

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

29 January 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 5 February 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

Reports for Approval

3. Proposed Business Improvement Districts for Bangor - Update Report (report attached)
4. Sea Bangor Update 2026 (report attached)

Reports for Noting

5. Arts Service Programme 2026/27 (report attached)
6. AND Experiences, Walks and Tours End of Season report 2025/26 (report attached)
7. Destination Campaign Overview Spring and Autumn 2025 (report attached)
8. Update on Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2025/26 (report attached)
9. Place and Prosperity Directorate Budgetary Control Report - December 2025 (report attached)
10. Notices of Motion referred to Committee by Council – None

11. Any Other Notified Business

11.1. Update - Fringe Fleadh Event 2026

*****IN CONFIDENCE*****

Reports Delegated for Approval – (In confidence)

12. Delegated Authority to Place and Prosperity Committee 05 February 2026 – Variance Request Urban Regeneration Programme (requested at Council 28.1.26) (report attached)

Reports for Approval (In Confidence)

13. Local Economic Partnership Costed Action Plan (report attached)

14. Go Succeed (report attached)

15. War Years Remembered Update report (report attached)

16. Supporting Thriving High Streets Glow Up Grant – Update and Variance Request (report attached)

17. Supporting Thriving High Streets – Clean City & Tidy Towns Proposal (report attached)

Report for Noting (In Confidence)

18. LMP Update (report attached)

MEMBERSHIP OF PLACE AND PROSPERITY COMMITTEE (16 MEMBERS)

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

Unclassified

3

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

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	05 February 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Regeneration
Date of Report	19 January 2026
File Reference	
Legislation	Business Improvement Districts Act (Northern Ireland) 2013
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Proposed Business Improvement Districts for Bangor - Update
Attachments	

Background

Members will recall that the Department for Communities (DfC) and the Council awarded the Bangor BID Steering Group a contract for funding to develop a proposed Business Improvement District (BID) to ballot stage.

The BID Steering Group has been working towards meeting the goals outlined in the terms and conditions of their Letter of Offer, as part of the process of preparing the BID proposal for ballot.

Update

Council Officers have continued to provide on-going support to the BID Steering Group. This support has included officer engagement, ongoing advice, and the provision of resources. The Steering Group meets with officers approximately every two months, or more frequently if required, in line with the Contract for Funding. The Steering Group also provides quarterly progress reports to Council officers.

Not Applicable

4

The BID Steering Group continues to work in accordance with the regulatory timeframe outlined in the Business Improvement Districts Act (Northern Ireland) 2013, as confirmed by DfC.

BID Regulatory Time Frame	
Consultation period 6 months (25 weeks): newsletters, meetings, social media, press etc.	
Notice to Department of Communities and Ards & NDBC	At least 98 days (14 weeks) before request to instruct ballot holder
BID proposals sent to ANDBC; with a request they instruct the ballot holder to conduct ballot	At least 70 days (10 weeks) before Day of Ballot
Ballot list and wording documents sent to ballot holder	At least 56 days (8 weeks) before Day of Ballot
Publication of notice of ballot with copy sent to DfC (2)	At least 49 days (7 weeks) before Day of Ballot
Despatch of Ballot papers	At least 42 days (6 weeks) before day of ballot
Final day for eligible voters to appoint proxies to cast their ballot	At least 10 days (2 weeks) before day of ballot
Issue of Replacement Ballot Papers (3)	(no later than) 3 working days before day of ballot
Close of Ballot	Day of ballot (postal vote closes at 5pm)
Declaration of Result	Within 7 days of the counting of votes

Progress since last report

- BID Steering Group application for a business bank account has been accepted and final administrative steps are under way.
- A BID Project Officer has been appointed, commencing employment on 5 January 2026.

Next Steps

The BID Steering Group will continue to work towards the regulatory timeline outlined above. Given the length of time required to complete all statutory stages, it is now proposed that the Council submit a letter of variance to DfC seeking to extend the approved project timeline from 31 March 2026 to 31 March 2027.

Council officers have also secured budget provision for the 2026/27 financial year to allow for exploration of a potential second BID. Officers will engage with local

Not Applicable

5

Chambers of Trade through the newly established Local Action Groups to consider this further.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council agrees to the submission of a Letter of Variance Request to DfC seeking an extension of the project timeline for the proposed Bangor Business Improvement District.

Unclassified

6

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

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	05 February 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Tourism, Arts and Heritage
Date of Report	12 January 2026
File Reference	TD189
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below: Screening Number 419 issued and in process
Subject	Sea Bangor Update 2026
Attachments	

Background

As part of an annual review of Sea Bangor the independent market research conducted at the 2025 event has been assessed by officers. Outlined below are some findings that are pertinent to the planning for the 2026 event.

The main audience for this event is family or friends and family groups, with 62% of visitors from Bangor and a dwell time of an average 2 hours.

Visitor numbers at 10,000 were significantly lower than previous years, poor weather over both days resulted in the cancellation of 'on water' activity and some other elements of programming. Therefore, a full review of programming to consider issues such as weatherproofing and authenticity will be being carried out.

Other commentary suggests that the event needs to refocus on its maritime theme and to connect with more local providers.

In order to extend the footprint of the event and broaden its appeal, officers have been working with PSNI, Traffic Management and Council Licensing Service to

Not Applicable

7

explore the possibility of pedestrianising the area from Quay Street car park to the roundabout in front of the Nines Hotel. This would enable the relocation of the food trucks, normally situated on the Pier, allowing freer access and less congestion on the Pier and the introduction of some authentic maritime activities.

The pedestrianised area would add to the 'festival' feel and extend the existing footprint of the event. This concept will now be developed to include consultation with local businesses.

The current successful passport initiative would form part of the festival weekend with traders being encouraged to join in the maritime theme. Officers will work with participants to ensure an even spread of activities and develop more innovative activities. They will also work with the participating traders to mark out their premises with a Sea Bangor 'marker' for ease of identification and produce a map to guide visitors around the city.

Opportunity

The Events team has been approached by the Royal Navy with the opportunity for the Council to participate in a nationwide initiative being held in 2026.

Turn to Starboard and the Invictus Games is launching 'Full Circle' a 2,000-nautical-mile circumnavigation of the UK by two tall ships. Full Circle is a 12-week sailing expedition carrying the Invictus Games Flag around the UK ahead of Birmingham 2027. Two traditionally rigged tall ships – Pellew and Spirit of Falmouth – will undertake the 2,000-nautical-mile journey, calling at ports across all four nations.

The voyage will carry the inspirational message of the Games through the Invictus flag as it is carried from Vancouver, Canada to the UK to join the Full Circle team's expedition, marking a year to the games commencing in Birmingham. The epic adventure will begin on 17 March 2026, departing from Falmouth and travelling anticlockwise around the UK before returning to Falmouth on 11 June 2026. The journey will build momentum ahead of the official one-year-to-go until Invictus Games Birmingham 2027 event in July 2026. For further information see <https://www.turntostarboard.co.uk/full-circle>

The two ships are scheduled to arrive in Bangor on Friday 22 May and stay until Monday 25 May (Bank Holiday Monday). The Royal Navy would be active participants in this event and are putting in requests to Headquarters for support in the form of the Royal Marine Band and a P2000 vessel. Full details of the programme need to be finalised, but the officers have been advised by event managers, Turn to Starboard, that there are opportunities for members of the public to have tours of the ships and the intention is to host local veterans at a function on board.

In order to maximise this opportunity both in terms of visual spectacle, maritime heritage and PR attached to being part of such a worthy national programme, officers are proposing maintaining the same weekend as Sea Bangor 2025 to coincide with the ships' arrival i.e. 23 and 24 May 2026.

Not Applicable

The chosen weekend also marks the 110th anniversary of the Battle of Jutland, a significant date in Bangor’s military history, after which Barry Bingham received the Victory Cross. Officers can further explore how to mark this occasion as part of the weekend programme, with the support of the Royal Navy.

When planning and programming this event, officers will be cognisant of the continuing work at the Waterfront and will consider the impact of parking, attendee arrival and how best this can be managed.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council approves the proposed programming and dates for Sea Bangor 2026 outlined within the report.

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	05 February 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Tourism, Arts and Heritage
Date of Report	09 January 2026
File Reference	ART 08/02 26
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 Service Programme 2026/27
Attachments	

Introduction

As Members will be aware the Arts and Heritage Service now reports to the Place and Prosperity Committee. The Arts Service offers a comprehensive annual programme of activity that includes events and festivals, creative classes, exhibitions, music, theatre, talks and outreach activity (as per Annual Report presented to the Place and Prosperity Committee in October 2025).

The activity aligns to two Corporate Plan priorities: Social and Economic and specifically outcomes four and five:

- A vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors
- Safe, welcoming and inclusive communities that are flourishing.

Not Applicable

10

Programming takes place at Ards Arts Centre with additional events in other Borough venues, for example Studio 1A, Space Theatre, The Imperial and the Walled Garden in Bangor and in partnership with Portico in Portaferry.

Arts Festivals

The below list of festivals is delivered by the Arts Service on an annual basis. The festivals include a combination of free to attend and paid for activities/events.

- Ards International Guitar Festival
- Creative Peninsula – visual art/craft
- Aspects Literature Festival
- Ards Puppet Festival – children/family friendly
- Leid AND Lairn Festival – Ulster-Scots

The above festivals attract c.10,000 attendees per annum with an overall budget of £114,000 with c.£27,000 generated from ticket sales.

The summary table at the end of the reports sets out the schedule for 2026/27. All events, festivals and arts programming are promoted actively throughout the year with support from the Communications and Marketing team's dedicated Corporate Communication Marketing Assistant (Arts and Heritage) with a focus on PR and social media. [What's On | AND Culture](#)

Arts Programme

The annual programme at Ards Arts Centre focuses on attracting footfall and engaging a regular/repeat visitor. This is achieved through programming term-time creative classes covering a range of topics including different painting and drawing skills, calligraphy, textiles, ceramics and floral art. In addition, two gallery spaces showing monthly exhibitions provide visitors with something new on a regular basis. Exhibitions are by application process or by direct approach by Officers and showcase a variety of local, community interest, emerging, established and touring works by groups and individuals. Following a recent call-out, all galleries are programmed until early 2027.

Regular music programming occurs monthly at Friday Night Live concerts at Ards Arts Centre and quarterly/seasonal music events take place at the Chamber at Bangor Castle. Theatre events take place at local theatre venues when appropriate and when venues are available. In addition, an annual Arts Night takes place at North Down Museum.

Outreach programming takes place where viable with summer schemes, ad-hoc theatre events, professional development sessions and a regular Aspects Festival Club all taking place in external venues. The outreach activity coupled with an audience development Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Portico ensures equity of geographical access for the arts.

Summary of activity 2026/27

Not Applicable

11

Ards International Guitar Festival	15-19 April 2026	Various/Newtownards
Term 1 Creative Classes/Workshops	May-June 2026	Ards Arts Centre
ForM Sculpture Exhibition	1-30 June 2026	Walled garden/ Bangor
Summer Schemes x 2	July-August 2026	Ards/Donaghadee
Creative Peninsula Festival	30 Jul-9 Aug 2026	Ards Arts Centre
Term 2 Creative Classes/Workshops	Sept-Dec 2026	Ards Arts Centre
Aspects Literature Festival	24 Sept- 4 Oct 2026	Various/Bangor
Ards International Puppet Festival	25-26 Oct 2026	Ards Arts Centre
Leid AND Lairn Festival	End Oct-Nov 2026	Various boroughwide
Creative Peninsula Christmas Fayre	4-5 Dec 2026	Ards Arts Centre
Term 3 Creative Classes/Workshops	Jan-Mar 2027	Ards Arts Centre
Young Aspects Festival	26-28 Feb 2027	Various/Bangor
Arts Night at the Museum	19 March 2027	North Down Museum

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council notes this report.

Unclassified

12

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

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	05 February 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Tourism, Arts and Heritage
Date of Report	12 January 2026
File Reference	TO/EV92
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	AND Experiences and Walks and Tours Programme End of Season Report 2025/26
Attachments	Appendix 1 - AND Experiences and Walks and Tours 2025/26 Appendix 2 - AND Walks and Tours 2026/27

Background

Throughout 2025/26, as part of the AND Experiences and Walks and Tours Programmes, the Tourism Service planned 12 Experiences and 17 Walks and Tours for the season. These mostly take place from April to September each year.

Experience AND Programme 2025/26

In collaboration with existing tourism-focussed businesses, alongside other local businesses interested in diversifying into the visitor/tourism market, the Tourism team delivered a series of new or enhanced Experiences in 2025/26.

These were programmed following an Expression of Interest application process where those successful can develop and operate a pilot experience at zero or limited

Not Applicable

financial risk to themselves. The total Council budget associated with the Experience Programme is £6,000.

Between April 2025 and February 2026, 12 Experiences were programmed. However, due to some Experiences lacking sufficient sales to proceed, and a lack of commitment demonstrated from one business, a total of six experiences have been delivered at the time of writing the report (one is programmed for February and another one, which offers a variety of dates, is still available for bookings until the end of March). These Experiences ranged from 'on the water' to craft and food and drink and at various locations throughout the Borough (see Appendix 1 for full list).

In relation to the six experiences completed, a total of 124 tickets were available with 102 tickets sold, equating to 82%. Of these, 35% were 'Out of Borough' (OoB) participants from, GB, ROI as well as rest of NI. Every experience has received positive feedback to date.

Industry Day

Ticket sales from the 25/26 programme generated sufficient income to enable the Tourism service to deliver its annual Tourism Industry Day hosted at The Clandeboye Lodge Hotel on 14 October 2025 with 80 delegates attending. The day offered opportunities for businesses to be guided on the theme 'The Power of Storytelling' with five speakers presenting on how storytelling can enhance a tourism businesses/experience. Speakers were from a range of NI tourism related businesses including Tourism NI (TNI) and the Chief Executive of Tourism Ireland. A networking session was held to close the day. Feedback received was extremely positive.

AND Experience Programme 2026/2027

During 2025/26, a review was conducted on the previous 2024/25 season and 2025/26 'in season' for 2026/27 planning programme purposes. This was to ensure it was 'fit for purpose' and delivered against its aim; "To increase the capacity of local tourism providers and develop a portfolio of quality sustainable visitor experiences, that will be attractive to our target markets encouraging more Out of Borough (OoB) visitors and spend".

During the 2025/26 programme, Officers acknowledged that several Experiences were cancelled due to low ticket sales and that the quality and content of the Experience was not attracting interest from the market. The first review recommendation for 2026/27 programme planning included requirement that Experiences would align with the Tourism NI Embrace a Giant Spirit (EAGS) brand with the opportunity for national promotion.

Another recommendation was that the programme was to become more proactive in its approach by identifying gaps in the Council's current product portfolio and programme experiences accordingly.

In 2026/27 there will be two strands to the programme delivered through an Expression of Interest (EOI) process.

Not Applicable

14

Strand one outputs include a minimum of six EAGS level Experiences programmed to fill the identified product gaps: 'On the Water' activity; Culture/Music/Heritage and Food and Drink. Each successful business will also be offered up to four mentoring sessions. The Experiences are required to run between April 2026 – March 2027. Strand two will offer the opportunity for 30 businesses to attend a series of six training workshops to support businesses at all levels of experience development. This will be delivered February to May 2026 with subjects including.

1. Market Opportunities and Customer Segments
2. Aligning with the Embrace a Giant Spirit Brand
3. Ideas Generation and Uniqueness
4. Customer Journey Mapping
5. Story Crafting for Experience Design
6. Commercialising and Selling Your Story

The EOI was launched on 5 January 2026 with closing date of 25 January 2026. It was promoted through various Council ezines, local press, contact lists and social media. The process is not concluded at the time of writing the report. Following the assessment process, businesses will be selected to participate in the pilots or offered the Strand Two element.

AND Walks and Tours Programme 2025/26

Walks and tours took place across the Borough from May through to New Year's Day with two walks in Newtownards and Donaghadee.

A total of 384 tickets were available with 316 sold, equating to 82%. Of these 26% were OoB including visitors from Australia, USA, France, GB, ROI and rest of N.I.

Aiming to attract a wide variety of visitors to the borough a diverse range of themed walks and tours including, horticultural, historical, Christian heritage, dog friendly and boat trips with storytelling and music were offered throughout the Borough. The programme continues to align and complement the two main food and drink festivals in summer and autumn. For a full listing of the 2025/26 programme see Appendix 1.

During the 2025 season a review of the Walks and Tours programme was undertaken. Recommendations for the programme were identified and have since been incorporated into planning. These include cognisance of wider Council availability of tours/walks by other services so as not to duplicate or compete, inclusion of new tour guides as available and relevant, more robust evaluation processes to be put in place, review of OoB target and inclusion of more food/drink related tours (to be dealt with via the Experience Programme).

To assist with increasing the number of local tour guides in ANDBC, with the longer-term goal of more tours being offered independently, the Tourism service ran an OCN Level 2 Tour Guiding course via SERC at a value of £3,800 met from existing budgets. 12 participants registered for the course with 12 short "taster" tours delivered during the summer season in the borough, examples of tours included:

- Bangor's Shortest Pilgrimage
- Behind the Garden Wall - Victorian Secrets in Bloom

Not Applicable

15

- A Guided Walking Tour of Portavo and Orlock
- Hearts of Bangor – History of The Old Market House
- Tour of Bangor Castle Grounds and Walled Garden

There were 83 tickets sold at £4 each with total proceeds at £332 going towards the Mayor's chosen charities.

Subsequently a number of these newly qualified guides have formed a Tour Guide Collective called "Coast and Country Tours", the Tourism team is hopeful several members will deliver local independent tours, promoted by ANDBC, during the coming season.

AND Walks and Tours Programme 2026/27

The 2026/27 Walks and Tours programme will begin in May and finish on New Year's Day 2027. The programme will seek to complement wider Council and events activity. Two new walks are to be delivered by two of the newly qualified OCN Level 2 tour guides. The "pilot" guided walks have been programmed in May, to give the guides the opportunity to deliver the walks independently throughout the summer season. See Appendix 2 for draft 2026/27 programme.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes this report and appendices.

Appendix 1 - AND Experiences and Walks and Tours 2025/26

16

Experiences Programme 2025/26

Experience	Month	Location
Macha Workshops*	April	Kircubbin
Strangford Sea Safari	May	Whiterock
Couple's Electric Adventure Escape	Various dates offered through to end March 26	Whiterock
Braiding with a Lucet	May	Kircubbin
Create your own Spring Garden Box	May	Millisle
Deadly Tales of Bangor – A Wartime whodunit	June	Bangor
A Survivor's Tale: The Story of The Princess Victoria*	June	Donaghadee
Stories and Supper at The Ulster Folk Museum	September	Cultra
Forge and Feast with Paul Cunningham	September	Helen's Bay
Seacourt Supper Club*	October	Bangor
Christmas All Wrapped Up*	November	Bangor
Celtic Saints: A Journey Through Time and Tradition	February	Bangor

*cancelled

Walks and Tours Programme 2025/26

Walks and Tours	Dates	Locations
Bangor Bay Boat Tours	May	Bangor Bay
Bangor Bay Boat Tours	May	Bangor Bay
Gardener's Delight	May	Ballywalter
Trad and Tide	June	Bangor Bay
Trad and Tide	June	Portaferry, Strangford Lough
Summer Solstice Voyage of Discovery	June	Portaferry, Strangford Lough
Gothic Abbey and Physic Garden Tour	July	Greyabbey
Newtownards Historical Walking Tour	July	Newtownards
Rosemount Estate Garden Tour	July	Greyabbey
Paws for Gin	August	Donaghadee
Trad and Tide	August	Bangor Bay
Step Back in Time	September	Bangor
Spirits of the East Coast	October	Donaghadee
Donaghadee NYD Walking Tour	January	Donaghadee
Newtownards NYD Walking Tour	January	Newtownards

Appendix 2 - Draft AND Walks and Tours 2026/27

17

Tour name	Month	Location
Hearts of Bangor (New*)	May	Bangor
Gardener's Delight	May	Ballywalter
Sea Bangor walking tour (New*) (Sea Bangor event)	May tbc	Bangor
Jenny Watts boat trip with storytelling (Sea Bangor event)	May	Bangor Bay
Ocean Crest boat trip with music and storytelling	June	Bangor Bay
St Brendan boat trip with music and storytelling	June	Portaferry, Strangford Lough
Historical Tour of Newtownards	July	Newtownards
Rosemount House and Garden Tour	July	Greyabbey
Gothic Abbey and Physic Garden Tour	August	Greyabbey
Paws for Gin	August	Donaghadee
Spirits of the East Coast walking tour	October	Donaghadee
New Year's Day Walk	January	Bangor
New Year's Day Walk	January	Donaghadee

Unclassified

18

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

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	05 February 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Tourism, Arts and Heritage
Date of Report	20 January 2026
File Reference	TO/MAR4
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below: n/a evaluation report
Subject	Destination Campaign Overview Spring and Autumn 2025
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Campaign Visual Asset Examples 2025

As an output of the Integrated Tourism Regeneration Development Strategy, the Council agreed to the delivery of a Borough Marketing and Communications Strategy (BMCS) with the aim to create greater awareness of Ards and North Down as a visitor destination. The objective being to convey a clear proposition presenting Ards and North Down as an appealing visitor destination, targeting potential visitors, increasing revenue and supporting jobs.

The roll out of biannual destination campaigns in spring and autumn by the Council's Communications and Marketing Service is a key deliverable of the BMCS. In 2025, those campaigns were delivered in March and October/ November (the quieter shoulder seasons before and after peak summer months) and guided by Tourism Northern Ireland's consumer sentiment to target 'most likely to travel' segments in NI domestic market (Aspiring Families), ROI market (Active Maximisers), as well as the GB market (short breaks) holiday makers.

Not Applicable

19

Both multi-channel digital-led marketing campaigns were designed to raise awareness of Ards and North Down as an appealing destination that was easily accessible, offering value-for-money short breaks.

Campaign Aims

1. Promote AND tourism industry offers aligned to discoverni (Tourism NI) and visitardsandnorthdown (VisitAND) websites.
2. Increase awareness of AND as an appealing place to book short breaks. Driving traffic and engagement to VisitAND website and social channels.

Overview

The two campaigns were designed to support the industry by directing audiences to book offers and inspire potential visitors about what to see and do on a short break in Ards and North Down. Simultaneously, the campaigns generated strong growth of Visit AND's online following. A total of 35 local tourism provider offers were promoted.

Messaging delivered clear and compelling reasons to visit, with a call-to-action to book offers and enter the campaign competition for a chance to win £300 off a stay in the Borough. A total marketing investment of £59,000 covered creative concepts, asset creation, video and photography as well as all campaign advertising placement.

The campaigns generated strong reach driving an additional 44,622 webpage views, 303,000 YouTube video views and 850,026 via audio ads. They also stimulated visitAND social media audience growth with 752 new followers an increase of 5%, and strong engagement including 2,287 competition entries (up 64% on prior year). Long term positive impact is evident with 140 new people signing up to receive ongoing regular marketing communications from Council as a direct result of the campaigns.

Overall, the two campaigns generated a total of 6.4million impressions/opportunities-to-see an increase of 100,000 impressions compared to the prior year for the equivalent budget.

Reach was further extended via out-of-home at transport hubs including Connolly Station Dublin and Grand Central Station Belfast, shopping centres. The campaigns also leveraged the Council's industry partners to reach an even broader audience including Visit Belfast Regional Partnership with presence in the Visit Belfast Welcome Centre – a key gateway for visitors to the city.

1. Spring 2025 – 'Your next adventure is in Ards and North Down' Campaign

This multi-channel campaign ran across traditional channels including high visibility out-of-home and via radio as well as digital channels such as YouTube, Spotify, META (Facebook, Instagram), Google Search and Display advertising organic social media, web, email. The campaigns also generated digital and print features in Rof publications Irish Independent and The Gloss helping to further extend destination awareness in this key target market.

Not Applicable

20

2. Autumn 2025 – ‘Closer Than You Think’ Campaign

This campaign focused on the borough being easy to get to and a great destination to explore, and ran across traditional channels including radio, print advertising, and out-of-home (including Visit Belfast Welcome Centre, Grand Central Station, Connelly Street Station Dublin, and other high footfall sites in NI and ROI including shopping centres and Applegreen sites). Digital channels included Google Search, Google Display, META Facebook and Instagram advertising, organic social, video, web, email, and via Belfast Live, Dublin Live, Irish Times, and whatsonni.

Digital Benchmarking- Above Industry Average

Digital Marketing allows for accurate measurement of visibility and engagement. The digital-led approach for these destination awareness campaigns ensures that content is precisely targeted to the key audiences. Statistics for both campaigns show engagement levels such as click through rates (CTR)* across a range of digital channels which are well above industry benchmark levels.

Both campaigns generated CTR well above benchmark levels.

- META advertising (Spring) achieved an average CTR of 1.22%, outperforming the industry average ad CTR of 0.73%,
- YouTube video content achieved a View Rate of 56.23% versus an industry benchmark of 20%.
- Google Display advertising 0.80% versus an industry benchmark of 0.53% and Google Search advertising CTR 8.86% well above the industry benchmark of 4.68%.
- The autumn digital advertising campaign generated an average CTR of 5.57%, well above the 0.9% industry average.

These results demonstrate that both campaigns resonated with the target audience and that the content was compelling and well-targeted, encouraging a significant portion of users to act by clicking through for more information.

*Note Key terms – Reach = seen / heard, Impressions = appeared, CTR = click through rate = percentage of people seeing the advert and clicked to find out more by visiting the campaign web pages.

Local tourism providers featured gave feedback about the positive impact of these campaigns:

‘As an activity provider we cannot reach all potential visitors alone. Support from council led tourist campaigns is a vital tool in our marketing. Their support makes visitors aware of what we have to offer for a local day out.’

‘We were delighted to be involved in Ards and North Down Borough Council’s destination marketing campaign, which provided a fantastic platform to showcase our eFoiling water activity package alongside the area’s outstanding accommodation, attractions and experiences. The campaign significantly increased our reach, particularly within the ROI market, allowing us to connect with new audiences and attract visitors from further afield to enjoy short breaks in this stunning coastal destination’.

Not Applicable

21

Summary

Together, these two campaigns effectively promoted a total of 35 offers for tourism providers based in the Borough and generated 6.4 million digital / impressions / opportunities-to-see. As a direct result of the campaign an additional 43,967 visitors were driven to the visitardsandnorthdown.com website and the audience following on VisitAND social media channels increased by 5%.

The main objective – building awareness through creating a strong profile of the Borough as an appealing visitor destination to potential visitors – was achieved with strong reach across NI, ROI and GB audiences. Tourism providers across the borough were showcased who praised the promotional work as a positive way to showcase the borough's destination appeal. The fully integrated digital-led approach continues to effectively reach a larger visitor audiences across target markets. It is anticipated that the output of that greater awareness will be a positive impact on visitor interest and bookings.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council notes the report.



Ards and
North Down
Borough Council

Appendix 1

2025 Spring and Autumn Campaign Visual Asset Examples

Ards and North Down Borough Council - Communications and Marketing Service
www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk

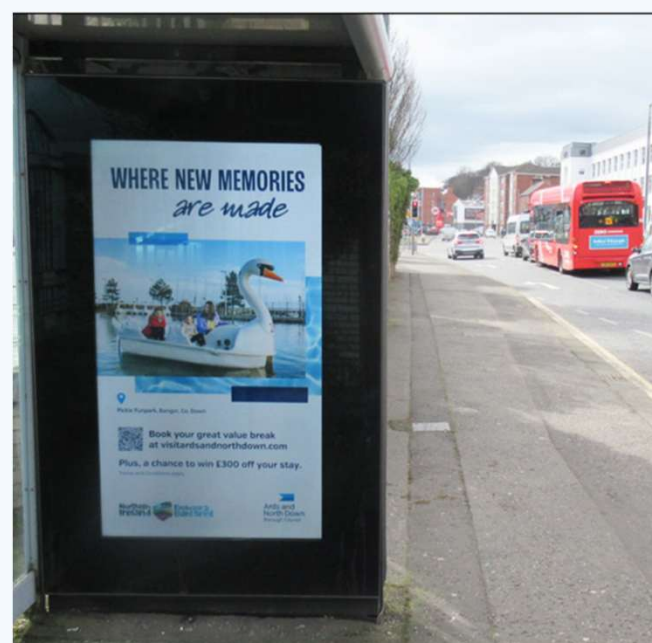


Spring 2025 – Visual Asset Examples

WHERE THE LAND
meets the lough

Click here to book your great value break in Ards and North Down

Strangford Lough, Co. Down



WHERE NEW MEMORIES
are made

Donaghadee Lighthouse, Co. Down

YOUR NEXT ADVENTURE IS IN
Ards and North Down

Hugging the shores of Strangford Lough in Northern Ireland, Ards and North Down offers visitors a unique blend of coastal beauty, serene countryside and charming towns to explore, all within an hour from the heart of the bustling capital Belfast.

Where the land meets the lough: Ards and North Down offers a wealth of activities for lovers of the great outdoors, with 155 miles of scenic coastline, there's no better place to take to the water and enjoy boat trips, kayaking, paddleboarding, or a fishing. For those seeking a slower pace, take a stroll along the pier at Donaghadee Lighthouse, a trip up to Scribble Tower in Newtownards to enjoy the picturesque views of the lough or visit Mount Stewart's beautifully maintained gardens.

Where new memories are made: Making memories with the little ones? Wonder awaits at Exploris Aquarium and Seal Sanctuary in Portlerry. Step back in time at the Ulster Transport Museum, or visit Puffin Park, one of the top visitor attractions in Northern Ireland, with the Puffin Puffer steam train, giant gull seals, children's electric cars and an 18-hole mini-golf course.

Where every bite tells a story: Savour the tastes of the region's many markets, cafes, artisan food shops and award-winning restaurants, with menus featuring the finest locally-sourced produce: from seasonal Comber Earlies potatoes (with PGI status), to Portlerry Prawns, Strangford Lough Langoustines, and grass-fed rain-fed beef. Wash it all down by dropping into one of our local pubs, and enjoy the warmest of welcomes and a 'best cheer' of local ale, gin or whiskey, always served with our world-renowned hospitality and a smile.

Where the past meets the present: Steeped in history and tourism with creativity, there's so much waiting to be discovered across Ards and North Down. Located in Newtownards, Ards Arts Centre has two professional galleries, showcasing local, national and international artists. North Down Museum is located in the beautiful estate island of Bangor Castle and welcomes visitors to chart the history of the region. Kids are also in for a treat, with the chance to experience life as a Viking in the replica longhouse before grabbing a young explorer's backpack to discover the hidden wildlife of Castle Park.

What better way to end your time in Ards and North Down than a relaxing and restorative night's rest? The region offers a wide range of accommodation, from distinctive self-catering options, cosy guest houses, glamping, camping and luxury hotels.

Book your next adventure at www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/spring2025 and enter the competition for a chance to win £300 off your stay. Terms and conditions apply.

Irish Independent News Opinion Business Sport Life Style Entertainment

Irish News Dublin Local News World Farming Latest News Subscriber Exclusives

Home / StoryPlus

Ards and North Down: The ultimate destination for seaside stays and scenic days

From breathtaking coastline scenes to charming towns, this region has something for everyone.

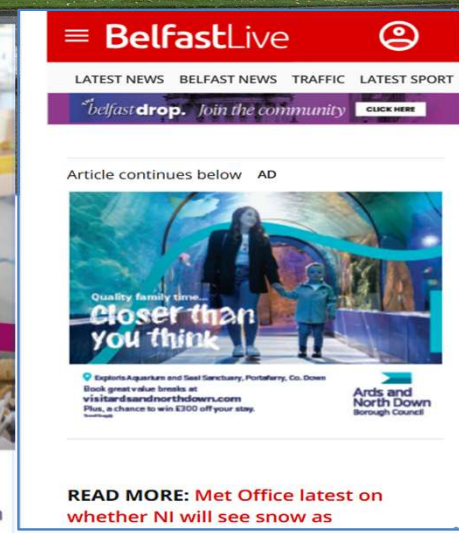
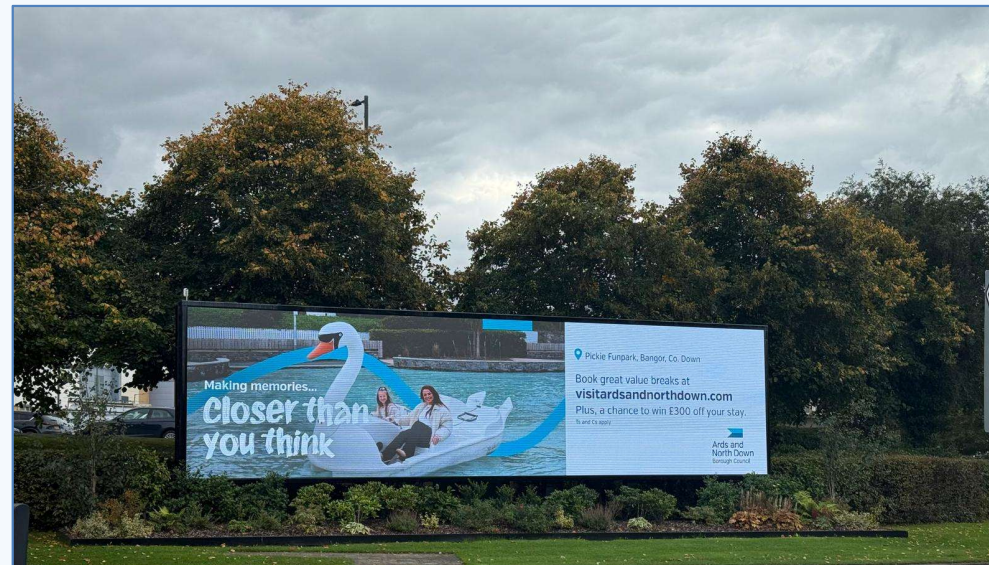
WHERE NEW MEMORIES
are made

WWT Castle Esplanade Wetland Centre, Comber, Co. Down

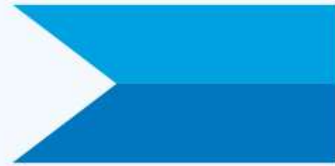
Ards and North Down Borough Council - Communications and Marketing Service
www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk



Autumn 2025 – Visual Asset Examples



READ MORE: Met Office latest on whether NI will see snow as



Ards and North Down Borough Council

Unclassified

26

ITEM 8**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	05 February 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Economic Growth
Date of Report	20 January 2026
File Reference	RDP19
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Update on Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2025/26
Attachments	

Background

As members will be aware the Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2025/26 was launched on Thursday 25 September 2025.

Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2025/26 (RBDGS)

The RBDGS is funded through the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs 'Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation' (TRPSI) Programme and is delivered in partnership with local Councils.

Eligible rural businesses can apply for capital assistance of 50% up to the value of £7,500 for the purchase of capital equipment which will help businesses to enhance sustainability and growth and, in many cases, create employment opportunities which in turn will strengthen the rural economy. Applicants are required to provide a minimum of 50% match-funding.

Not Applicable

27

The scheme opened for applications on 25 September 2025 and closed at 12.00pm midday on Thursday 30 October 2025. Mandatory pre-application workshops were held on the 01, 03 and 06 October 2025 with 65 attendees in total.

A total of 42 applications were received. 5 of which were deemed ineligible as they did not follow procurement requirements. An assessment panel convened on the 08 and 09 December 2025:

- 37 applications were assessed.
- 2 applications were rejected as they did not achieve the minimum threshold.
- 35 applications were deemed eligible and proceeded to Letter of Offer.

Total Eligible Project Cost = £350,975.58

Total Grant Awarded = £155,844.88

Successful applicants were required to attend a mandatory Letter of Offer Workshop outlining the terms and conditions and the claims and monitoring process. Workshops were held on the 16, 17 and 18 December 2025.

All Letters of Offer were accepted by the successful applicants and projects are now underway. All works outlined in the Letter of Offer must be completed and paid no later than the 23 March 2026.

2024/25 v 2025/26 Scheme Uptake

	2024/2025	2025/2026	Variance
Maximum Level of Grant	£4,999	£7,500	+50%
Minimum Match Funding Contribution	50%	50%	N/A
Applications Submitted	36	42	+17%
Successful Applications	31	35	+13%
Grant Award	£101,736	£155,844	+53%

It should be noted that of the 35 successful applications, 17 of these have not received funding under the RBDGS in the past.

Grant Award to ANDBC as the Delivery Agent for RBDGS

DAERA has confirmed that a grant of up to a maximum amount of £14,230.02 will be made available to the Council towards the cost of services to be carried out by it in connection with the delivery of the RBDGS.

Not Applicable

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes this report.

Unclassified

29

ITEM 9

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	05 February 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Finance
Date of Report	23 January 2026
File Reference	FIN23
Legislation	Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Place and Prosperity Directorate Budgetary Control Report - December 2025
Attachments	

The Place and Prosperity Budgetary Control Report covers the 9-month period 1 April 2025 to 31st December 2025 and reflects the recent Organisational changes. The net cost of the Directorate (excluding Planning and Building Control) is showing an underspend of £304k (6.5%) – box A on page 3.

Explanation of Variance

The Place and Prosperity Directorate's budget performance is further analysed on page 3 into 3 key areas:

Report	Type	Variance	Page
Report 2	Payroll Expenditure	£185k favourable	3
Report 3	Goods & Services Expenditure	£115k favourable	3
Report 4	Income	£4k favourable	3

Not Applicable

30

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

Type	Variance £'000	Comment
Payroll	(185)	Mainly due to vacant posts during the first 9 months. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capital Development (£66k) Economic Growth (£98k)
Goods & Services		
Economic Growth	(67)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic Development (£91K) – mainly underspend in Vacancy & Derelict Buildings Regeneration - £44k overspend – mainly from shop front grants
Capital Development	(34)	Revenue spend on major capital projects less than budget.
Income		
Economic Growth	(4)	

Not Applicable

31

REPORT 1 BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT					
Period 9 - December 2025					
	Year to Date Actual	Year to Date Budget	Variance	Annual Budget	Variance
	£	£	£	£	%
Place & Prosperity					
5100 Place and Prosperity HQ	291,763	325,900	(34,137)	425,100	(10.5)
5200 Economic Growth	1,415,143	1,590,800	(175,657)	2,899,000	(11.0)
5400 Tourism, Arts & Heritage	2,391,981	2,385,700	6,281	3,137,500	0.3
5500 Capital Development	247,252	347,400	(100,148)	641,100	(28.8)
Total	4,346,139	4,649,800	A (303,661)	7,102,700	(6.5)
REPORT 2 PAYROLL REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Place & Prosperity - Payroll					
5100 Place and Prosperity HQ	205,597	242,800	(37,203)	324,000	(15.3)
5200 Economic Growth	1,182,945	1,287,800	(104,855)	1,718,700	(8.1)
5400 Tourism, Arts & Heritage	1,320,170	1,296,900	23,270	1,711,300	1.8
5500 Capital Development	224,497	290,700	(66,203)	386,900	(22.8)
Total	2,933,210	3,118,200	B (184,990)	4,140,900	(5.9)
REPORT 3 GOODS & SERVICES REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Place & Prosperity - Goods & Services					
5100 Place and Prosperity HQ	86,165	83,100	3,065	101,100	3.7
5200 Economic Growth	657,563	724,500	(66,937)	1,687,800	(9.2)
5400 Tourism, Arts & Heritage	1,257,952	1,274,900	(16,948)	1,639,000	(1.3)
5500 Capital Development	22,755	56,700	(33,945)	254,200	(59.9)
Total	2,024,435	2,139,200	C (114,765)	3,682,100	(5.4)
REPORT 4 INCOME REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Place & Prosperity - Income					
5100 Place and Prosperity HQ	-	-	-	-	-
5200 Economic Growth	(425,365)	(421,500)	(3,865)	(507,500)	(0.9)
5400 Tourism, Arts & Heritage	(186,140)	(186,100)	(40)	(212,800)	(0.0)
5500 Capital Development	-	-	-	-	-
Totals	(611,506)	(607,600)	D (3,906)	(720,300)	(0.6)

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes this report.