Centre, Lisburn (12 businesses)
- June: Garden Show Ireland, Antrim (2 businesses)
- October: Dingle Food Fest / Eat Ireland in a Day Showcase (4 businesses)
- November: Samhain Festival of Food and Culture, Kells (4 businesses)

The first trade show of 2026 will be the Love Your Food Show, due to be held in early spring.

5. Ulster Fry Championship (part of the Donaghadee Ulster-Scots Festival)

Tourism Officers provided advice, organisational input, equipment and staff attendance into this annual event run by Donaghadee Community Development

Not Applicable

11

Association (DCDA). The competition itself attracted competitors from across Ulster with four local businesses. Several Taste Ards and North Down businesses also traded at this event with stalls across the weekend. It was reported 3400* in attendance at activity over the weekend.

**Figure provided by DCDA.*

6. Taste Summer in Ards and North Down

A total of 18 food and drink shoulder experiences and activities were delivered by third party local businesses, across the period of the festival within 7 towns, villages and Bangor city. All reported healthy business from involvement in the wider festival and a desire to participate in the Autumn festival shoulder programme.

At the Comber Earlies Food Festival, the Food and Drink Officer along with Event colleagues managed the 'Taste AND Meet the Maker' session featuring various Taste AND members. The shoulder food activities specific to the Comber event featured activities at such as McBride's on the Square "The Big Food (Charity) Quiz". The festival period culminated with a Slow Food showcase weekend at No 14 The Georgian House, hosted by celebrity chef Paula McIntyre and guests Anthony O'Toole and Sally Barnes, alongside Jim Mulholland from No 14. The showcase highlighted the Slow Food movement utilising local and national produce. Free events during the day were well supported with the evening showcase dinner selling out.

7. Taste Autumn in Ards and North Down

Shoulder activity included 17 experiences and activities taking place across 10 of the borough's towns, villages and Bangor city. Unfortunately, the annual Chilli Festival, delivered by Parks and Cemeteries, with support from food and drink/tourism development staff, was cancelled on both days due to the first of the season's storms.

Part funded by DAERA's NI Regional Food Programme Taste AND @ The Castle 27-28 September, was the last event of the Taste Autumn programme. Located at Clandeboye Estate in 2024, the event moved to Bangor city centre to alleviate issues experienced at that site, such as parking and transport and infrastructure. The event showcased ANDBC food and drink businesses to a local market – meeting a key objective within the FDDDP. Almost 40 businesses participated in the artisan market, with local chefs taking part in kitchen theatre demos compered by SERC. Whilst the first day was subject to another storm, with constant heavy wind and rain, footfall exceeded 1000 through the marquee stalls and on day two, with fair weather, over 4500 visited the event, equating to the footfall experienced at Clandeboye and demonstrating the site's suitability to draw a crowd of this demographic to Bangor city. The trader survey showed significant support for the change in venue. 35% of total sales sold over £1000 produce and 65% sold over £500. 100% of traders reported selling over 70% of their stock with nearly a quarter selling over 90%. A number reported selling out early on day two (sample size 30). Of those consumers surveyed, 30% were out of borough and over 40% noted a spend of over £30 per person with 25% reported more than £50.

Not Applicable

12

8. Good Food Ireland (GFI)

In 2025, ANDBC became a member of Good Food Ireland® and is the first council in Northern Ireland to join. Good Food Ireland® has been dedicated to showcasing Ireland's rich culinary heritage since 2006, connecting people with the best sustainable food and drink experiences across the island. To date, the relationship has been an effective one with ANDBC able to avail of its captive marketing reach within ROI to promote AND food and drink and benefitting from its presence at international trade shows where they represent all members of GFI. GFI has also played an instrumental role in developing the Officer relationship with Tourism Ireland (TIL) in 2025, including a familiarisation visit by representatives to ANDBC in late September. This relationship has continued to grow with ANDBC officers and TIL now in regular contact and a further two subsequent visits having taken place since September.

Seven members of the Taste AND network have since taken out individual membership and there are several others discussing 2026 membership. The recent GFI annual awards in November were a pleasant surprise for these new members of Taste AND. Underground Dining, Bangor, won the Food Lovers Choice Award (NI), in a category that entirely consisted of members from ANDBC. Indie Fude, Comber, were finalists in "Best Shop" (all Island) and No 14, Comber, finalists in "Best Restaurant" (all Ireland). All highlighting the strength of AND on a national scene. An Officer was invited to attend the event at short notice free of charge, to experience the event. Seating arrangements at a top table alongside representatives from TIL afforded further discussion and secured more visits to AND in the incoming year.

9. Award Winners 2025

As mentioned and further detailed in Appendix 1, the year has been successful for AND businesses. The 'gold standard' food and drink awards in Produce is the UK's "Great Taste Awards" which are announced in August and Ireland's "Blas na hEireann Awards" in September. For the alcoholic drink's producers, the 'gold standard' class of awards are the "International Wine and Spirit Competition (IWSC)", the "World Gin Awards" and the "World Whiskey Awards". Other notable awards for food are the "Irish Quality Food Awards" and the "British Quality Food Awards".

Looking forward to 2026**Taste Ards and North Down Local Food Heroes Awards**

To highlight the achievements of local businesses the 'Local Food Heroes' Honours Reception with the Mayor will be held in early March 2026 at Bangor Castle. The fifth Lady Dufferin Award for producer of the year and the third edition of the 'Local Food and Drink Champion' will be awarded.

Food and Drink Development Plan (FDDDP) 2027-2031

The second four-year Food and Drink plan will complete shortly. It is intended that Council will commission a new plan to set out goals for the years 2027-2031. A procurement exercise will be undertaken, subject to budget, to secure an independent facilitator to work with officers and stakeholders.

Not Applicable

13

ANDBC continues to support the sector across a variety of mechanisms as reported above, and Officers look forward to the development of the next Food and Drink Development Plan in shaping the next four years of support.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes this report.

Appendix 1 Award Winners 2025

14

A total of 88 awards have been won by 29 businesses within Ards and North Down*

Award Type	Total Number of Awards 2025
Blas na hÉireann	11
Guild of Fine Foods' "Great Taste"	15
Member of the British Empire Medal	1
Irish Restaurant Awards All Ireland	2
Irish Restaurant Awards Regional Winner Ulster	11
Irish Whiskey Awards	11
World Whiskies Awards	12
Irish Whiskies Masters	3
International Wine and Spirit Competition (IWSC)	1
San Francisco International Spirits	4
Ireland Free from Foods Awards	2
Irish Quality Food and Drink Awards	7
McKenna's/Times 100 (Restaurants)	1
NI Farming Life Awards	1
Michelin Guide	2 (NB 1 restaurant has since ceased business)
Good Food Ireland Awards	1
Hotel of the Year AA	1
Two AA Rosettes	1
World Cheese Awards	1

*As per available online data at time of reporting

Business	Individual Awards Won by Business 2025
Ballyboley Dexters	Great Taste Awards x 4 Blas na hÉireann x3
Bró38 Ltd	Blas na hÉireann x2
Clandeboy Estate Yoghurt	Irish Quality Food and Drink Awards x1 Great Taste Award x1
Copeland Distillery	Irish Whiskey Awards x2 World Whiskies Awards x 6 Irish Whiskies Masters x3
Echlinville Distillery	Irish Whiskey Awards x 9 World Whiskey Awards x6 IWSC x1 San Francisco International Spirits x11
Counterculture Real Bread	Blas na hÉireann x3
Cult	Blas na hÉireann x2
Frae	Irish Restaurant Awards All Ireland x1
Glastry Farm Ice-cream	Irish Quality Food and Drink Awards x1

Appendix 1 Award Winners 2025

15

Hollywood Honey	Great Taste Awards x1
Indie Fude	Member of the British Empire Medal for Significant Services to the Northern Ireland Food and Drink Industry. World Cheese Awards x1 Irish Restaurant Awards Regional Ulster x1
Lynchpin	Irish Restaurant Awards Regional Ulster x1 McKenna's Times 100 Restaurant
Mash Direct	Ireland Free from Foods Awards x2
Moorcroft Foods	Great Taste Awards x 4
No 14 at the Georgian House	Irish Restaurant Awards x1 Irish Restaurant Awards Regional Ulster x1
Noble	Irish Restaurant Awards All Ireland x1 Irish Restaurant Awards Regional Ulster x3 Michelin Guide x1
Peppup Sauce	Great Taste Awards x 1
Primacy Meats Food Village	NI Farming Life Awards x1
Papas Mineral Co	Irish Quality Food and Drink Awards x4
Rock a Doodle Do	Great Taste Awards x 4
Slice of Heaven	Irish Quality Food and Drink Awards x1
Underground Dining	Good Food Ireland Awards x1 Irish Restaurant Awards Regional Ulster x1
The Poachers Pocket	Irish Restaurant Awards Regional Ulster x1
The Walled Garden Helen's Bay	Blas na hÉireann x1
Culloden Hotel	Two AA Rosettes
The Old Inn	AA Hotel of the Year
Fontana	Michelin Guide x1 (NB since ceased trading)
The Dirty Duck Alehouse	Irish Restaurant Awards Regional Ulster x1
Hollywood Wine Bar	Irish Restaurant Awards Regional Ulster x1

Unclassified

16

ITEM 6

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	08 January 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Tourism, Arts and Heritage
Date of Report	04 December 2025
File Reference	ART 01 09/11 25
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Arts and Heritage Panel Minutes - September and November 2025
Attachments	Appendix 1 - AGM Minutes 1 September 2025 Appendix 2 - Minutes 3 November 2025

Background

The Arts and Heritage Panel is an advisory body comprising five Elected Members and 12 voluntary specialists from the arts and heritage sector. The elected members on the Panel are nominated annually at the Council AGM and by public advertisement/application process for the voluntary specialists whose term of office runs concurrent to the 4-year term of Council (2023-2027).

The Panel meets five times per annum in February, April, June (familiarisation visit), September (AGM) and November. Officers present reports on recent activity that has taken place across the Arts and Heritage Service and discuss topics relevant to the service.

Not Applicable

17

Minutes of the Annual General meeting (AGM) that took place on Monday 1 September can be found at Appendix 1 and minutes of the meeting that took place on Monday 3 November can be found at Appendix 2.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes the AGM minutes and the November minutes of the Arts and Heritage Panel meetings.

Meeting of Ards and North Down Borough Council **Arts and Heritage Advisory Panel** **AGM**

Monday 01 September 2025 at 5.30pm

Minutes of the Meeting of Ards and North Down Borough Council Arts and Heritage Advisory Panel held on Monday 01 September 2025 at 5.30pm in Ards Arts Centre, Conway Square, Newtownards.

Minutes Secretary: Ms Diane McCaw (Administration Assistant)

Chairperson: Ms Catherine Charley

Present:

- Cllr Pete Wray
- Cllr Alex Harbinson
- Ms Catherine Charley
- Ms Linda Wilson
- Ms Jane McCann
- Mr Billy Carlile
- Ms Jenny Kirkwood
- Ms Gail Prentice

In attendance:

- Ms Emily Crawford (Arts and Heritage Manager – AHM)
- Ms Arlene Matthews (Museum Manager – MM)
- Ms Sharon Mahaffy (Head of Tourism, Arts and Heritage - HTAH)

1. Apologies:

- Cllr Richard Smart
- Cllr Eddie Thompson
- Cllr Colin Kennedy
- Ms Anna Smyth
- Mr Marcus Hunter-Neill

2. Minutes of Meeting on 2 September 2024

Cllr Pete Wray proposed that the Minutes be approved as a correct record. This was seconded by Ms Catherine Charley and agreed unanimously.

3. Matter Arising

Ms Catherine Charley raised the point again of there being no signage for the Discovery Hub Gallery at the Visitor Information Centre. The AHM will investigate this.

Ms Catherine Charley also mentioned could the Arts Network be kept as a rolling item on the agenda.

4. Election of Office Bearers

Ms Catherine Charley stated that she had enjoyed her time as Chairperson and also congratulated the AHM and the Arts and Heritage Team for an impressive Annual Summary.

The AHM declared the office bearer's positions open and requested proposals for an elected member for Chairperson and a voluntary member for Vice-Chairperson.

Cllr Pete Wray proposed Cllr Richard Smart for the position of Chair, and this was seconded by Ms Catherine Charley. As Cllr Smart was not present at the meeting a reserve nomination was made. Cllr Wray proposed Cllr Eddie Thompson, and this was seconded by Mr Billy Carlile. The AHM will contact Cllr Smart.

Ms Jane McCann proposed Ms Linda Wilson for the position of Vice-Chairperson, and this was seconded by Ms Catherine Charley. Ms Wilson accepted and was elected as Vice-Chairperson.

The AHM chaired the remainder of the meeting.

5. Arts and Heritage Managers Introduction to the Arts and Heritage Annual Summary 2024/2025

The Annual Summary had been emailed to the Arts and Heritage Panel members prior to the meeting.

Both the AHM & MM highlighted some of this year's programme successes from the report. It was an eventful year with an extensive programme of Arts and Heritage based events, exhibitions, festivals, education and community outreach activities taking place across the Borough.

The AHM stated that a welcome 4% increase in budget had been secured for festivals and an extra £20,000 secured for 2025/26 to support a partnership community project, Beach of Dreams in what had been a challenging rate setting process. This year also saw the piloting of a new Ulster Scots festival Leid and Lairn.

Another project of note was the AND Arts Network. This is now open on a rolling basis for all creative industries. Officers will continue to encourage membership submissions throughout 2025/26 and are committed to hosting 3 networking events annually.

Ms Catherine Charley asked the AHM for an update on the grants review process. The AHM stated that the paperwork had been reviewed and that the awarding of grants would now fall with Officers. Once the paperwork has been ratified by Council, the grants no longer need to go to Council for approval which will speed up the process.

The MM highlighted a couple of points from the tabled report, one of note that the Education Officer post had increased to full time hours which in turn has enabled additional programming. The MM stated that there has been an increased demand from schools. Mr Billy Carlile asked if Council would be able to help with providing buses for school visits to the Museum to make it accessible to more schools. The MM stated that they are at capacity with both building space and staffing. A discussion ensued around the viability of providing transport and removing barriers to accessing education. The MM stated that it wasn't within the Museum's ability to coordinate or provide transport but recognised this is a problem in general for schools.

6. Adoption of the Annual Summary

The adoption of the Annual Summary was proposed by Ms Catherine Charley and seconded by Mr Billy Carlile.

7. Key Priorities 2025/2026 and Working Groups

a) Departmental Move

The AHM informed the panel that the Arts and Heritage service has moved to sit with Tourism and Events under the new title of Tourism, Arts and Heritage. Mr Brian Dorrian is the new Director of Place and Prosperity and Ms Sharon Mahaffy the existing Head of Tourism has become Head of Tourism, Arts and Heritage.

b) AND Arts Network Development

This was discussed earlier in the meeting.

c) Artist Exchange/Residencies

The AHM informed the panel that details of a new Nordic Artist Exchange programme funded via collaboration by all the UK Arts Councils have been circulated to the Arts Network for artists to apply directly. Local Authorities cannot apply directly to the fund.

8. Any other Business

Ms Linda Wilson asked if there was any more information on the Museum moving and the news of the Bangor Castle/City Hall becoming a hotel. The AHM stated that there were significant operational issues with the current museum building and that a move would be welcomed but that no decision has been made as to a new location.

Appendix 1

21

Mr Billy Carlile asked would it be possible to have someone from Tourism Dept attend the Heritage Cluster meetings. Officers will ensure representatives are invited where appropriate.

Date of Next Meeting:

Date for the next AGM:

- Monday 7 September 2026 at 5.30pm

Dates of normal meetings:

- Monday 3 November 2025 at 5.30pm via Microsoft Teams
- Monday 2 February 2026 at 5.30pm via Microsoft Teams
- Monday 30 March 2026 at 5.30pm via Microsoft Teams (Moved due to Easter)

As there was no further business the meeting closed at 7pm



Meeting of Ards and North Down Borough Council Arts and Heritage Advisory Panel

Monday 3 November 2025 at 5.30pm

Via Microsoft Teams

Minutes of the Meeting of Ards and North Down Borough Council Arts and Heritage Advisory Panel held online via Microsoft Teams on Monday 3 November 2025 at 5.30pm.

Minutes Secretary: Ms Emily Crawford (Arts and Heritage Manager - AHM)

Chairperson: Cllr Richard Smart

Present:

- Cllr Pete Wray
- Cllr Alex Harbinson
- Cllr Eddie Thompson
- Ms Anna Smyth
- Ms Jane McCann
- Ms Catherine Charley
- Ms Dympna Curran
- Ms Linda Wilson
- Ms Jenny Kirkwood
- Ms Emma Reisz (Queens University)
- Dr Lisa Rea Currie (Queens University)

In attendance:

- Ms Emily Crawford (Arts and Heritage Manager – AHM)
- Ms Sharon Mahaffy (Head of Tourism Arts & Heritage – HTAH)
- Ms Arlene Matthews (Museum Manager – MM)

1. Apologies:

- Ms Gail Prentice
- Mr Billy Carlile
- Mr Marcus Hunter Neil

Appendix 2

23

2. Update on Activity at the North Down Museum/Heritage Development – tabled

The MM highlighted the following points from the tabled report:

- There have been several high-profile exhibitions loans to the Museum for the 'Transformation and Inspiration' and History Detectives exhibitions from both private collections and PRONI. Good press coverage was gained including a live interview on BBC's Your Place and Mine. The History Detectives exhibition will be transferred to correx boards and displayed in PRONI in future.
- Colin Middleton's daughter Jane donated over £23,000 worth of his sketches to the Museum – a significant donation.
- A number of storytelling and literacy-based workshops for children took place as a pilot during the summer and proved very successful.
- Heritage talks have continued to be popular and adding a small ticket charge has helped increase the turnout.
- The 'Terrific Toys' project was launched as part of the Playful Museums. It is aimed at under 5's and was designed to go out to local nurseries. This has been very successful.
- New items have been purchased as part of the redevelopment of the bronze age galleries namely a new case which will preserve archaeological metal and enable the long-term curation of artefacts.
- The Museum is getting ready for Christmas with the Twilight Christmas evening happening on 27 November. There will be a pop-up shop along with demonstrations and music
- The 1878 Rebellion project will commence in December. The intention is to work with the community to develop lots of heritage research projects that will contribute to a joint conference with Down County Museum.

Cllr Richard Smart mentioned that the Museum has faced challenges around accreditation because of the age and condition of the building and limitations on staff resource. He stated more engagement and capacity building of the museum to reflect the Borough in its entirety was required and asked were there any plans to deal with the impact of the limitations going forward.

The MM stated that the building itself limits capacity. There have been issues with flooding which makes it difficult to meet loan requirements of temperature and humidity control for borrowing collections. Staff resources are also limiting with staff having to take on multiple roles.

Cllr Smart stated that hopefully the review of the Castle/City Hall and Museum buildings would address these issues. AHM stated that certain requests will be made within the estimates process for additional staffing. Cllr Smart wished to note his support for this. Ms Catherine Charley also wished to note her support.

Ms Linda Wilson wished to congratulate the Museum on the Fields of Change Conference stating that it was a very high quality event.

Ms Anna Smyth wished to congratulate the Museum on the Inspiration and Transformation exhibition.

3. Report on Arts Activity/Community Arts Development – tabled

The AHM apologised that the footfall counter had been disconnected without prior knowledge therefore the figures were not fully up to date. This has now been rectified.

Appendix 2

24

The AHM highlighted the following points from the tabled report:

- ForM sculpture exhibition had proven very popular and for the first time we were able to get exact footfall numbers due to counters being installed in the Walled Garden.
- Creative Peninsula took place in August with the Twilight Market having the highest footfall to date. This is reviewed and tweaked every year to try and improve the event. An artisan food and drink element has been added to encourage people to stay a while longer. Prizes have also been offered to artists and makers and a theme introduced.
- Events were hosted at the Ulster Folk Museum and the relationship with them is continued through the Leid and Lairn programme which launched on 25 October.
- Aspects Literature Festival proved very successful. The level of marketing was very high with social media posts and newspaper coverage. Highlights from the Festival included the David Trimble event with Stephen Walker and Lady Hermon and the always popular Carol Drinkwater. Young Aspects is set to take place on the first weekend in March.
- The AND Network is continually being developed. Ms Jane McCann kindly offered to host a networking event as part of Creative Peninsula around sustainability that attracted good numbers and conversation.
- Another application has been made to the Arts Council Rural Engagement Programme as a legacy project to the Siren Song/Beach of Dreams and the outcome is anticipated at the end of November,
- We have partnered with the Beat Carnival who delivered the Beach of Dreams and with Inspire Wellbeing on a mental health programme. The Arts Council have released new funding and £16,000 has been secured. The Community Arts Development Officer (CADO) will be working on a series of events for this through until March 2027.
- The previous Rural Arts Engagement programme culminated with a performance of 'Peggy, Francis and Me' which toured around a number of venues and was designed to engage with people who are more isolated and living in rural communities.

Cllr Eddie Thompson noted from the report that there was a long waiting list for the Donaghadee Summer Scheme and that it wasn't possible to secure other premises for an additional week. Cllr Thompson asked if any further investigations had been done to try and secure other venues for next year. The AHM stated that CADO is looking at alternative venues, but that accessibility wise the Community Centre is very well kitted out for the requirements of the scheme. The Community Centre also hosts the Council's Community Summer Scheme so between that and regular bookers, it is hard to get additional dates. It was also noted that the majority of the attendees are travelling from Bangor and that CADO will investigate an additional scheme in that area, however other arts organisations exist and duplication should be avoided.

4. Strategic Priorities:

a. Interdepartmental working/new structure

The AHM stated that all is going well with the move to the new Tourism, Arts and Heritage Service. A team building day was hosted by Sequoia on 13 October in the Court House in Bangor for office-based staff to meet with other members of the team.

b. AND Arts Network Development – next event 18 November

The AHM informed the Panel that an event was taking place on 18 November in the Arts Centre with the Arts Council showcasing immersive and digital technologies. This event is open to all, not just those on the Network.

Appendix 2

25

c. Artist Residency

An Artist in Residency opportunity has been presented through the Arts Council. An application hasn't been submitted as yet but the AHM will keep the Panel posted on this. It was thought that there may be another opportunity for an extension of the Finnish exchange but when the applications opened it became clear that Councils couldn't apply. The application needed to come from an individual artist. The opportunity was circulated to the AND Network.

5. (6pm) Presentation on BeHere Project – Project Summary tabled Lisa Rea Currie and Dr Emma Reisz - Centre for Public History, Queen's University

Cllr Smart welcomed Lisa and Emma from the BeHere project to the meeting to give an overview of a project being led at Mount Stewart.

Lisa informed the panel that they are working with various project delivery partners, namely Queens University Belfast, the National Trust, Artsekta, The Link Family & Community Centre and Kilcooley Women's Centre. It is intended to work with around 20 participants from The Link and Kilcooley Women's Centre and recruitment for those participants has begun.

Project Background

BeHere arises from the Historic Houses, Global Crossroads (HHGC) research project. HHGC explores how Mount Stewart and Clondeboy Estate have been shaped by global histories of empire, migration and exchange, and how these sites can be reinterpreted to reflect diverse narratives and foster inclusive engagement.

It is one of six projects funded by the AHRC's Creative Communities programme across the UK's devolved regions, it explores how co-created culture can enhance belonging, address regional inequality, deliver devolution, and break down barriers to opportunity with communities in devolved settings.

Project Aim

The project explores how engaging with heritage at Mount Stewart might contribute to a positive sense of place and belonging in Ards and North Down. Community members will act as co-researchers, using creative methodologies and developing their heritage-related skills to help explore this hypothesis.

Project Outputs

- Community-led creative output exploring 'Belonging' in Ards and North Down e.g. an exhibition to be displayed in community sites.
- Policy paper – Making recommendations grounded in learning from the project.
- Podcast – As part of the Creative Communities series, exploring the learning and focussing community voices from the project.
- Case Study – Sharing the process of the project in detail.

Lisa asked the Panel if this project would help contribute to any ongoing discussions within Council around heritage and strategy and would it be a helpful vehicle to support the existing Arts and Heritage networks in the borough. It is hoped that new audiences will be engaged

Appendix 2

with local heritage as Lisa has found that once people discover one heritage site and become involved in it, they are keen to find more.

Cllr Smart asked what the touring exhibition may look like and how wide the engagement would go. Lisa stated that it will probably be pop-up exhibition stands just in terms of storage and collections care after the project ends. It may include photos of things that the participants make during the process. The participants would be able to take their pieces home with them. Emma stated a key part of the project is that they have a budget for an arts facilitator. This person will work in a medium that the participants are interested in exploring and will be inspired by Mount Stewart. Monthly visits to Mount Stewart are planned. AHM stated that if there was a call out for an Artist, that this could be included in our e-bulletin which is sent out to local Artists and Makers.

A discussion then ensued.

Emma & Lisa left the meeting at 18.40.

6. Any Other Business:

a. Meetings going forward

Cllr Smart proposed that at least one if not all of the meetings for next year be in person meetings. The panel agreed to this. The AHM will investigate the option of hybrid meetings also, but this had proved difficult in the past. It was agreed that the February meeting be in person.

b. Festive Meet-Up

The AHM suggested a festive meet-up at the opening of the Made in AND at the North Down Museum on Thursday 27 November. Details to follow.

Date of Next Meeting:

Date and venue for the next meeting:

- Monday 2 February 2026 at 5.30pm
- Monday 20 April 2026 at 5.30pm – NB later than usual date due to Easter
- Monday 1 June 2026 at 5.30pm – Familiarisation visit tbc

As there was no further business, the meeting closed at 6.50pm

Unclassified

27

ITEM 7**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	08 January 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Strategic Capital Development (Interim)
Date of Report	11 December 2025
File Reference	RDP22/RDP56
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Bangor Waterfront Public Engagement Update
Attachments	

Purpose

To update members on upcoming public engagement activity for the Pickie Fun Park and Ballyholme Yacht Club (BYC) Watersports Centre projects within the Bangor Waterfront programme under the Belfast Region City Deal, and to note related queries from residents.

Background

Informal Public Information Sessions (outside the formal planning process) were held for:

- **Pickie Fun Park** on 27 September 2025 at Carnegie Library, with concept design boards presented by the Integrated Consultancy Team (McAdam) and Council officers. Feedback was largely positive.

Not Applicable

28

- **BYC Watersports Centre** on 10 October 2025, with concept proposals presented by WH Stephens/Kennedy Fitzgerald Architects and Council officers. Feedback was largely positive.

Both projects have since progressed into the formal planning process (PAN/PACC).

Ongoing Communications

Regular updates will continue via the Bangor Waterfront ezine and the Council's engagement platform GoVocal, providing transparent, accessible information and opportunities for feedback across the programme.

Member Update – Public Queries

Following the initial public information sessions, several queries were received and responded to by officers in relation to Pickie Fun Park. Some queries have subsequently been raised with the Minister (DfC) by residents. Officers will continue to engage constructively and provide factual responses through the appropriate channels.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended the Council notes this report.