

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

18 February 2026

Dear Sir/Madam

You are hereby invited to attend a hybrid Meeting (in person and via Zoom) of Ards and North Down Borough Council which will be held at the City Hall, The Castle, Bangor on **Wednesday, 25 February 2026 at 7.00pm.**

Yours faithfully

Michael Steele
Acting Chief Executive
Ards and North Down Borough Council

A G E N D A

1. Prayer
2. Apologies
3. Declarations of Interest
4. Mayor's Business
5. Mayor and Deputy Mayor Engagements for the Month of February 2026 (Copy to follow)
6. Minutes of Council meeting dated 28 January 2026 (Copy attached)
7. Minutes of Special Council meeting dated 28 January 2026 (Copy attached)
8. Minutes of Special Council meeting dated 10 February 2026 (Copy attached)
9. Minutes of Committees (Copies attached)
 - 9.1 Planning Committee dated 3 February 2026
 - 9.2 Environment Committee dated 4 February 2026
 - 9.3 Place and Prosperity Committee dated 5 February 2026
 - 9.3.1 Matters Arising - Event Proposal 2026 - Belfast Fleadh (Report attached)
 - 9.4 Corporate Services Committee dated 10 February 2026
 - 9.5 Active and Healthy Communities Committee dated 11 February 2026

9.5.1 Matters Arising – Item 10 – Ending Violence Against Women and Girls - Invite to Shared Island Event – 2 nominations (Verbal update)

10. Deputation Request from National Association of Councillors (NAC) (Report attached)
11. Request for Delegated Authority to Environment Committee - Approval of Ward Park Full Business Case (Report attached)
12. Sealing Documents
13. Transfer of Rights of Burial
14. Notice of Motion Status Report (Report attached)
15. Notices of Motion
- 15.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Alderman Adair and Councillor Edmund

That Council recognises the huge benefits to the Ards Peninsula and wider Borough of greater connectivity in terms of tackling isolation, boosting local business and enhancing tourism.

Furthermore, that Council is concerned about the increased traffic travelling along Ards Peninsula roads which could be better served by a fixed crossing between Portaferry and Strangford village and which may help in addressing congestion in other parts of the Borough and assist in improving road safety in roads within the Peninsula.

Council, therefore, agrees to write to The Minister Department for Infrastructure to request that she prioritises funding for a feasibility study into a bridge across Strangford Lough from Portaferry to Strangford village.

- 15.2 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Douglas and Alderman Cummings

To task officers to investigate and engage with other statutory agencies to work together to safely remove the fallen tree over the Enler River, Comber, which has been there since Storm Eowyn.

- 15.3 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Cochrane and Alderman Brooks

That this Council notes with deep concern the recent destruction caused to bushes, trees and wild grass in The Commons, Donaghadee.

Further to this, Council agrees to write to the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, calling upon him to designate The Commons, Donaghadee as either an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI), or another appropriate form of protected status, in order to help safeguard this important green space.

****IN CONFIDENCE****

16. Leisure Provision Procurement of Legal and Leisure Specialist Teams (Report attached)
17. Request for a licence at Carrowdore Playing Fields to facilitate works at Strangford Integrated College (Report attached)
18. Artificial pitch replacement at Aurora and Ward Park (Report attached)

MEMBERSHIP OF ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Alderman Adair	Councillor Harbinson
Alderman Armstrong-Cotter	Councillor Hennessy
Alderman Brooks	Councillor Hollywood
Alderman Cummings	Councillor S Irvine
Alderman Graham	Councillor W Irvine
Alderman McAlpine	Councillor Irwin
Alderman McRandal	Councillor Kennedy
Alderman McDowell	Councillor Kendall
Alderman McIlveen	Councillor Kerr
Alderman Smith	Councillor McBurney
Councillor Ashe	Councillor McClean
Councillor Blaney	Councillor McCollum (Mayor)
Councillor Boyle	Councillor McCracken
Councillor Brady	Councillor McKee
Councillor Cathcart	Councillor Moore (Deputy Mayor)
Councillor Chambers	Councillor Morgan
Councillor Cochrane	Councillor Newman
Councillor Douglas	Councillor Thompson
Councillor Edmund	Councillor Smart
Councillor Gilmour	Councillor Wray

**LIST OF MAYOR'S/DEPUTY MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS
FOR FEBRUARY 2026**

Monday 2 February

6.30 pm Visit from 6th Ards Beavers and Cubs, Church Street, Newtownards

Wednesday 4 February

11.30 am Celebration Event to mark the Acquisition of 'The Ballroom at Londonderry House' by Sir John Lavery, Mountstewart

1.00 pm King's Church Refurbishment Reopening, King's Church, Seacliff Road, Bangor

Thursday 5 February

10.00 am Jobs, Support & Training Fair, Bangor Aurora

Friday 6 February

11.00 am Morning Tea with Knit and Natter Group from Comber Library, Mayor's Parlour, City Hall, Bangor

Sunday 8 February

3.30 pm DEPUTY MAYOR - Service of Thanksgiving to mark 85th anniversary of the Air Training Corps (ATC) & 825 (Bangor) Squadron, St Andrews Church, Clandeboye Road, Bangor

Tuesday 10 February

10.30 am Radio Interview - Blair Mayne Bursary, Mayor's Parlour, City Hall, Bangor

1.00 pm First Day of Mayor's Cup, Ards Blair Mayne and Leisure Complex

7.30 pm Opening of the 'Building Boats at Ballyholme Exhibition', North Down Museum

Wednesday 11 February

10.00 am Care Day Breakfast, Mayor's Parlour, City Hall, Bangor

1.00 pm Connecting Families Event, Queen's Hall, Newtownards

Thursday 12 February

1.30 pm Final Day of Mayor's Cup, Ards Blair Mayne and Leisure Complex

7.00 pm Civic Reception for Bangor RBL 100th Anniversary, Council Chamber, City Hall, Bangor

Monday 16 February

12.00 noon Lunch with new High Sheriff, Dr Cairns, Mayor's Parlour, City Hall, Bangor

Tuesday 17 February

11.00 am Morning Tea with Holywood U3A, Mayor's Parlour, City Hall, Bangor

1.00 pm Lidl Northern Ireland: Celebrating Local Suppliers and Communities, Mayor's Parlour, City Hall, Bangor

6.00 pm Thank you reception for volunteers at Donaghadee Christmas Events, Tivoli Bar, Donaghadee

7.00 pm Civic Reception for Olive Leaf Royal Black Preceptory No 542 75th Anniversary, Council Chamber, City Hall, Bangor

Wednesday 18 February

12.30 pm Leisure Strategy Launch Event, Ards Blair Mayne and Leisure Complex

1.00 pm Visit to Mobile Digi Lab, Signal

2.00 pm Photo for March Job Fair, Ards Blair Mayne and Leisure Complex

6.00 pm Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Showcase Workshop, Signal Centre, Bangor

Thursday 19 February

10.00 am Morning Tea with Millisle Health and Wellbeing Group, Mayor's Parlour, City Hall, Bangor

1.30 pm Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Showcase Event, Clandeboye Lodge Hotel

7.00 pm Live Here Love Here Community Awards 2026, Belfast City Hall

Friday 20 February

3.00 pm Afternoon tea with Love Rathmore, Mayor's Parlour, City Hall, Bangor

Monday 23 February

7.00 pm Line Dancing with the Hub, Hamilton Road Hub

Tuesday 24 February

- 9.15 am BeeSafe Event, Ards Arena
- 11.00 am Photo – Launch of Sports Grants Programme, Mayor’s Parlour, City Hall, Bangor
- 1.30 pm PR Photo – Mayor’s Charity Concert, Mayor’s Parlour, City Hall, Bangor
- 2.00 pm Mayor’s Charity Committee, Mayor’s Parlour, City Hall, Bangor

Wednesday 25 February

- 10.00 am Student Council’s Schools Visit, Council Chamber, City Hall, Bangor
- 12.30 pm IIP Photo with Plaque, City Hall
- 1.00 pm Lunchtime meeting with Bangor Rotary Club, Bangor Golf Club

Thursday 26 February

- 11.00 am Surestart Health Fair, Bangor Library
- 1.00 pm Photo – Disability Employment and Support Day, Aurora
- 2.00 pm Blue plaque Unveiling to honour William Sharmon Crawford, Crawfordsburn Inn
- 7.00 pm DEPUTY MAYOR Launch of the Richard Croft Exhibition, Ards Arts Centre

Friday 27 February

- 10.00 am Morning Tea with Christmas Hamper Appeal Volunteers, Mayor’s Parlour, City Hall, Bangor
- 1.00 pm Visit from Consulate General – Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Mayor’s Parlour, City Hall, Bangor
- 7.30 pm DEPUTY MAYOR Visit from 6th Ards Scouts Group, Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards

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ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of Ards and North Down Borough Council was held at the City Hall, The Castle, Bangor on Wednesday 28 January 2026 commencing at 7.00pm.

In the Chair:	The Mayor (Councillor McCollum)	
Aldermen:	Adair	McAlpine
	Armstrong-Cotter	McRandal
	Brooks	McIlveen
	Cummings	Smith
	Graham	
Councillors:	Ashe	W Irvine
	Blaney	Kennedy
	Boyle	Kendall
	Brady	Kerr
	Cathcart	McBurney
	Chambers	McClellan
	Cochrane	McCracken
	Douglas	McKee
	Edmund	Moore
	Gilmour (Zoom)	Newman
	Harbinson	Thompson
	Hennessy	Smart
	S Irvine	Wray

Officers: Acting Chief Executive (M Steele), Acting Director of Corporate Services (C Jackson), Director of Environment (G Bannister), Director of Place and Prosperity (B Dorrian), Director of Active and Healthy Communities (A Faulkner), Democratic Services Manager (J Wilson) and Democratic Services Officer (H Loebnau)

1. PRAYER

The Mayor (Councillor McCollum) welcomed everyone to the meeting and it commenced with the Director of Environment reading the Council prayer.

NOTED.

2. APOLOGIES

The Mayor sought apologies and those were received from Alderman McDowell and Councillors Hollywood and Irwin.

NOTED.

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3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Mayor sought Declarations of Interest and none were made. The Mayor reminded everyone that Declarations of Interest could be made at any point in the meeting should the need arise.

NOTED.

4. MAYOR'S BUSINESS

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the first full Council meeting of the year. She reported that she had been delighted to read in the papers this month that nine of Ards and North Down citizens had been awarded in the New Years Honours list for dedicated public service, from charity to sport, education and health and welfare.

The list of recipients was as followed:

- Annette Elizabeth Beaney. For Charitable Service.
- Elizabeth Rose Hamilton. Security Guard, Stormont Castle. For Public Service.
- Rhys Joshua McClenaghan BEM. For services to Gymnastics.
- Dr Marilyn Avril Courtney McMullan (Marilyn Shanks). For services to Education in Northern Ireland.
- Elizabeth Anne Meehan. Patient Demographics Service Manager, Health and Social Care. For services to Healthcare.
- Richard Elliott Wright. Retired Police Superintendent. For services to the Welfare of Police Officers.
- Joanne Aicken. For Public Service.
- Veronica Dougherty. Personal Secretary, Northern Ireland Policing Board. For Public Service.
- John McMurrin. Building Supervisor, Donaghadee Primary School. For services to Education and to the community in Donaghadee.

On behalf of the Council, she extended to them her sincere congratulations.

NOTED.

5. MAYOR AND DEPUTY MAYOR ENGAGEMENTS FOR THE MONTH OF JANUARY 2026

(Appendix I)

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PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- List of Mayor's/Deputy Mayor engagements for the Month of January 2026.

The Mayor outlined her engagements for the month highlighting a number of them;

A Belonging Afternoon Tea had been a wonderful event which had brought together community groups from across the Borough to celebrate their contribution to 'Belonging' in the areas in which they resided. She had been struck by the groups' willingness to engage and the enthusiasm for the work they did.

Mayoral receptions had been held for Ards Rugby Club, Donaghadee Rugby Club and the Walking Football Club. Those sports groups had demonstrated how they brought inclusivity into action since they each included teams for all abilities and also for those with disabilities. The Walking Football Club had built momentum in recent months attracting players over the age of 60 and she considered it to be a great example and contribution to positive ageing.

The Mayor explained that she had also engaged with two PEACEPLUS programmes; Active and Able which was a programme for 16-24 year olds and was beneficial for young people and their mental, physical and social health. Secondly, the Beyond Belief Programme was one which brought together communities of faith in an effort to pool their resources in relation to their combined work against poverty as well as other forms of faith based social engagement.

The Mayor reported that she and Chief Executive had recently visited the Montalto Estate to witness the handover of the High Sheriffs. She praised the Borough's outgoing High Sheriff, Peter Leckey, and thanked him for his work with the Council and welcomed Dr Ivor Cairns into his new role and looked forward to working with him.

The Mayor had been delighted to attend the Freedom of the Borough Conferment on Rhys McClenaghan the previous weekend and thought that whole event had been a resounding success. She had thoroughly enjoyed getting to know Rhys better and described him as kind, humble, great and very funny and remarked that the Conferment would undoubtedly be the highlight of her Mayoral year. She thanked the Deputy Mayor for attending on the Sunday of the celebratory weekend which was a lovely complement to the conferment itself that had taken place on the Friday and Rhys' gymnastic skills were displayed alongside those of other high-level competitors. Some local children had also been invited to attend, and the Deputy Mayor had welcomed the opportunity to be part of that. The Mayor praised the organisation of the event, it had been creative, imaginative and had been carried out with great enthusiasm and was a worthy reflection of Rhys and his wonderful achievement.

Finally, the Mayor referred to the Holocaust Memorial event which had taken place the previous evening at Bangor Castle despite the stormy weather and she thanked those who had attended the commemoration which had been poignant and very moving.

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RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Graham, seconded by Councillor Thompson, that the information be noted.

6. MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING DATED 17 DECEMBER 2025

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the minutes be approved and adopted.

7. MINUTES OF COMMITTEES

7.1. Audit Committee dated 15 December 2025

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

Proposed by Councillor Thompson, seconded by Alderman Graham, that the minutes be approved and adopted.

Councillor Wray pointed out a minor typing error on page two of the minutes where it should read digitalisation 'of' title deeds and not 'if' title deeds.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Thompson, seconded by Alderman Graham, that the minutes be approved and adopted.

7.2. Environment Committee dated 7 January 2026

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Kendall, seconded by Councillor Harbinson, that the minutes be approved and adopted.

7.3. Place and Prosperity Committee dated 8 January 2026

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

Proposed by Councillor McCracken, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the minutes be approved and adopted.

In respect of Item 10 – Innovation Hub Site

Councillor Kendall indicated that she wished to raise the matter later in the meeting and in confidence.

In respect of Item 4 - Event proposals August 2026 – Fleadh Belfast and RSPBANI Ulster Pipe Band Championship

Alderman McIlveen asked to make an amendment under item 4 that was seconded by Councillor Cochrane.

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That item 4 is referred back to the Place and Prosperity Committee for further consideration and that officers provide a supplementary report to look at: what other days the fringe event could be held on; what the financial and operational implications would be of each option; and, how we ensure proper Member oversight and value for money for events going forward.

At the outset of the discussion Alderman McIlveen stated that his request was not an objection to the Fleadh itself nor indeed to a fringe event. He said The Fleadh was a well-established cultural event, and he recognised the potential value it brought in terms of visitors to an area and its profile, and economic activity for the Borough. He went on to outline that the issue before the Council was one of process, timing, and governance, and it was on those grounds that he was asking for a deferral to the Place and Prosperity Committee for a short report on alternative options.

He said that Members would be aware that Bangor was already scheduled to host the Ulster Pipe Band Championships on the same day. That was a major event in its own right and one that required significant officer involvement and Council resources to deliver safely and successfully.

He expressed his concern that Members had not been given the opportunity to properly consider the implications of adding a Fleadh fringe event on the same day, particularly when there had been limited consultation with Elected Members prior to the proposal coming forward. He did not think that was the way to do business. There had been similar concerns around the Christmas event in Newtownards and at that time Members had been left with no alternative but to proceed with a pared down event (that was clearly scheduled for the wrong time) for what should have been the launch of Christmas in the Borough's primary shopping town. He stressed the need for consultation with Members and that was one of the reasons why they were elected to office, to provide an input based on their local knowledge.

He went on to say that there were also legitimate questions around cost and capacity. If officers were already fully committed to delivering the Pipe Band Championships, Members should have clarity on what additional staffing, operational costs, and external support would be required to run a fringe event alongside it. From what he could ascertain that was the reason why ratepayers were being asked to provide an additional £40,000 because of the lack of staff to cover the second event. To him it appeared, based on his reading of the report, that if the event were held on a different day that officers would have the capacity to support the fringe event and it would therefore not attract the same level of cost. As things stood for an event of this scale, the spend did not appear to represent value for money. He suggested that much had been made of the Pipe Bands welcoming this but that should not be a major consideration to the Council since it did not need to bear any cost or responsibility for the Fleadh fringe event unlike the Council.

So for those reasons he considered that a short deferral would be useful to allow officers to bring back a report setting out:

- whether the fringe event could be held on a different day
- what the financial and operational implications would be of each option; and
- how we ensure proper Member oversight and value for money

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He thought that was a reasonable and proportionate request which would not undermine The Fleadh, and it did not close the door on the event. It simply ensured that decisions of this scale were taken with full information, proper scrutiny, and respect for the role of the Council and its Members and there was still time to do this since the event was not scheduled until August.

He therefore asked Members to support a deferral to the Committee for a report on alternative options.

Councillor Cochrane, in seconding the amendment, emphasised that his position was not an objection to the event itself but rather that the Council was committing additional resources without having fully explored alternative options. Failing to consider alternatives, he argued, risked creating inconsistencies in how similar requests were treated, with potential financial and staffing implications. He therefore viewed the amendment as a reasonable and responsible step and called for a short deferral to allow consideration of alternative dates, noting that doing so would strengthen the Council's decision-making process and uphold its duty to ratepayers.

Councillor W Irvine rose to support the amendment adding that if the matter had not come forward in this way, he would have been opposed to it, since it had not been included in the rate-setting process. He expressed disappointment that there had been no prior consultation with Members regarding the event, particularly given the equality considerations involved and suggested that the issue be revisited to determine whether it could still be progressed.

Councillor Smart asked the Director for clarity on whether the amendment would have any implications for the timeframe required to produce the report, including whether a deferral might be necessary. In response the Director of Place and Prosperity explained that if the amendment were agreed, the Council would aim to prepare a report addressing the issues raised, with the intention of bringing that to the February meeting of the Place and Prosperity Committee, though that could not be guaranteed and March might be more realistic. When asked if the report could go to the full Council meeting in February the Director confirmed that that too was an option, though the preference was to take matters through the parent Committee first.

Continuing, Councillor Smart spoke in support of the events strategy, emphasising the importance of footfall and paid-for events that benefitted the Borough. He noted that holding events on different days would help avoid clashes and maximise attendance within the Borough. He highlighted the significant potential The Fleadh offered for the Borough and its hospitality sector, describing it as one of the key levers available to enhance economic return and support the wider economic wellbeing of the area.

Alderman McRandal said he was surprised by the proposed amendment particularly since the event aligned fully with the Borough's strategy. He noted that due process had been followed; officers had identified the opportunity and brought it to the Place and Prosperity Committee in a way that was entirely consistent with Council procedures. He stated that he saw no conflict, and that event organisers were keen

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to collaborate. The date itself was significant, and it was expected that many visitors would stay in Bangor while also attending the main event in Belfast which would launch the following day, creating valuable opportunities for local hospitality businesses. He cautioned that sending the matter back to the Committee would cause delays and risk sending a negative message. He described the Fleadh as a golden opportunity to showcase the Borough and he thought that was an opportunity that should be embraced. He requested a recorded vote.

Councillor Cathcart referred that in 2016 Bangor hosted the Ulster Fleadh and a week later, also held celebrations for the Twelfth of July which both offered valuable opportunities to showcase Bangor and support local businesses. He stressed that scrutinising decisions was not the same as opposing the events. He supported the event proceeding and wanted it to be a means to champion Bangor, but he believed that holding the events on separate days would allow Bangor to gain the greatest benefit. While he preferred this approach, he added that if the events had to take place on the same day, he would still support them.

Councillor Boyle, reflected on how the debate was being played out on social media and considered it to be an embarrassment for the Council. He referred to some Members who had spoken who were uneasy with a fringe event taking place in Bangor and did not believe that they welcomed this event. He questioned why the Council would delay making this decision suggesting, that in doing so, it conveyed shame. He referred to Councillor Kennedy who had been vocal at Committee on the matter. He emphasised that the Borough was home to several cultures, all of which deserved to be supported and celebrated. He said that he would not be supporting the amendment and that he did not want any more adverse publicity on the matter.

Councillor Brady said he had no issue with proper scrutiny if that was the intention but felt it was unnecessary in this case emphasising that the proposal represented an opportunity to attract a significant number of visitors. The Council was satisfied that it could deliver the Pipe Band event with public support, and he believed that holding both events on the same day would send an inclusive message to residents, reinforcing the idea of a welcoming Borough. He warned that delaying or questioning the decision at this stage created uncertainty and could deter potential visitors from coming to Bangor. He also said that he would not be supporting the amendment.

Councillor S Irvine spoke in support of the amendment noting that the Borough already hosted many cultural events and questioned the proposed funding level, suggesting that £40k seemed excessive without clear justification and would like to know more about how the funds would be allocated. He agreed that all cultures were welcome in the Borough and urged Members to be mindful of the Council's finances.

Councillor Blaney expressed his enthusiasm for the Fleadh, saying he believed it would be a fantastic event. He explained that he would not have supported the amendment if he had been confident that the original proposal had been fully checked. However, he raised concerns about the location that had been chosen and asked officers to explore alternative sites, such as the Eisenhower Pier.

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He noted that there was still time to consider other ideas in order to maximise the event's potential and referring the matter back to the Committee, he said, would allow for proper checks and provide an opportunity to consult with Bangor's bars, restaurants, and Chambers of Commerce. Councillor Blaney re-emphasised that his intention was to strengthen the event, not to oppose it. He made clear that he too would not vote against the proposal and stressed that the message should be that the Council was 100% behind the Fleadh.

Councillor Cathcart raised a Point of Order under Standing Order 20.12, seeking clarification about comments made earlier in the meeting after Councillor Boyle had made allegations directed towards his Party and at him suggesting he would oppose an event coming to Bangor or deny backing for something associated with his own city. He stated that he had made his support for the event abundantly clear and was disappointed that anyone might think otherwise. He also remarked that the tone within the Chamber had been disappointing.

In response, the Mayor outlined that Councillor Boyle had the opportunity, if he wished, to apologise, withdraw, or qualify the remarks he had made. Councillor Boyle said that if any Party had felt upset by his comments, he apologised, and if his remarks had been interpreted differently from what he intended, he also offered his apology to the Party Group.

Councillor Kendall then spoke, acknowledging that the situation was difficult. She agreed that the proposal presented an opportunity, but she also recognised the concerns raised by other Members regarding fairness in the process, how funding for events was allocated, and the scrutiny of budgets. She asked for clarity on what accepting the amendment would mean in practical terms, particularly whether it would delay reaching a decision and whether there would still be sufficient time to resolve any outstanding issues afterward.

The Director of Place and Prosperity confirmed that the Council intended to have a report ready either for the meeting the following week or for the full Council meeting in February. He emphasised the need to issue quotations to the company by the end of March and before the Easter break at the latest.

The Mayor stated that there appeared to be universal support for the Fleadh coming to Bangor, and highlighted the strong desire to support local businesses, particularly the hospitality sector, which she described as being "on its knees". She felt that the concerns raised by Alderman McIlveen had been more than adequately addressed through due process. She also stressed that the event was fundamentally about attracting visitors, and that ensuring adequate accommodation was also essential. Bangor, she argued, was particularly well placed to provide that and she questioned whether delaying the decision until April would risk undermining the opportunity completely.

The Director of Place and Prosperity explained that, based on information the Council had received, particularly from Belfast City Council, accommodation for the event was expected to have already been booked. Given the proximity of Bangor to Belfast and the availability of public transport, he did not believe the event would negatively affect existing bookings. He also clarified that although third-party groups

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had been mentioned in earlier discussions, this event was being organised by the Council and would remain a Council-led event, and no funding would be provided to any external groups.

Alderman Graham thanked Councillor Boyle for his comments but cautioned against assuming or interpreting the motives of others. While acknowledging that some individuals might not be sympathetic, he stressed that such sentiment was not coming from the Council Chamber. His primary concern related to the use of a second car park for the event, noting that the Queens Parade car park had already been lost.

He also went on to highlight that the Pipe Band Championship was a cross-community event and suggested that the Council may wish to reconsider the scheduling, since holding two major events on the same day could reduce the economic benefit achieved. Although he recognised the reasoning behind the funding level and the potential duplication of events, he emphasised that he was aware that officers were working hard to attract visitors to the Borough.

Councillor McCracken referred to hearing mutterings of objections to the event from the Party opposite for some weeks which he did not understand describing it as a poor display of politics. In his view, the economic, social, and cultural benefits of the event were obvious, and the reasons given by the DUP would not be accepted by the public. He noted that a mix of views had been aired, but they appeared inconsistent and did not stack up. He said that the process had been followed and officers had secured a very positive event for Bangor. Reports were brought to the Place and Prosperity Committee where questions had been answered and the proposal had been strongly voted through. He questioned why the process was now being challenged, stating that it was accurate and that extended debates were unnecessary. He emphasised that this was a Council event, that the Fleadh organiser was not receiving £40k, and that the funding covered a wide range of Council activities.

He also pointed out that The Belfast Fleadh would run from 2 - 9 August 2026, while the Bangor event was scheduled to take place on 1 August, which he believed was the most logical timing. He questioned why the two cultural events could not run simultaneously, arguing that they could compliment each other and increase the appeal of coming to Bangor. He added that suggestions that governance and process had not been accurate was insulting to officers who had worked hard to organise the event. He felt there was a "chill factor" and reiterated that he wanted a culturally diverse Borough, which he said Alliance stood up for.

Alderman McIlveen then raised a Point of Order under Standing Order 20.12, stating that during his summing up, Councillor McCracken knew exactly what he was doing by referring to the DUP group as "mutterings" against the Fleadh over the last few weeks, yet there had been no evidence of such "mutterings." He said the concerns raised by Councillor Kennedy at the Committee were about the process, and that Councillor McCracken's comments did not stack up, suggesting the Member had contradicted himself regarding the vote and ascribing the Group as against the event which was not the case.

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The Mayor offered Councillor McCracken an opportunity, if he wished, to apologise, withdraw or qualify his remarks. Councillor McCracken agreed to qualify his remarks, noting that at the Committee there had been direct opposition from one DUP Member, Councillor Kennedy, stressing that he had voted against the proposal at the Corporate Services Committee. He referred to comments raised by Alderman McIlveen at Committee on the process, and commentary on social media.

The Mayor called the Council to order and that cross chamber interactions be ended.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter raised a further Point of Order, stating that Councillor McCracken had made a claim about a vote that was not reflected in the public record and that he had prescribed views to her which she did not hold and which she found to be offensive. She asked whether the Mayor would address that, noting that a previous matter she had raised the previous month had not been responded to.

At this point, the Mayor announced a five-minute recess.

RECESS 9.18 pm
RECOMMENCED 9.23 pm

When the meeting resumed, the Mayor referred to the Point of Order made by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter referring to the Standing Orders which required a Member to state the alleged breach of the Standing Orders. Alderman Armstrong-Cotter referred to Standing Order 20.12.

The Mayor referred to Standing Order 20.11 and stated that she considered the debate closed, as the comments made were general and no direct opinion had been ascribed against her in the course of the debate.

Councillor Kennedy, raised a further Point of Order under Standing Order 20.12, thanking the Mayor for the explanation and said that Councillor McCracken's comments during the debate met the threshold of a breach against him. He reiterated that he had no issue with the Fleadh and his issue was with the process. He expressed disappointment that the matter had been turned into something else. He criticised Alliance for turning the issue into a "sectarian bunfight" and asked Councillor McCracken to withdraw his comments.

The Mayor offered Councillor McCracken an opportunity, if he wished, to apologise, withdraw or qualify his remarks. Councillor McCracken agreed to qualify his remarks then clarified his use of the word 'mutterings' explaining several instances where concerns had been expressed, one of which was Councillor Kennedy's speech at Committee expressing concern about the Fleadh and the process. Councillor Kennedy repeated that his concerns had related to the process.

The Mayor noted that a recorded vote had been requested.

On being put to the meeting with 23 voting FOR, 13 voting AGAINST, 0 ABSTAINING and 4 ABSENT, the amendment was CARRIED. -

The voting was as follows:

<p>FOR (23) Aldermen Adair Armstrong-Cotter Brooks Cummings Graham McIlveen Smith</p> <p>Councillors Blaney Cathcart Chambers Cochrane Douglas Edmund Gilmour S Irvine W Irvine Kennedy Kerr McClellan Newman Smart Thompson Wray</p>	<p>AGAINST (13) Aldermen McAlpine McRandal</p> <p>Councillor Ashe Boyle Brady Harbinson Hennessy Kendall McBurney McCollum McCracken McKee Moore</p>	<p>ABSTAINED (0) Aldermen</p> <p>Councillors</p>	<p>ABSENT (4) Aldermen McDowell</p> <p>Councillor Hollywood Irwin Morgan</p>
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RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Councillor Cochrane, that the minutes be approved and adopted with an amendment that Item 4 be referred back to the place and Prosperity Committee for further consideration and that officers provide a supplementary report to look at: what other days the fringe event could be held on; what the financial and operational implications would be of each option; and, how we ensure proper member oversight and value for money for events going forward.

7.3.1 Delegated Authority to Place and Prosperity 5 February 2026 – Variance Request Urban Regeneration Programme

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that as Members would be aware officers continued to work with DfC officials to deliver the Urban Regeneration Programme. That was a programme of three distinct strands of regeneration initiatives focused on animation, placemaking and connectivity.

Changes to projects had resulted in an identified underspend. Officers were working closely with DfC to review options for alternative projects. Any changes must align with the programme objectives and be achievable within the programme timescale.

Timeframes within the funding period, 31 March 2026, were now extremely close, particularly given the time required by officers to suitably inform a variance request and for DfC to accept such and complete the relevant processes.

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RECOMMENDED that the Council gives delegated authority to the Place and Prosperity Committee on 5 February 2026 to agree any revised projects and to make the variance request to DfC.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor McCracken, seconded by Councillor Smart, that the recommendation be adopted.

7.4. Corporate Services Committee dated 13 January 2026

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

The Mayor indicated that Item 16 of the minutes had been ratified at the earlier meeting of Special Council.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Cochrane, seconded by Councillor Thompson, that the minutes be approved and adopted.

7.5. Active and Healthy Communities Committee dated 14 January 2026

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

Proposed by Councillor Ashe, seconded by Councillor W Irvine that the minutes be approved and adopted.

In respect of Item 7 - Update on Bathing Waters in ANDBC - Nomination of Additional Beaches

Councillor Kendall asked if she could make an amendment in respect of Item 7 of the minutes and that was seconded by Alderman Graham.

That the recommendation be adopted, and given the tragic news of the death at Helen's Bay at the weekend, that Council continues to work in partnership with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, to explore best practice with regards to supporting bathers' safety, bringing back a report to the Committee to outline what else Council can do to promote safety at our beaches and harbours, and any potential safety measures that could be implemented.

Councillor Kendall welcomed the extension of designated bathing waters and noted that it was widely supported. She expressed her sadness and shock at the recent tragic death of a swimmer on the coast of the Borough and emphasised that the proposed amendment was something the Council could commit to. She stressed the importance of continuing to do everything possible to support and promote safety.

Alderman Graham indicated his support for the amendment and formally seconded it. He said that Members had been deeply saddened by the news of the incident. He noted that the individuals involved were experienced swimmers who loved what they did, but reiterated the need to promote safety wherever possible. He expressed the Council's sympathy to the bereaved family.

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The Mayor also expressed her sorrow at learning of the lady's passing, noting that the swimmers had been visitors to the Borough. She acknowledged that people took part in open-water swimming because they loved it, and that the family had recognised that the lady had died doing something she loved. The Mayor confirmed that she would write to the bereaved family on behalf of the Borough, and that she had already written to Minister Muir to extend sincere sympathies and to discuss what further action the NIEA might take.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Ashe, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the minutes be approved and adopted with an addition at Item 7 that the recommendation be adopted, and given the tragic news of the death at Helen's Bay at the weekend, that Council continues to work in partnership with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, to explore best practice with regards to supporting bathers' safety, bringing back a report to the Committee to outline what else Council can do to promote safety at our beaches and harbours, and any potential safety measures that could be implemented.

8. INVITATION – ARMY BENEVOLENT FUND – BELFAST BLITZ CONCERT
(Appendix II)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Acting Chief Executive detailing that on 12 January 2026, the Chief Executive received a letter from David Forsey, Director at Army Benevolent Fund offering a number of VIP tickets to Councillors, Executives and Support Staff to a concert at the Waterfront Hall featuring the Band, Bugles, Pipes & Drums of the Royal Irish Regiment, to commemorate the 85th Anniversary of the Belfast Blitz. A copy of the letter was attached as an appendix.

The date was Saturday 21 March 2026 and tickets were priced at £70 per person.

All proceeds from the concert would go to aid soldiers, veterans and army families in times of need.

RECOMMENDED that the Council consider nominating a Member(s) to attend.

The Mayor explained that she was unable to attend this event and invited a proposal from the Council.

It was proposed by Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that Alderman Cummings attend to represent the Council.

The Mayor was in agreement stating that Alderman Cummings was a wonderful Champion for the Borough's veterans and the Armed Forces.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that the recommendation be adopted and that Alderman Cummings attend.

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9. SMALL BUSINESS RATES RELIEF CONSULTATION RESPONSE (Appendix III - V)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that Members may be aware that on 9 December 2024 the then Minister of Finance outlined a Strategic Roadmap for the Rating system to the Assembly. The proposal was to build a progressive rates system for both households and businesses. The Minister advised that this process was to be based on the principles of fairness and equity, and to ensure that the rates system aligned with the Executive's policy objectives of stimulating the local economy and supporting the growth of the rating taxbase, while providing appropriate support for those who needed it.

On 18 November 2025 the Minister of Finance made an oral statement to the Assembly which was attached as an appendix. As part of the statement the Minister announced his intention to bring about change that would see enhanced support for small businesses.

On 4 December 2025 the Department for Finance wrote to the Council inviting a response to the Consultation Paper on Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR) options which is attached as an appendix. The consultation paper outlined four potential policy options and requested consultees respond to eight specific questions. The consultation process had a very tight timeframe as the Minister wished to make changes in time for April 2026.

The Council's Heads of Service Team (HoST) had reviewed the proposals and compiled a draft response which was provided as a further appendix. The response to each question was aligned to the Council's Corporate Plan 2024 -2028 and The Big Plan 2017 – 2032. The draft response to each question was in bold, and responses detailed below each question.

RECOMMENDED that the Council approves the draft response to the consultation for formal response before the consultation completion deadline of 29 January 2026.

Prior to proposing Councillor McClean drew attention to inconsistencies in the Council's response to the view expressed by the Council earlier in the evening, in respect of question 7 which asked how additional support could be funded, and where Council had responded to say it welcomes the new non-domestic revaluation list. The Acting Chief Executive stated that the responses had been drafted prior to the publication of the REVAL 2026. Councillor McClean suggested that the response be updated to question 7 to state that funding should be a matter for The Executive

Proposed by Councillor McClean, seconded by Councillor McCracken, that the recommendation be adopted.

As seconder Councillor McCracken welcomed this and repeated that he thought there should be a fundamental review of the rating system.

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RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor McClean, seconded by Councillor McCracken, that the recommendation be adopted with the amendment that Question 7 be a matter for the Executive.

10. SEALING DOCUMENTS

RESOLVED:- On the proposal of Alderman Graham, seconded by Councillor Edmund,

THAT the Seal of the Council be affixed to the following documents:-

- (a) Grants of Rights of Burials – D41190 – D41229
- (b) Concession Agreement for the Supply, Installation, Operation and Maintenance of Electric Vehicle Chargepoints for the NI Electric Vehicle Consortium

11. TRANSFER OF RIGHTS OF BURIAL

There were no Transfers of Rights of Burial.

12. NOTICE OF MOTION STATUS REPORT

(Appendix VI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Acting Chief Executive detailing an attached Status Report in respect of Notices of Motion.

This was a standing item on the Council agenda each month and its aim was to keep Members updated on the outcome of Motions. It should be noted that as each Motion was dealt with it would be removed from the report.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the report.

Councillor Wray referred to a Notice of Motion 666 that he had brought forward and noted that it should be referred to the Active and Healthy Communities Committee and not the Corporate Committee.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Wray, seconded by Councillor Thompson, that the recommendation be adopted.

13. NOTICES OF MOTION

13.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Cochrane and Councillor Thompson

That this Council notes the growing popularity of Linear Park in Bangor East as a hub for the local community.

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Further to this, officers will bring back a report exploring options for providing path markings in both Upper and Lower Linear Park for runners, such as distance indicators eg. 1 km, 2 km), along with appropriate signage to assist those who wish to keep fit in the Park.

Officers will also examine options for upgrading the path and accompanying drainage system in Lower Linear Park between the bridge and the Ring Road, in light of persistent flooding and drainage issues.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Cochrane, seconded by Councillor Thompson, that the Notice of Motion be referred to the Environment Committee.

13.2 Notice of Motion submitted by Alderman McIlveen and Alderman Armstrong-Cotter

That this Council notes that the natural stone blinding pathways around Londonderry Park are prone to saturation with water resulting in significant standing water and sludginess which adversely impacts on the use and enjoyment of the park. Council therefore requests that officers prepare a business case with a view to paving or tarmacking the paths in the park to improve the user experience.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that the Notice of Motion be referred to the Environment Committee.

13.3 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Cathcart and Councillor McClean

That this Council recognizes its responsibility to ensure that our city, towns and villages are looking the best that they can be, to be welcoming places for visitors and our residents. It is therefore essential that the correct structures and policies are in place to ensure that within the resources made available all expected maintenance is being carried out efficiently and effectively.

A proactive maintenance regime was agreed when this Council was created and has worked well in some areas but hasn't had the desired impact in other areas. Basic maintenance and upkeep of our public realm particularly in our centres and prominent areas can and should be improved.

The Council therefore commits to reporting on a review of its current proactive maintenance and cleansing regimes, highlighting options and opportunities for improvement and associated budgetary requirements, so as to allow members to consider potential improvements in outcomes concerning the maintenance of Council property and the public realms.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Cathcart, seconded by Councillor McClean, that the Notice of Motion be referred to the Environment Committee.

13.4 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Brady and Alderman McAlpine

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That this Council pledges to write to Stormont to request the introduction of femicide as a specific hate crime which therefore carries an appropriate sentence, as well as specific deradicalisation support while in prison in order to prevent reoffending. Femicide is defined as the intentional killing of a woman due to factors such as hatred, discrimination or subjugation.

It also includes acts motivated by control, possession or domination over a woman, or in relation to her refusal to establish or maintain an emotional relationship, or as an act of limitation of her individual freedom.

This Council recognises that the motivation for this crime is rooted in a desire for the control and subjugation of women, driven by patriarchal attitudes in society.

That perpetrators can be partners but as our communities are changing, we are also seeing a growing trend of 'honour based' killings of women by family members.

That while femicide lies at the extreme end of the spectrum of violence against women, other acts motivated by control, possession, or dominance—such as domestic abuse, coercive control, and harassment—create the conditions in which femicide occurs. These acts serve as warning signs that, when left unaddressed, can escalate to fatal violence.

And that by establishing femicide as a distinct criminal offence, we send a clear message that gender-based violence will not be tolerated and that the lives of women have inherent value deserving of specific legal protection.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Brady, seconded by Councillor Kendall, that the Notice of Motion be referred to the Active and Healthy Communities Committee.

13.5 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Ashe and Councillor Moore

That Council notes the success of the inclusion of effigies and emblems to the penalties for 'in-programme' bonfires; that Council tasks officers to engage with groups to add flags to the list of penalties for 'in-programme' bonfires; and that officers return a report updating Members on these actions by the June committee meeting.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Ashe, seconded by Councillor Moore, that the Notice of Motion be referred to the Active and Healthy Communities Committee.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that the public and press be excluded from discussion of the following item of confidential business.

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In respect of the Place and Prosperity Committee – Item 10 – Innovation Hub Site

Further discussion took place in relation to the Innovation Hub.

READMITTANCE OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, seconded by Alderman McIlveen that the public and press be re-admitted to the meeting.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 10:00 pm.

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid special meeting of the Ards and North Down Borough Council was held at the City Hall, The Castle, Bangor and via Zoom, on Wednesday, 28 January 2026 commencing at 7.00pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: The Mayor (Councillor McCollum)

Aldermen:

Adair	McDowell (7.04 pm
Armstrong-Cotter	Zoom)
Brooks	McIlveen
Cummings	McRandal
Graham	Smith
McAlpine (7.03 pm	
Zoom)	

Councillors:

Ashe	W Irvine
Blaney (7.02 pm)	Kendall
Boyle	Kennedy
Brady	Kerr
Cathcart	McBurney
Chambers	McClellan
Cochrane	McCracken
Douglas	McKee
Edmund	Moore
Gilmour	Newman
Harbinson	Thompson
Hennessy	Smart
S Irvine	Wray

Officers: Acting Chief Executive (M Steele), Acting Director of Corporate Services (C Jackson), Director of Active and Healthy Communities (A Faulkner), Director of Place and Prosperity (B Dorrian), Director of Environment (G Bannister), Head of Finance (S Grieve), Democratic Services Manager (J Wilson) and Democratic Services Officer (H Loebnau)

1. PRAYER

The Mayor (Councillor McCollum) welcomed everyone to the meeting and then invited the Director of Environment to read the Council prayer.

NOTED.

2. APOLOGIES

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The Mayor sought apologies at this stage. Apologies were received from Councillors Irwin and Hollywood and apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Blaney and Alderman McAlpine.

NOTED.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Mayor sought Declarations of Interest at this stage and none were declared. Members were reminded that Declarations could be made at any point during the meeting.

NOTED.

Before Item 4 was considered Councillor Cochrane proposed that it be taken out of confidence and taken in public due to the interest in the item and that was seconded by Alderman McIlveen.

AGREED.

4. MINUTES OF ITEM 16 CORPORATE SERVICES COMMITTEE HELD ON 13 JANUARY 2026

(Appendix I)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copies of Item 16 of the above minutes.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Cochrane, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that the minutes be adopted.

5. PRUDENTIAL CAPITAL FINANCE REGIME (FILE)

(Appendices II - VI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Acting Director of Corporate Services detailing that the Council was required to adopt the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice 2021 Edition (the CIPFA Code), which required the Council to approve a Treasury and Investment Management Policy and Practices. The Council approved the strategy in February 2023. Although no updates to this policy were required this year it was included as an appendix.

In addition, the former Department of the Environment (DOE) issued Guidance on Local Council Investments in October 2011 that required the Council to approve a Treasury Management Strategy Statement before the start of each financial year. That was set out in an attached appendix.

Capital Strategy

The Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011 required the Council to have regard to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities 2018 Edition (the Prudential Code)

when determining how much money it could afford to borrow. The objectives of the Prudential Code were to ensure, within a clear framework, that the capital investment plans of local authorities were affordable, prudent and sustainable, and that treasury management decisions were taken in accordance with good professional practice.

This capital strategy gave a high-level overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contributed to the provision of Council services along with an overview of how associated risk was managed and the implications for future financial sustainability.

To demonstrate that the Council had fulfilled its objectives, the Capital Strategy detailed the indicators that must be set and monitored each year. The strategy was set out in appendix 2 and the Prudential Code required that it was made available on the Council website.

Appendix 3 set out the capital budgets (net of any funding receivable) for the next three years and on which the capital strategy had been based. Members should note that several projects on the schedule had a delivery period that was greater than the three-year plan.

Appendix 4 set out the Council's minimum revenue provision policy as required by the Prudential Code and reflected changes made to the CIPFA Accounting Code in respect of leases.

RECOMMENDED that the Council approves the report and associated appendices.

Proposed by Alderman Smith, seconded by Councillor Cochrane, that the recommendation be adopted.

Proposing the recommendation Alderman Smith informed Members that he was represented on the Capital Working Group. He considered that it would be helpful to tease out the key points that were impactful from the reports. The capital financing requirement had increased by 68% over the past three years from £76.2M to £144.8M. It was known that capital was the Council's second largest spend after payroll and that cost was likely to grow over the coming years.

In addition to that was risk management in respect of the potential impact of interest rates which would affect revenue requirements either positively or negatively. It should also be remembered that there was considerable officer time required and project management of £144.8M with additional funding coming for what was a significant agenda of work. Those serious figures in the report would need to be considered over the months ahead.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Smith, seconded by Councillor Cochrane, that the recommendation be adopted.

6. ROBUSTNESS OF ESTIMATES AND ADEQUACY OF RESERVES

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Acting Chief Executive detailing that Section 4 of the Local Government Finance Act 2011 required the Chief Financial Officer of a Council to submit a report on the robustness of the estimates and for the Council to have regard to this report when considering the estimates.

In addition, Section 6 required the Chief Financial Officer of a Council to submit a report on the adequacy of reserves and for the Council to have regard to that when considering the estimates.

Robustness of Estimates

The aim of the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) was to give the Council a realistic and sustainable plan that reflected the Council's priorities and the policy of reasonable Council Rate increases as reflected in the Corporate Plan.

The detailed estimates had been formulated in the context of the budgeting strategy agreed in September 2025 and detailed work had been carried out with Directors, Heads of Service and Service Unit Managers for the various services. The work underpinned the MTFP, taking into account forecast outturn, current spending plans, the likely future demand level pressures for both revenue and capital expenditure and the risk environment. The major risks to the MTFP were:

Pay issues

- Pay budget significantly increasing (but workforce numbers staying largely static despite new demands). Pay increases are directly linked to Government policy with regard to the setting of the national living wage.
- Medium term – Trade Unions demanding pay and grading review.

Waste Management

- Additional costs associated with the Extended Producer Responsibility income are unknown, but there is an expectation that quality standards of waste will have to improve through new investment.
- The level of income received each year is likely to reduce year on year, as producers improve their approach to the creation of packaging materials to limit their cost exposure.
- If Council collection quality does not meet efficiency and effectiveness targets it may be exposed to fines.

Car Parks

- Income is at risk if Council is unable to implement its proposed Carpark Order. Council is dependent on the Department for Infrastructure revoking its order in order to do this.

Financial resilience

- The Council's low reserves and high capital appetite leaves the rate payer exposed to interest rate fluctuation.
- The Council is not resourced financially or operationally to deal with the challenges of the Climate Change Act and moving to net zero.

Prioritisation

- Further work is required to align budget setting more coherently with the Corporate Plan.
- Underlying tension in the capital investment programme between statutory requirements, investing in modern efficient facilities, stimulating economic regeneration and broader boroughwide sporting facilities.
- The long-term decline in the non-domestic rate base presents a significant financial challenge to the Council. Although progress has again been made this year, the budget is still not sufficiently orientated towards resolving the non-domestic rate problem.

A number of iterations had been reported to meetings of the Corporate Services Committee during the estimates process, before being agreed at the meeting on 13 January. As part of that process, management had carried out some 'stress testing' of the budgets. The results were set out in the table below:

Category	Test	£'000
Payroll	2025/26 pay increase 1% higher than budget	436
Capital Financing	Interest Rates 1% higher than budget	35
Waste	5% increase	370
Maintenance	5% increase	164
Energy	Prices 10% higher than budget	339
Other Expenditure	5% increase	1,330
Service Income	5% reduction	832
Rates Income	Actual income 1% less than estimated	700
	Average	526

If two of the risks materialised that maximum exposure that Council would have would be in the region of £2.2M. The increased general fund balance and a reallocation of Earmarked Funds would be adequate to absorb those costs in the short term, although both would need replenished in the following years.

On the basis that:

1. the capital and revenue budget estimates for 2026/27 presented to this meeting, had been prepared in line with the CIPFA Treasury Management Code, Prudential Code and the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting;
2. the stress tests did not identify any substantial risks;
3. in the coming year the Council would commit to continuing:
 - a. with its thorough review of the 10-year capital plan, given the significant impact on future rate setting and the risk exposure noted through this rate setting process.
 - b. within the realignment of its budgets to meet the strategic outcomes set out in the corporate plan in order to address the risks already identified.

The Acting Chief Executive was satisfied that the budgets set were robust.

Adequacy of Reserves

The Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011 required the Chief Financial Officer of a Council to submit a report to Council on the adequacy of any proposed level of financial reserves for a financial year.

In line with its budgeting strategy the Council had considered the adequacy of reserves throughout this Estimates process, including the establishment of a new strategic waste fund within the Earmarked Fund. The appendix set out the forecast year end reserves position for the current and next financial years and the Acting Chief Executive was content with the adequacy of those.

Cognisance had also been taken of the CIPFA Local Authority Accounting Panel Bulletin 99 (issued July 2014), which gave guidance on the level of reserves and the financing of Council expenditure.

RECOMMENDED that Council establishes a strategic waste fund within the earmarked fund and notes the Chief Financial Officer's report on the robustness of estimates and adequacy of reserves.

Proposed by Councillor Cochrane, seconded by Alderman Smith, that the recommendation be adopted.

Alderman Smith referred to the report and sought clarification on the section relating to financial resilience, specifically the references made to Climate Change and the net zero obligations, and the potential impact of the Climate Change Act. He asked what the implications of those requirements were for the Council.

The Head of Finance advised that this remained an evolving area, with a number of obligations arising from national policy changes and amendments linked to the Climate Change Act. He explained that the Council was required to comply with those national requirements and had limited control over the broader strategic direction, which continued to be set at a national level.

He noted that transitioning the Council's fleet to meet future environmental standards would require significant investment and it was expected that, in due course, heavy goods vehicles and petrol-powered vehicles would no longer be available for purchase, and the Council would need to plan for that accordingly.

The Head of Finance further highlighted that the physical impacts of climate change were already being experienced locally and over the past 18 months, storm damage had affected a number of Council assets, and the full scale of future impacts remained uncertain. He stressed the requirement and importance of being "climate ready" and preparing for the investment that would be required in the coming years. He confirmed that several climate-related cost pressures had been included in the current year's rates, and that those pressures would need to be considered carefully as part of future financial planning.

(Alderman McAlpine joined the meeting at 7.03 pm)

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Cochrane, seconded by Alderman Smith, that the recommendation be adopted.

7. DISTRICT RATES 2026/27

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Acting Director of Corporate Services detailing that the report was to present to Members the proposed district rates for the 2026/27 financial year.

The Corporate Services Committee at its meeting on 13 January recommended, subject to ratification, a domestic district rate increase of **4.74%** for the 2026/27 financial year. Appendix 1 set out the formal calculation. Appendix 2 set out 2026/27 Service budgets.

RECOMMENDED that the Council sets for the 2026/27 financial year a non-domestic district rate of 27.0109p in the pound and a domestic district rate of 0.4445p in the pound. It is, further, recommended to approve 2026/27 Service budgets in Appendix 2.

Councillor Cochrane asked to make an amendment which was seconded by Alderman McIlveen.

Councillor Cochrane proposed the district rates for the 2026/27 financial year. Which is a 4.74% increase and an increase of approximately £2.40 per month for the average household and £13 per month for the average business in the Borough.

In addition to this, Council agrees to write to the Minister of Finance to express our grave concern at the disproportionate impact of REVAL2026 on the hospitality sector and requests that he takes all necessary steps to ensure the long-term sustainability of these businesses such as halting the REVAL process to review the methodology or providing funding for mitigation measures such as had been announced in England.

Councillor Cochrane opened by thanking his Council colleagues, the Director, the Head of Finance, and the wider finance team for their hard work in preparing the budget and noted it was robust, detailed and ambitious, particularly given the challenging financial climate. He emphasised that it enabled the Council to meet its commitments and continue delivering for residents.

Moving on to REVAL 2026, he thought that Minister O'Dowd had demonstrated a worrying disconnect between the budget and the reality facing the hospitality sector. He highlighted the extortionate rates increases following the recent revaluation, which had left many businesses questioning their viability. He repeated the call for the Finance Minister to pause the increases and stressed the importance of the Council adding its voice in solidarity to that call. The Council had been proactively engaging with the hospitality sector, and he urged that it now clearly express its concern and seek urgent engagement with relevant authorities to seek help. He emphasised that hospitality businesses played a vital role in the local economy and could not be ignored by the Council.

Alderman McIlveen emphasised that Members were fully aware of the severe pressures facing the hospitality sector. He noted that the industry was already under considerable strain even before the REVAL 2026 outcomes were published, and that the current economic pressures had only deepened those challenges. He highlighted that the impact extended far beyond individual businesses, with sports clubs and a wide range of community organisations also feeling the strain. He called on Members to present a united front in urging a pause and review of the current situation, or to introduce mitigation measures similar to those implemented in England. He stressed that the Minister had the authority to intervene and provide meaningful relief to those affected.

Turning to the rate, he wanted to place on record his sincere thanks to his fellow Members and Council officers. Council officers had worked under significant pressure, and while there had been challenges, they had been acknowledged and addressed throughout the process. What was now in front of the Council was the culmination of months of work navigating an increasingly complex financial landscape. The external economic environment continued to impact Council services, and those pressures had to be managed carefully. At the same time, households across the Borough were facing real cost-of-living pressures. From the DUP's perspective, any rate increase must be accountable, justified, and balanced. Ratepayers expected value for money, and rightly so, and it was the Council's responsibility to protect the ratepayer while safeguarding the core services that people relied upon every day. He thought that failing to fund those essential services would, in the long run, be a false economy.

Concluding, he commended the officers for their openness and willingness to engage throughout this process, and to the political parties for their constructive engagement.

Alderman Adair commended the Finance team and supported the suggestion that the Council write to the Minister. He noted that he too had been contacted by local businesses, some of which were facing average rate increases of up to 65% across the Borough. He thought that the hospitality sector, in particular, had been severely affected by rising fuel and energy costs, and stressed that the Minister needed to take that into account, since many of those businesses were already under significant financial pressure.

The Alderman warned that if businesses became unviable, the wider public would also feel the impact and for that further reason he believed the Council should speak with a unified voice. He suggested that the Council lobby alongside Hospitality Ulster and the Chambers of Commerce, given that the hospitality industry was the backbone of tourism and the food economy, and remained one of Northern Ireland's largest employers.

He commended his two colleagues for including the issue in their proposal and stressed the importance of taking the opportunity to raise their collective voice.

Councillor McKee stated that he and his party colleague, Councillor Kendall, were appreciative of all the hard work of officers on reaching this point of the rates setting process and agreed with the call for support for businesses from the amendment.

However unfortunately, they could not support the above inflation increase in the district rate. He said businesses and households were already stretched to the limit and the hit was felt by ordinary people first. That was not a neutral decision, it was a political choice.

What made it even harder to justify was the unfairness built into the system. He referred to the Head of Finance's comments to the Corporate Services Committee and the many cost pressures facing this Council - some beyond its control - but one that was very much a long-standing elephant in the room for rates setting in Northern Ireland. That was the current rates cap which shielded owners of the highest-value homes while everyone else was asked to pick up the slack. If the Assembly had accepted the Finance Minister's recommendation to raise the cap, brought to the Executive meeting back in June, the Council could have seen around £600,000 in additional revenue and he stated that that alone could have significantly reduced the pressure for an above-inflation increase. If the rates cap was fully removed - rather than merely raised as recommended by the Minister - up to £2 million could be available to support local services in the Borough and ease the burden on ordinary households and small businesses.

He recognised that the Council did not set the rates cap but the parties that did sat in government at Stormont. He said that the three largest parties in this Chamber were also part of the Northern Ireland Executive, and they had failed to act, first, by not accepting the Finance Minister's recommendation to raise the cap, and more broadly by refusing to remove a system that entrenched inequality. The result was that Councils were pushed towards above inflation rate rises on ordinary residents, while the wealthiest homes remained protected and that was what was unfair and the Green Party could not support it. He believed that those at the very top should contribute properly, instead of Councils being forced to balance budgets on the backs of working families, renters and small businesses. He ended by stating that until the rates cap was properly reformed, above inflation increases would always hit the wrong people and that is why he and Councillor Kendall would oppose the rate being proposed.

Alderman McRandal rose to support the proposal stating that he was aware that there had been much work behind the scenes to get to the present position and he was acutely aware of the pressure in striking the rate and the balance achieved was the responsible course of action. The position of the Department of Finance was untenable for businesses and he thought there should be transitional relief to ease the pressures and impact of that decision.

Councillor Cathcart thanked the Finance team for the work it had done to set the rate as low as possible and that was why the amendment was so important while recognising that there was a limit to what the Council could do. He explained that he represented Bangor Central and spoke of the businesses there facing huge rate rises coming closely behind the Labour Party's anti-business taxes. He said that pubs and the hospitality sector were so critical to Bangor's economy and the Council should do all it could to support it since many were facing the prospect of having to close. He also believed in rate reform to potentially cut rates in some areas but pointed out that abolishing it altogether would see some homes in the Borough

paying more in rates than Buckingham Palace. Unity against the revaluation should make the Minister of Finance reflect on his decision.

Alderman Smith was content to support the rate increase for the year ahead and thought that 4.74% was important to avoid the diminishment of capital infrastructure. He was happy to support the amended recommendation to send a strong message in terms of the business rate which was so challenging.

Councillor Blaney was delighted to support and was aware of the anger of business owners who had suffered enough and simply wanted to know that the Council was on their side. The Minister seemed to think that hospitality was a golden goose, forgetting it was facing VAT increases, a rise in the minimum wage and this rate increase would be like a sledgehammer to the hospitality sector. The Council needed to express its anger or risk losing the sector completely. He was adamant that the Minister's decision must be fought and expressed that the rate would not be tolerated.

Councillor McCracken was aware of the horrendous rises such as 83% in hotels and he thought that was unfair and unsustainable and ignored the many proposals that could mitigate the rise. There needed to be serious reform to the whole system to provide reassurance to local ratepayers. He was proud of the grants and capital projects and proud of the officers for being able to leverage that funding and he thought that was an intelligent way to spend money.

Councillor Brady commended the officers for the hard work that had been carried out and understood why the decisions were being made. He was aware the keeping the rise as low as possible would affect the Council's ability to provide its services in the long run, but he agreed with the Green Party on the references to the cap. He thought that there was an inequality problem and there needed to be a strategy to address that.

Alderman Brooks rose to support the amendment. He stated that the biggest cost the Council faced was the cost of labour and it had the luxury of being able to provide a living wage to its employees. He contrasted that with a local business which was in an entirely different position since it had to make a profit while paying for water, bin collections and businesses were rightly questioning what they received for the rates they were paying. He agreed that rates needed to be completely reformed, and he suggested that Northern Ireland should lead the way in that.

Councillor Cochrane repeated that the Reval 2026 was unacceptable and that this Council stood with the hospitality sector.

When the amendment was put to a vote 35 were in favour, 2 were against and the amendment was CARRIED.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Cochrane, seconded by Alderman McIlveen that the district rates for the 2026/27 financial year be a 4.74% increase.

This is an increase of approximately £2.40 per month for the average household and £13 per month for the average business in the Borough.

In addition to this, Council agrees to write to the Minister of Finance to express our grave concern at the disproportionate impact of REVAL2026 on the hospitality sector and requests that he takes all necessary steps to ensure the long-term sustainability of these businesses such as halting the REVAL process to review the methodology or providing funding for mitigation measures such as had been announced in England.

The Mayor stated that the Council had fulfilled one of its most important duties as it struck the district rate and sought to deliver a balanced budget for the year ahead.

She thanked Councillor Cochrane, for proposing the rate and thanked members of the Corporate Committee for the careful review of the Council's financial position. Work towards reaching this position had started in September, when the Council had agreed its budgeting principles, which included:

- growing the non-domestic rate base
- targeting efficiencies without reducing services
- making provision for the Council's ambitious capital investment programme.

Throughout the process, and in considering difficult prioritisation decisions, the Council had sought to continue to invest in the places and services residents relied upon daily.

The Council was taking practical steps to tackle environmental issues with plans for a 'recyclingonthego' pilot, which would make it easier to recycle while out and about. Later in 2026 it would be trialling plastic bags and wrapping recycling directly at the kerbside, something she knew that many residents had been asking for. The Council would also be deploying mobile CCTV to target fly tipping, catch offenders and deter illegal dumping across the Borough.

The Council was advancing the next stage of the Green Road to Donaghadee Greenway, building on the very significant progress already achieved between Newtownards and Bangor and promoting sustainable, active travel that reduced car use in the area.

The Council was continuing to invest in the places, people and programmes that helped communities thrive — from grants for local sports clubs to improved pitches, courts and equipment, to funding that supported athletes, teams and volunteers as they prepared for Glasgow 2028.

Enhancements planned at Ards Blair Mayne and Bangor Aurora would help maintain excellent service standards and support the ongoing health and wellbeing of residents. Through the Council's Visually Aware Borough initiative there would also be expansion of accessible leisure activities, ensuring the Council's facilities were more inclusive and welcoming for everyone.

The Council was also continuing to champion climate action, guided by the Council's Roadmap to Sustainability, which set out clear commitments on carbon reduction and the protection of the area's natural assets. Through the kerbside recycling scheme, support was being given towards a more circular economy by helping residents recycle more materials at home. Alongside that, biodiversity was being enhanced in parks and open spaces, and there was continued partnership-based work on environmental education and green tourism, all practical steps that helped build a cleaner, greener and more resilient Borough.

The Council had focused on efficiencies in its essential and most costly services. Waste disposal remained the most significant operational pressure for nearly all councils. The Borough's leading performance on recycling meant more income from recyclables, lower disposal costs, and greater compliance with statutory targets. Similarly, as demand on the Council's facilities continued to grow, it was working hard to better manage maintenance, moving away from reactive repairs and towards planned, value for money upkeep. It continued to prioritise active energy management in tandem with 'green' energy initiatives such as installing solar panels. All of those measures aimed to help control costs and support a more sustainable financial position.

The Council had also made a very active decision to prioritise prosperity and support sustainable economic growth across the Borough – investing in regeneration initiatives, tourism partnerships and 'town' centre improvements that supported higher footfall and effective placemaking.

Over the past year work was well underway 'on the ground' at Marine Gardens, and two of the Bangor Waterfront Redevelopment projects; Ballyholme Yacht Club and Pickie Fun Park, were in pre-planning, moving the Borough ever closer towards the regeneration of Bangor City as a world class destination for visitors and investors.

Progress continued to be made on a number of very significant investment projects that were designed to increase jobs, drive footfall and act as a catalyst for wider economic growth. Those included the new Citizens Hub in Newtownards, Innovation Hub in Holywood, a new Council City Hall and the repurposing of Bangor Castle. The planned demolition of the former NIE building at Balloo later this year was another exciting opportunity, clearing the way for a new phase of development on that valuable site.

The Council was continuing to invest in business support programmes that delivered meaningful results. The Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme was helping to revitalise vacant properties and bring new life into the town and city centres. The Council was also supporting local business voices directly through Chamber Grants and funding for the Business Improvement District in Bangor, helping the business community strengthen capacity and drive town and city development.

Recognising the importance of partnership working, direct grant provision to local Chamber groups would continue aimed at strengthening their capacity and bolstering place-based administrative support. The Council looked forward to launching new Local Action Groups for Bangor and the four towns in the Borough in Spring 2026.

Those would create a dedicated two-way communication hub to champion place-based thinking and empower local communities.

As a Borough the Council had clear ambitions for the next decade: modern services, resilient infrastructure and places that attracted residents, visitors and businesses. The capital plan represented over £250 million investment, supported by central government partners who were providing over 50% of the funding. Managing that ambition responsibly meant smoothing the cost of borrowing and ensuring capital financing provision was predictable. That required the Council to make provision in the current year for capital spend over the coming decade.

The Mayor concluded stating that it was her hope that this provided some insight into the complexities and challenges of setting a budget for an organisation with such a broad range of responsibilities and so many significant ambitions as the Council.

The decision was a 4.74% increase to the district rate for 2026/27. That was an increase of approximately £2.40 per month for the average household and £13 per month for the average business in the Borough. That budget would enable the Council to protect essential services, support vibrant communities, strengthen the conditions for business growth and investment, and fund the infrastructure the Borough needed into the next decade and beyond.

She thanked the Acting Director of Corporate Services, the Head of Finance and the finance team for all their work and to the Members for their scrutiny and attention throughout the process.

NOTED.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 7.57 pm.

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid (in person and via Zoom) Special meeting of Ards and North Down Borough Council was held at the City Hall, The Castle, Bangor, and via Zoom, on Tuesday 10 February 2026 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair:	The Mayor (Councillor McCollum)	
Aldermen:	Adair	McRandal
	Cummings	McDowell
	Graham	McIlveen
	McAlpine (Zoom)	Smith
Councillors:	Ashe	S Irvine
	Blaney (Zoom)	W Irvine
	Boyle	McClellan
	Cathcart	McCracken
	Chambers (Zoom)	McKee (Zoom)
	Cochrane	Moore
	Douglas	Morgan (Zoom)
	Gilmour	Newman
	Hennessy (Zoom)	Thompson
	Hollywood Zoom)	Smart

Officers: Acting Chief Executive (M Steele), Acting Director of Corporate Services (C Jackson), Head of Finance (S Grieve), Manager – Chief Executive’s Office (F Thompson), Democratic Services Manager (J Wilson) and Democratic Services Officer (P Foster)

1. PRAYER

The Mayor (Councillor McCollum) welcomed everyone to the meeting and commenced with the Acting Director of Corporate Services reading the Council prayer.

NOTED.

2. APOLOGIES

The Mayor sought apologies at this stage.

Apologies had been received from Aldermen Armstrong-Cotter & Brooks and Councillors Brady, Edmund, Kennedy, Kerr, McBurney & Wray.

NOTED.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Mayor sought Declarations of Interest at this stage and none were made.

The Mayor reminded everyone that Declarations of Interest could be made at any point in the meeting should the need arise.

NOTED.

4. NOTICES OF MOTION

4.1. NOTICE OF MOTION SUBMITTED BY ALDERMAN MCILVEEN, COUNCILLOR COCHRANE, ALDERMAN MCDOWELL, COUNCILLOR HENNESSY, ALDERMAN SMITH AND COUNCILLOR SMART

At this stage the Mayor commented that as Members would recall she had previously outlined in detail how the rates would be allocated for the incoming financial year and confirmed that all of that information still stood. However, she advised that there had been significant developments since the last Special Council meeting which she wished to place on record at the outset.

As Members would be aware on 29 January the Minister of Finance announced that the plans for Reval 2026 would no longer proceed. This announcement had a direct impact on the district rates that were set by the Council on 28 January 2026.

All budgets, and substantially all assumptions had remained the same as those considered by the Corporate Services Committee and agreed at Special Council. A revised conversion factor revised Estimated Penny Product, and a slightly adjusted assumption on in-year domestic tax base growth had resulted in a rate increase of 4.50% for the 2026/27 financial year, rather than the previously agreed rate of 4.74%.

The Mayor stated that she had received a Rescinding Motion, signed by six Members of Council. For openness and transparency, she would now read the Motion into the Record.

That this Council rescinds its decision taken at the Special Council meeting on 28 January being that the district rates for the 2026/27 financial year be a 4.74% increase. This is an increase of approximately £2.40 per month for the average household and £13 per month for the average business in the Borough; in addition to this to write to the Minister of Finance to express our grave concern at the disproportionate impact of REVAL2026 on the hospitality sector and requests that he takes all necessary steps to ensure the long-term sustainability of these businesses such as halting the REVAL process to review the methodology or providing funding for mitigation measures such as had been announced in England and instead Council requests officers to submit new rate poundages for consideration, based on the current valuation list and substantially the same assumptions as previously used in order to take any benefit that may accrue to ratepayers and further writes to the Minister of Finance to express our grave concern at what had been the disproportionate impact of what had been proposed under REVAL2026 on the

hospitality sector and requests that he takes all necessary steps to ensure the long-term sustainability of these businesses when reviewing REVAL2026 and its the methodology and the potential funding for mitigation measures such as had been announced in England.

Alderman McIlveen proposed, seconded by Councillor Cochrane, that this Council rescinds its decision taken at the Special Council meeting on 28 January being that the district rates for the 2026/27 financial year be a 4.74% increase. This is an increase of approximately £2.40 per month for the average household and £13 per month for the average business in the Borough; in addition to this to write to the Minister of Finance to express our grave concern at the disproportionate impact of REVAL2026 on the hospitality sector and requests that he takes all necessary steps to ensure the long-term sustainability of these businesses such as halting the REVAL process to review the methodology or providing funding for mitigation measures such as had been announced in England and instead Council requests officers to submit new rate poundages for consideration, based on the current valuation list and substantially the same assumptions as previously used in order to take any benefit that may accrue to ratepayers and further writes to the Minister of Finance to express our grave concern at what had been the disproportionate impact of what had been proposed under REVAL2026 on the hospitality sector and requests that he takes all necessary steps to ensure the long-term sustainability of these businesses when reviewing REVAL2026 and its the methodology and the potential funding for mitigation measures such as had been announced in England.

The proposer Alderman McIlveen commented that this was a rarity where the Council had struck a rate and circumstances then occurred which resulted in it having to revisit it. He stated that the Council was legally required to strike the district rates (the domestic district rate and the non-domestic district rate) no later than 15 February each year. The Council had struck its district rate on 28 January 2026 based on the Penny Product provided to it by the Land & Property Services (LPS). However, that Penny Product had been based on calculations based on Reval2026. Reval2026 was then stopped the following day by the Finance Minister and the stopping of that process had resulted in a recalculation of the Penny Product which was more favourable. While it was marginal, given the cost of living and impact on business, anything which the Council could do to ensure its district rate was as low and affordable should be pursued.

Continuing Alderman McIlveen reminded members that on 28 January 2026, the Council had voted in favour of a rate rise of 4.74% which was felt was the best that it could achieve to deliver the standard of service it needed to deliver. Part of that calculation had now changed which would result in a reduction in the level of that increase. In order to restrike the rate, the Council therefore needed to rescind the decision it previously made, a welcome situation to find itself in. However, on the evening of the 28 January, the Council had also made a statement of support for the hospitality sector and asked that a letter be sent to the Finance Minister to outline its deep concerns around Reval2026 and the impact that it would have on the hospitality sector. The Council called for Reval2026 to be halted and mitigations to be looked at and due to Reval2026 being halted that letter was not sent so the Council's concerns had not been expressed to the Minister.

Alderman McIlveen expressed his delight that Reval2026 had been stopped but believed that was not the end of the story. He felt that it continued to be vitally important that the Council wrote to the Finance Minister to set out its concerns, adding that it was equally important it was done at this time when he was weighing up his options on the issue. Alderman McIlveen stated that while the Council was rescinding the decision of 28 January 2026, it must still write to the Minister to detail those concerns which were raised by so many Members at the end of last month.

Commenting as seconder Councillor Cochrane acknowledged that it was rare to have a rescinding Motion of this nature and referred to the comments made by the proposer. He agreed that it was important for the Council to express its deep concern to the Minister and as such he urged members to support the motion.

Alderman McRandal indicated that he was very happy to support the motion and expressed his thanks to Alderman McIlveen for drafting it and to officers for their assistance. He welcomed the Minister's u-turn in respect of Reval2026 stating that the recalculation of the rate in light of this equated to a small reduction which was appropriate and welcome. Continuing, he stated that the Council remained mindful of the burden it placed upon its residents and businesses and in view of the cost pressures faced by Council he believed that striking this rate was appropriate and a reasonable course of action.

Also rising in support Alderman Smith welcomed the u-turn made by the Minister on his proposals for REVAL2026. While that had provided the opportunity for the Council to reduce its rate, it also put a stop to massive increases in valuations within the hospitality industry and many businesses within the Borough. Alderman Smith acknowledged that this was merely a pause in the process for engagement adding that he believed more needed to happen. As such he believed that this provided the opportunity for the Minister to undertake a wider review of District Rates while maintaining the income and ensuring that was spread fairly across the Business sector. He added that it was also important to ensure that small businesses in particular were protected from excess taxations.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Councillor Cochrane, that this Council rescinds its decision taken at the Special Council meeting on 28 January being that the district rates for the 2026/27 financial year be a 4.74% increase. This is an increase of approximately £2.40 per month for the average household and £13 per month for the average business in the Borough; in addition to this to write to the Minister of Finance to express our grave concern at the disproportionate impact of REVAL2026 on the hospitality sector and requests that he takes all necessary steps to ensure the long-term sustainability of these businesses such as halting the REVAL process to review the methodology or providing funding for mitigation measures such as had been announced in England and instead Council requests officers to submit new rate poundages for consideration, based on the current valuation list and substantially the same assumptions as previously used in order to take any benefit that may accrue to ratepayers and further writes to the Minister of Finance to express our grave concern at what had been the disproportionate impact of what had been proposed under REVAL2026 on the hospitality sector and requests that he takes all necessary steps to ensure the long-term

sustainability of these businesses when reviewing REVAL2026 and its the methodology and the potential funding for mitigation measures such as had been announced in England.

5. ROBUSTNESS OF ESTIMATES AND ADEQUACY OF RESERVES (FILE FIN169)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from Acting Chief Executive detailing that Section 4 of the Local Government Finance Act 2011 required the Chief Financial Officer of a Council to submit a report on the robustness of the estimates and for the Council to have regard to this report when considering the estimates.

In addition, Section 6 required the Chief Financial Officer of a Council to submit a report on the adequacy of reserves and for the Council to have regard to this when considering the estimates.

This subsequent report was required in response to the motion to rescind the previous rate poundages set by Council on 28 January due to the suspension of the Reval2026 process.

Robustness of Estimates

There was no change to the underlying budgets for the new district rates proposed later in this meeting. The issues raised in the previous robustness report remained unchanged.

The only change required was in the calculation of the rates, where the conversion factor and estimated penny product had reverted to numbers based on the current valuation list with a minor adjustment to the assumption on the number of new houses that may be added to the list during the next 12 months. This had increased from 400 to 415 homes.

On the basis the previous report and those changes noted above the Chief Executive was satisfied that the budgets set were robust.

Adequacy of Reserves

The Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011 required the Chief Financial Officer of a Council to submit a report to Council on the adequacy of any proposed level of financial reserves for a financial year.

As the underlying budgets and use of reserves had not changed since the previous report to Council on 28 January, the Acting Chief Executive was content with the level of reserves.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the Chief Financial Officers' report on the robustness of estimates and adequacy of reserves.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Cochrane, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that the recommendation be adopted.

6. DISTRICT RATES FOR 2026/27 (FIN169) (Appendix I)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from Acting Director of Corporate Services detailing that as members would be aware the Minister of Finance suspended the implementation of Reval2026 on 29 January after this Council had set its district rate poundages for the 2026/27 financial year.

This report was prepared on the foot of the proposed rescinding motion to be considered by Council earlier in this meeting and was to present the revised district rate poundages for the 2026/27 financial year.

All budgets and substantially all assumptions had remained the same as considered by the Corporate Services Committee. A revised conversion factor, estimated penny product and slightly adjusted assumption on in year domestic tax base growth resulted in an increase of 4.50% for the 2026/27 financial year. Appendix 1 set out the formal calculation.

RECOMMENDED that Council sets for the 2026/27 financial year a non-domestic district rate of 30.1556p in the pound and a domestic district rate of 0.4435p in the pound.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Cochrane, seconded by Alderman Graham, that the recommendation be adopted.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 7.15pm.

ITEM 9.1

44

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of the Planning Committee was held in the Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards, on Tuesday 3 February 2026 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Councillor McClean

Aldermen: Graham McAlpine (Zoom) McDowell
McIlveen Smith

Councillors: Cathcart Harbinson (9.16 pm) Hennessy Kendall (Zoom) Kerr
McCollum McKee (Zoom) Morgan Smart Wray

Officers: Director of Place and Prosperity (B Dorrian), Head of Planning and Building Control (A McCullough), Principal Planner (G Kerr), Senior Planners (J Hanna & A Todd) and Democratic Services Officer (R King)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for lateness had been received from Councillor Harbinson.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declarations of interest were recorded:

Alderman Graham, Alderman McIlveen, Councillor Cathcart and Councillor Kerr – Item 4.5 - LA06/2023/2221/F

Councillor Cathcart – Item 4.2 - LA06/2023/1563/A

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PLANNING COMMITTEE MINUTES OF 02 DECEMBER 2025

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above.

AGREED on the proposal of Alderman Graham, seconded by Councillor Wray, that the minutes be noted.

4. PLANNING APPLICATIONS**ORDER OF BUSINESS**

In order to facilitate the attendance of external speakers, the Chair advised that Item 4.4 would be brought forward to follow Item 4.1.

4.1 LA06/2024/0952/F – DEMOLITION OF EXISTING DWELLING AND ERECTION OF 2 NO. 3-BED AND 4 NO. 2-BED APARTMENTS
(Appendix I - VII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Case Officer's report.

DEA: Hollywood & Clandeboye

Committee Interest: Application with six or more representations contrary to officer's recommendation

Proposal: Demolition of existing dwelling and erection of 2No. 3 bed and 4No. 2 bed apartments

Site Location: 115 Station Road, Craigavad

Recommendation: Grant Planning Permission

The Head of Planning and Building Control (A McCullough) outlined the details of the planning application.

At its meeting of 07 October 2025, officers had presented the application for demolition of the existing dwelling at 115 Station Road and its replacement by 6no. apartments.

Members were reminded of the location, close to the end of the private road. Officers had recommended the grant of planning permission, that recommendation being based on the previous extant approval for 4no. apartments on site as allowed on appeal by the Planning Appeals Commission.

The Committee was shown an image of the existing dwelling on site, whilst a further slide displayed the ortho image of the site and a photograph showing the end of the asserted PRow (Public Right of Way) where it met the boundary of the site.

A further image showed the front elevation of the proposed block housing six apartments.

Members were advised that the floor plan remained basically the same as that approved under appeal, with a 0.75m increase in the height of the proposed building, increase in parking, slight reduction in open space provision, whereby there was still provision of c114m² in the form of small communal area to the rear and private balconies – considered to meet the requirements of Creating Places and also cognisant of the location adjacent to the coastal path.

There were a number of issues raised at the Planning Committee meeting of October 2025 which had necessitated a further addendum to clarify a number of assertions made.

In respect of the previous PAC decision, it was clarified that it was a material consideration but the weight to be attributed to it was a matter of planning judgement. A copy of the PAC decision was forwarded to each Member further to the 07 October meeting, and a copy of the minutes at which the appeal decision was notified to Committee was appended to the report.

In respect of the amount of open space to be attributed to a development of this size, the officer highlighted an error in the Addendum at paragraph 22 whereby it was stated that 81.4m² had been proposed.

It was clarified that the total proposed was 114m² made up of 58m² provided as a communal area to the rear of the building, in addition to each apartment having its own private balcony, which was accepted within the guidance document, Creating Places, as being appropriate for apartments. This figure was well above the minimum space requirement suggested of 10m² per apartment.

In relation to the arrangement of the site in the context of the asserted Public Right of Way, the images within the Addendum clearly set out the location whereby the RoW left Station Road and continued to the front of the property along the shore. Those images, alongside the Swept Analysis, clearly demonstrated that there would be no likely reversing of vehicles onto the Public Right of Way, and there was appropriate room for manoeuvring around the site accordingly. The submitted Shorefront section also assisted in highlighting for Members where pedestrians could step aside from vehicles on the road.

A Minded to Refuse resolution was passed, as proposed by Cllr McCollum and seconded by Alderman Graham, with reasons for refusal to be submitted to Planning officials for review and refinement into appropriately worded reasons.

As noted in the Addendum, a Minded to Refuse resolution was not a final decision on the application. It allowed Members to reflect on all the information provided and then to exercise its consideration of the planning balance.

A document was submitted setting out the rationale for considering that the application should be refused. That had been circulated to all Members and was appended to the Addendum accordingly. Despite additional concerns raised on the evening of October's meeting, the reasons had been distilled down into density, development not in keeping with the established residential area, and precedent. A final slide set out the proposed reasons for refusal based on the rationale submitted. The matter now rested with Members accordingly.

The Chair invited questions from Members for clarification.

Councillor McCollum referred to 'pull in' areas along the right of way and asked if those were private or publicly owned. The officer advised that they were private and Councillor McCollum argued that they could be closed off by the owners at any time which she understood would prevent motorists being able to give way to oncoming vehicles as well as restricting pedestrian access along the route.

While the officer accepted that, she pointed to grass areas at the front where it provided room to step aside. Councillor McCollum noted those areas were also privately owned and owners could withdraw public access at any time.

Attending to speak against the application, Ms Emma McBurney was permitted to give an address lasting up to three minutes.

Ms McBurney advised that she was speaking on behalf of local residents and made the following points:

- The reasons for refusal before Members reflected the Committee's resolution of October 2025.
- The Planning Department had confirmed that the Committee was not bound by the previous PAC decision and was entitled, as a matter of law, to distinguish that development from the proposal now under consideration.
- The applicant's repeated claim of a genuine fallback position was disagreed with, as the fallback related to four units rather than six.
- The increased intensity of use and the associated requirement for additional car-parking spaces would have resulted in the loss of private amenity space, further urbanising the land use in a manner akin to a city-centre apartment development.
- The applicant's comparison with a town-centre apartment scheme demonstrated this point.
Residents' complaint was twofold in that the development was substandard and contrary to creating-places guidance, and it would have resulted in unsafe access arrangements, including the potential for reversing vehicles onto the public right of way abutting the PAC site boundary.
- Access to the public road was taken from the boundary of the application site along a 350-metre public right of way with no footpaths, used daily by hundreds of walkers, cyclists and children.
- The introduction of additional traffic would have been unsafe and would have prejudiced users of the right of way, which was a material planning consideration.
- Reference was made to the applicant's 'Access and Manoeuvring Clarification' document.
- On behalf of residents, Marrac Design had submitted a rebuttal which demonstrated that the clarification document was fatally flawed.
- The submission failed to acknowledge that four dwellings - two existing and two beyond the application site - held an unfettered right of way over the application site.
- The applicant's claim that only vans could deliver below the railway bridge was disputed as incorrect.
- A further submission entitled 'Shore Front Layout' was referenced, noting that it related to private land outside the application boundary and formed no part of the proposal before the Council.
- The applicant had a right of way to pass over Station Road — the road surface - which fronted the shore.

- The right of way was confined to the road and not to the private bell mouths or the areas of the front garden alleged to be verges for the frontage dwellings.
- The claim of a new road being built was inaccurate.
- The recent submissions carried little or no weight, and the residents' rebuttal highlighted fundamental issues with the application.
- A respectful request was made that the Committee proceed with its 'minded to refuse' recommendation.

As there were no questions, Ms McBurney returned to the public gallery.

Speaking in support of the application, Mr James Morley was permitted to address the Committee for up to three minutes, and he made the following points:

- The refusal reasons centred on two matters: the increase in density and the slight increase in height.
- The correct starting point for assessing the proposal was the already approved scheme, and an increase in density, in itself, was not a reason for refusal.
- The relevant test was the visual and physical impact, and there was no significant change in appearance when compared with what had previously been approved.
- The site had sufficient parking and amenity space for the proposal, and the increase in density should therefore have been regarded as acceptable.
- The height increase was insignificant, and when viewed in context it did not result in any greater visual impact.
- The planning arguments relating to density, design and townscape character had already been extensively argued by the Council and settled by the Planning Appeals Commission.
- Public resources should not have been wasted on repeatedly reassessing the same issues between the same parties on substantially the same basis.
- The Committee was required to undertake a full weighing and balancing exercise, and detailed viewpoints were set out in the supplementary notes.
- Planning reports should have been read as a whole and not analysed in the manner of statutes or contracts.
- Part of the weighing and balancing was the fallback position and the PAC decision, both of which were considerations that should have carried significant weight.
- The proposal related to the same site, same building and same principle of development, with only a slight height increase and a change in density.
- The height increase was sought solely to protect the property and future residents from coastal flooding, and this consideration should have outweighed any minimal visual impact.
- The change in density - from four to six units - did not materially alter the visual appearance of the already approved scheme.
- This was an increase in density without town cramming.
- It was an increase to an already approved building which correctly aligned with the policy being used to support a refusal.

- The site could easily have accommodated the increase, and the Committee was challenged to identify where the harm was.

As there were no questions from the Committee, Mr Morley returned to the public gallery.

Councillor McCollum proposed, seconded by Alderman Graham, that the Council refuse planning permission.

Councillor McCollum spoke to her proposal, expressing the following views:

- Both the applicant and objectors had been given a fair opportunity to present their submissions and new material.
- The refusal reasons she had put forward were robust, precise and well linked to planning policy and legally defensible.
- While a departure from the Planning Department's recommendation, the planning considerations she had based her proposal on were sound, fair and reasonable.
- While respectful of the PAC approval for the previous application, she argued that this was not binding, nor was it the only material consideration and the Committee was required to attach weight which it felt appropriate.

Councillor McCollum went on to refer to the document which outlined her refusal reasons, and she confirmed that they were as stated. She provided a brief overview of her main points as follows:

- The application conflicted with Policy LC1 of the Addendum because its housing density was far higher than the established area.
- The existing neighbourhood density was five dwellings per hectare, and the accepted fallback position was 40 dwellings per hectare. The current proposal for 64 dwellings per hectare represented a further 50% increase.
- Combined with the increased building height, she considered the impact harmful and unacceptable.
- The proposal did not respect the established character, form or environmental quality of the area and the site formed part of a distinct and valued coastal area.
- Departing from SPPS par 6.137 required exceptional circumstances which Councillor McCollum argued had not been demonstrated and the PAC also found no basis for treating this as an exceptional case.
- The scheme would set an unacceptable precedent which could lead to 'creeping consent' – small approvals that gradually justified more intensive and harmful development.
- There were other patterns of this in the Borough including an example referenced by the applicant on Seafront Road.

The seconder, Alderman Graham, noted the increased density and the site would access a public right of way on the coastal path, a road that was not under control of public authorities. He remained concerned that the additional traffic would compromise safety and confirmed that his previous objections still stood.

Alderman McIlveen was unable to support the proposal to refuse planning permission, he had not supported it previously and had not heard anything that had altered that view.

He felt that the weight of the PAC decision was a key one in this particular case and there was already a precedent there for a development of this size and scale – suggesting that, externally, the build form was similar to what already existed in the area. He recognised road safety concerns were debated previously and while not a fan of the development, ultimately the decision needed to be taken on existing policy and the PAC decision.

Alderman Smith took a similar view remaining unconvinced of the reasoning to refuse. He was content that the issues with open space and car parking had been resolved and noted that only a minor increase in the building height, feeling that visual impact was negligible. He estimated that the traffic increase would only be 10% which he felt was not significant. Given all evidence before the Committee, he believed it was difficult to refuse planning permission.

On being put to the meeting, with 8 voting FOR, 6 voting AGAINST, 1 ABSTAINING and 1 ABSENT, the proposal was CARRIED.

The voting was as follows:

FOR (8)	AGAINST (6)	ABSTAINED (1)	ABSENT (1)
Aldermen	Aldermen	Aldermen	Aldermen
Graham	McDowell		
McAlpine	McIlveen		
	Smith		
Councillors	Councillor	Councillors	Councillor
Cathcart	Hennessy	McClellan	Harbinson
Kendall	Morgan		
Kerr	Wray		
McCollum			
McKee			
Smart			

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor McCollum, seconded by Alderman Graham, with 8 voting FOR, 6 voting AGAINST, 1 ABSTAINED and 1 ABSENT, that the Council refuses planning permission.

4.4 LA06/2024/0771/F – CHANGE OF USE FROM AGRICULTURAL BUILDING, COMMERCIAL STORE AND WORKSHOP TO DWELLING WITH EXTENSION AND RELOCATION OF THE ACCESS

(Appendix X)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Case Officer's report.

DEA: Ards Peninsula

Committee Interest: Called in by a Member of the Planning Committee.

Proposal: Change of use from agricultural building, commercial store and workshop to dwelling with extension and relocation of the access.

Site Location: 60m to the SE of 31A Loughries Road, Newtownards

Recommendation: Refuse Planning Permission

The Planning Officer (A Todd) outlined the details of the planning application. It had been recommended for refusal and had been called in by Alderman McIlveen to determine whether the building was considered to be appropriate for conversion under Policy CTY4 of PPS 21 and the SPPS and to ensure consistency with previous decisions of this type taken by the Committee.

The site was located at the junction of Loughries Road and Drumawhey Road and was occupied by a single storey building last used for agricultural and storage purposes. Site boundaries to the road were undefined at the corner of the junction however mature hedgerows defined the remainder of the road frontage boundaries as well as a hedgerow along the rear western boundary.

The existing building was a mix of stone and block construction with render finish and an asymmetric corrugated metal roof. There were two large openings comprising corrugated metal doors, one to the front and one to the side along with smaller door and window openings on the front elevation of the building which had been blocked up.

Members were shown the plan and elevations of the existing building. Internally, the building was split into two separate areas. The front section appeared to comprise of the remains of an older building of stone construction and the rear section was a later addition.

It was proposed to remove the rear section of the existing building, retain the front section and add a new rear return.

The proposed dwelling was small in scale and of a traditional linear form with finishes of stone, render and slate.

As the application was for the change of use and conversion of a building to a dwelling in the countryside, it had been assessed against the SPPS and policies CTY1 and CTY4 of PPS21. While policy CTY 4 'Conversion and Reuse of Existing Buildings', stated that planning permission would be granted for the sympathetic conversion of a suitable building for a variety of uses including a dwelling, paragraph 6.73 of the SPPS introduced a further requirement that the building must be of local importance and cited examples such as former school houses, churches and older traditional barns and outbuildings. The SPPS was clear in paragraph 1.12 that any conflict between the SPPS and PPS 21 was to be resolved in favour of the SPPS.

While the SPPS did not define 'locally important', the examples given were suggestive of buildings that generally had some local architectural merit or historic interest. In the consideration of appeals, the PAC had consistently taken the view

that the SPPS required the building in question to be of some merit and importance to its local setting making it worthy of retention and to warrant it being of 'special character or interest'.

A series of historical maps of the site confirmed that a building had occupied the site since the early 1800s and that it appeared to be in the same location as the older section of the current building on site. While the Planning Department did not dispute the historical evidence of a building on the site, characteristics of any traditional vernacular merit of a building that may have once existed on the site had long gone.

As outlined in a further image, there appeared to be the remains of traditional stone walls within the front section of the building along with blocked up door and window openings however, what little remained of any vernacular building had been so extensively altered that it no longer exhibited any vernacular or architectural features of merit which would be considered worthy of retention. The roof of the original building had been removed along with the upper sections of the original gable walls, and a large extension and asymmetrical corrugated metal roof had been added.

Further images showed the original building on the site dating back to the 1800s was an L-shaped building which would have marked the corner of the junction of the two roads. As could be seen on the present-day aerial image, the rear portion of this original building no longer existed and the extension built to the north-west elevation, had doubled the depth of the original building.

Proposals for conversion considered under the SPPS and Policy CTY4 had to be considered based on the condition and merits of the current building on the site, not based on a building that may have once occupied the site in the past. The current building exhibited no vernacular features of any worth and despite the building being known as Barn End in the past by one local resident, there was no evidence of any particular historic interest or use associated with the building.

In terms of its general suitability for conversion and re-use, the building was of a considerable age however no structural survey or other evidence had accompanied the application to demonstrate that the building was structurally suitable for adaptation. In the front section of the building, the rear wall was higher than the front wall which would not have been an original feature of a vernacular building and it had therefore been significantly increased in height to accommodate the new roof.

In the submitted Design and Access Statement, the agent raised two conversion proposals which were allowed at appeal, that he considered to be similar to the current proposal, one at 65 Rathmore Road, Dunadry, and one adjacent to 11 Killyvolgan Road, Ballywalter. Both of these buildings were substantial vernacular two storey barns with original intact walls, roofs and window and door openings. In both appeals, the Commissioners considered the buildings to be good examples of traditional vernacular barns. The buildings were found to be in good repair and considered to be good examples of non-listed vernacular architecture. The Planning Department did not consider that the heavily altered building at Loughries Road was comparable to these examples of traditional purpose-built barns.

A further slide showed some examples of other proposals for conversion which were dismissed at appeal. These buildings were more comparable to the current building

under consideration and were not considered by the PAC to be locally important. In these appeal decisions, the Commissioners determined that the policy did not state that all older vernacular buildings were necessarily locally important and despite age and stone construction of the buildings in question, they were found to display no noteworthy architectural features or merit. These buildings had similar characteristics to the current building under consideration and on this basis the Planning Department was content that its assessment and policy interpretation was consistent and in line with the PAC's approach.

In his call-in request, Alderman McIlveen had also asked that Members ensured consistency of approach with previous decisions of this type taken by the Committee. While each individual planning application should be considered on its own merits, it was also important that planning policy and guidance was applied consistently. There had been four examples of previous similar proposals considered by Committee in recent years, summarised as follows:

The first July 2019, was for the conversion of an outbuilding to tourist accommodation at 50 Thornyhill Road, Killinchy. Committee agreed with the officer's recommendation to refuse on the grounds that this building was not considered to be locally important given its lack of any architectural or historic features of merit.

The second application considered by Committee in June 2023, was for the conversion of a barn to a dwelling at 29 Newtownards Road, Comber. Committee agreed with the officer's recommendation to approve on the grounds that the building was considered to be of local importance. Factors which were considered to contribute to its local importance included construction of local Scrabo Stone and Bangor Blue slates, the building's association with the prominent period property at No. 29, the historic use of the building as housing for local farm workers and the various attractive vernacular features such as the irregular window openings.

The third application considered by Committee in March 2023 was for change of use from a garage to a holiday let. This was recommended for refusal by officers as it was not considered to be a locally important building however Committee overturned the recommendation and approved the application giving determining weight to the tourist use and on the basis that the works carried out to the building made it appear locally important as it was a noticeable feature when travelling along the Portaferry Road.

The last application considered by Committee in September 2025 was for conversion of ancillary accommodation to a dwelling. Committee agreed with the officer's recommendation to refuse on the basis that the building was of modern construction exhibiting no architectural or historic merit and therefore it was not considered to be locally important.

In summary, the Planning Department did not consider that the building in question was of local importance as required by the SPPS. The original building had been heavily altered and extended, and no vernacular or architectural features of any worth remained, nor was there evidence of any historic use or interest associated with the building. The Planning Department was content that the consideration of the application and the interpretation of policy was consistent with the approach taken by

the PAC and on this basis, it was recommended that planning permission was refused.

The Chair invited questions from Members for clarification.

Alderman McIlveen, recalling the minutes of another application at Moneyreagh Road, had noted a recurring theme concerning what was considered to be locally important by the Committee, specifically sites that were on or visible from the road. He put this to the officer who explained that visibility was not necessarily a test but could be a factor.

Alderman McIlveen argued that in examples where the Committee had gone against officer recommendations, the cases had involved sites that were prominent and visible. He had noted that the case on Moneyreagh Road was modern in construction but clearly on the road. He recalled a previous discussion where his colleague had focused on local significance, particularly the presence on the road as the main point of an argument. In this case he felt that the building marked a road corner and was quite prominent locally.

The officer responded that while prominence could be a factor, policy also required architectural merit or historic interest.

Alderman McIlveen asked if officers accepted that part of this building was used as a pre-existing cottage and the officer, while unsure if that was its original use, pointed to evidence of traditional stone walls.

In a further query, Alderman McIlveen recalled one of the presentation slides relating to the restoration of a cottage and believed that the windows and the chimney flue pointed to former residential use. He also understood from reviewing the application, that there was presence of stonework under the render. He asked if the applicant intended to remove the newer elements of the building in order to retain the old stonework, feeling that the thrust of the application was to bring the old building back to life.

The officer stated that appeared to be what was being proposed but there was no submission of a structural survey to support the plans.

Councillor Wray acknowledged the officer's expertise in interpreting plans and policies and accepted that this type of application was new to him. He referred to evidence that the building had existed since 1833 and was known as The Barn End. He argued that the building's physical presence alongside the road made it well known locally, despite not everyone being aware of its full history. He asked how officers had determined that the building had no local interest.

The officer responded that the decision was based on evidence presented with the application and there was no evidence of historic use presented other than one local resident had said it was known as The Barn End. Weight also had to be given to PAC decisions which did not allow the conversion of every old building but only those that had particular merit, vernacular worth or special character.

Mr Stephen Dickson was in attendance to speak in support of the application and made the following points:

- The building, known locally as ‘The Barn End’ and confirmed by an 86-year-old local resident and others, was clearly an undesirable building, visually prominent in any direction, in a commanding roadside position at a corner and junction.
- The building was not derelict.
- The owner’s health in later years did not permit keeping livestock, but the established agricultural, workshop, storage, building-materials and commercial use was evident.
- The established use could have been continued or intensified with auto repairs, a joinery workshop or small manufacturing, etc., with little control.
- Potentially, the building could have been replaced with a new, potentially undesirable purpose-built commercial shed, subject to approval.
- The vegetation and render to the façade had been removed to visibly show the character and architecture of the existing vernacular building / original cottage.
- Internally and externally, the cottage window and door opening positions and surrounds were still intact. The original fireplace position and chimney were evident centrally on the original gable to the Loughries Road.
- The exposure of the stonework had highlighted the aesthetic quality of the stone walling as an exceptional feature worthy of retention and context, conferring a local historical significance on the building.
- Policies set out provisions for sympathetic conversion, with adaptation, if necessary, of a locally important building (such as former schoolhouses, churches and older traditional barns and outbuildings) as a single dwelling where this would secure its upkeep and retention.
- It did not define “locally important,” but examples given were suggestive of buildings that generally had some local architectural merit or, as in this case, historic interest.
- Public views of the building were not a policy requirement; however, “locally important” surely implied that the building must be a focal point or landmark.
- Historic mapping confirmed the building’s vernacular status from the 1840s.
- The building had been altered over the years to meet the needs of the original vernacular dwelling and later the current established use.
- These alterations could not take away the fact that the ethos of the formal vernacular architecture had only been masked, with the historical detailing still evident, shown by the exposed stonework, internal fireplace, flue, sills, windows and door openings.
- The chimneys had been removed, but the gable peaks were only reduced by approximately 50%, as detailed on drawing “03A Existing Sheds.”
- The proposal would visually integrate into the site and surrounding area and would provide a dwelling acceptable in design and appropriate to the local area.
- The COR stated: ‘With all things considered it is my planning judgment that the proposed extensions are sympathetic to the scale, massing and architectural style and finishes of the existing building.’
- Also: ‘On balance, due to the roadside location and the open views of the site, together with the criteria of the policy CTY14, the design of the proposal is

acceptable. The conversion to dwelling will not exacerbate the prominence of this building in the local landscape.’

- The appeals referenced were relevant support to the application, as they both importantly suggested that works to the buildings could be accepted to restore their character, maintaining them as historical rural vernacular buildings.
- The scheme would secure the retention and improvement of a rural building of merit, as well as the removal of the unremarkable part of the existing structure, enhancing this rural property. The scheme would therefore constitute an ecological and environmental improvement in this locality.
- Numerous vernacular barns, etc., had been approved by the council for change of use in farmyards, etc., in areas where they were not in public viewpoints. These had been deemed to be buildings meeting the requirements of “locally important” on virtually their age alone.
- Given its historic value and prominent location, it must have been a material consideration that “The Barn End” was “locally important.”
- It was ironic that policies allowed for an additional dwelling in the countryside adjacent on the ownership, but planners considered conversion and enhancement of the existing building inappropriate.
- Approval or refusal depended on whether members considered this to be a ‘locally important building’ and appropriate development for this site and locality.

The Chair invited questions from Members and Councillor Cathcart sought clarification on the stonework and if the applicant would be agreeable to have its use included in a condition, should planning approval be granted.

Mr Dickson confirmed the intention was to develop with exposed stonework, noting that the existing building incorporated large stones throughout the elevation, unlike more economical buildings where stone size typically reduced higher up. He confirmed that the applicant intended to retain the main cottage structure and the proposal included reuse of the chimney and fireplace. Mr Dickson indicated that the applicant would be happy for such a condition to be placed on an approval.

Alderman Graham questioned if it would be feasible to retain such a significant element of the old stonework and queried the previous structure of the roof, if it had originally been an apex roof with slates. Mr Dickson believed that assumption was correct, pointing to more recent agricultural use as the reason for the existing sloped tin roof. He believed that that it would be feasible to retain the original stonework.

Councillor Hennessy asked if it was known if the building was structurally feasible and if a survey report had been produced. Mr Dickson explained there had only been a visual survey but reported that there were no major cracks and the walls had survived due to the roof and maintenance and use as an agricultural workshop. He explained that the render was difficult to remove at the front and that was done as part of the investigation during the application.

Referring to the proposals, Councillor Morgan noted there was very little stone wall and a lot of concrete blocks. She asked what proportion of the development would feature the stonework.

Mr Dickson referred to the image of the existing footprint which was the outside walls of the old cottage. In addition to that footprint the applicant was adding a back return and a front porch. He pointed to the existing front door and windows and front elevation of the proposal

As there were no further questions, Mr Dickson returned to the public gallery.

The Chair invited questions to the officer and Councillor McCollum noted the cost and complexity of renovating an old stone building and asked what would happen if the project later proved unviable. She wondered if it would be essential for the original stone to be re-used, or whether the applicant could simply build a basic bungalow instead.

The officer advised that specific walls could be conditioned, and a structural survey would be required. The applicant would be required to retain the existing structure as an alternative structure would be considered a replacement.

Alderman McIlveen proposed, seconded by Councillor Wray, that the Council grant planning permission.

Alderman McIlveen felt that the proposal was sympathetic to the countryside and would be consistent with the Committee's previous approach - noting that the building was prominent from the road. It was important for the Council to look at how it could protect its built heritage and not allow a building to go to 'rack and ruin' but protect it for future generations. It was important for it to be conditioned appropriately, and he was content for that to be delegated to officers.

Councillor Wray agreed with that approach in terms of conditioning along with the importance of protecting built heritage at what he felt was a locally important building in terms of the policy. He felt it would both enhance what was there now and the type of building that could have been constructed.

Councillor Cathcart felt it was a difficult balance but accepted the argument that the building was unappealing in its current condition and would benefit from the conversion. He felt it important that the condition to retain the stone walls be included and he sought reassurance on that.

The Head of Planning and Building Control had concerns on how such a condition could be applied and warned that this could be problematic in terms of enforcement if the conversion proved unviable. The condition could also potentially place the applicant in a position they did not wish to be in.

Councillor McCollum wondered if a deferral to allow for the submission of a structural survey would be more appropriate and the officer advised this fell under a deferral for further information and was an option open to the Committee.

Councillor Morgan agreed that a structural survey should be the minimum requirement though she struggled to support the proposal to grant planning permission, suspecting that it would not be viable to retain the stonework while also raising concerns about a lack of information to suggest the building was of local importance. She also felt the proposed conversion, whilst attractive, was not sympathetic to the barn.

Councillor Hennessy was supportive of conversions of vernacular buildings, but he returned to the policy reasons for refusal and agreed that the building was not considered locally important, or of any architectural merit with no vernacular features.

The Chair asked the officer for guidance on the protocol for a deferral to allow submission of a structural survey and the officer referred to protocol that allowed deferrals for clarification, additional information or a site visit. She also pointed out that since 5th January 2026, the Council's Validation Checklist, as approved by Committee, required submission of a structural survey before an application could even be validated.

Alderman McIlveen had appreciated the concerns raised by the officer and did not want to place a burden on the officers or the applicant in terms of dealing with the matter and he hoped that the Committee could at least agree in principle with the development and the retention of built heritage. He wondered if the Committee would be 'minded to approve' the application in that regard which he felt would provide comfort for the applicant before a financial commitment to attain a structural survey report.

The officer referred to procedural guidance and explained complexities in proceeding with a 'minded to approve' agreement. Alderman McIlveen was content to withdraw his original proposal and proposed the following:

That the application is deferred to allow for the submission of a structural survey.

Councillor Wray agreed to second the proposal.

Alderman Graham was sympathetic to the application and queried if the onus was on the architect to satisfy the requirements in terms of structure, noting the design could be amended to retain the stonewalls in such a way that they were not load bearing. He queried the next steps of the process if the Committee was to agree to the deferral.

Referring to the formal definition, the officer advised that the survey was a comprehensive report on the condition and construction of a property and would be required to support applications for the conversion of a rural building to demonstrate that it was capable of conversion without major or complete reconstruction. This was the responsibility of the applicant to obtain an appraisal of the structural stability of the building, identifying clearly any rebuilding works and to include a schedule of works necessary to carry out the conversion.

On being put to the meeting with 10 voting FOR, 4 voting AGAINST, 1 ABSTAINING and 1 ABSENT, the proposal was declared CARRIED.

The voting was as follows:

FOR (10)	AGAINST (4)	ABSTAINED (1)	ABSENT (1)
Aldermen	Aldermen	Aldermen	Aldermen
Graham	McDowell		
McAlpine			
McIlveen			

Smith

Councillor

Cathcart
Kendall
Kerr
McCollum
Smart
Wray

Councillor

Hennessy
McKee
Morgan

Councillor

McClellan

Councillor

Harbinson

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Councillor Wray, with 10 voting FOR, 4 voting AGAINST, 1 ABSTAINED and 1 ABSENT, that the application is deferred to allow for the submission of a structural survey.

(Councillor Cathcart left the meeting having declared an interest in Item 4.2 - 8.24 pm)

4.2 LA06/2023/1563/A – REPLACEMENT OF TWO-SIDED FIXED PRISMATIC SIGN WITH ELECTRONIC MESSAGE DISPLAY PANELS (RETROSPECTIVE)

(Appendix VIII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Case Officer’s report.

DEA: Ards Peninsula

Committee Interest: Call-in by a Member of the Planning Committee

Proposal: Replacement of two-sided fixed prismatic sign with electronic message display panels (retrospective).

Site Location: Cardy Gospel Hall, 1 Cardy Road East, Greyabbey

Recommendation: Refuse Consent

The Principal Planner (G Kerr) outlined the planning application. It was before Members due to a call-in from the delegated list by Councillor Cathcart in the week beginning 24 November 2025, to determine whether the sign did or did not cause demonstrable harm to the amenity and character of the rural area in line with PPS 17, Control of Outdoor Advertisements, Policy AD1.

It was noted that there were both letters of objection and support in relation to the proposal. Environmental Health, DFI Roads and the Biodiversity officer had been consulted and had no objections. Members were also advised that there was a history of enforcement at the site, with the submission of applications as a result of investigations. The recommendation was to refuse advertising consent. Using a Google image, the officer explained that the site was located in the countryside, approximately 1.8km north-west of the settlement of Greyabbey, which was the closest settlement shown by the Ards and Down Area Plan. The site lay within a rural setting with a dispersed pattern of settlement, including dwellings in the vicinity.

Members were shown the previously approved signage to assist in understanding cumulative impact. The officer highlighted that this retrospective application had been considered alongside another retrospective planning application for signage, LA06/2023/1562/A, which related to the replacement of gable signage with an illuminated sign. Both electronic signs were located within the curtilage of the church, separated by a distance of approximately 41m, with both visible from Cardy Road. The application for the gable of the church had been granted consent. However, the officer advised that if the unauthorised sign under consideration were to be granted consent, its illuminated nature and close proximity to the approved sign would result in a negative cumulative impact within the countryside setting. When viewed together, particularly at night when illuminated, the signs would not be sympathetic to the rural setting.

Images of the site and surrounding area were shown to provide context. Turning to planning policy, the officer advised that the provisions of PPS17: Control of Outdoor Advertisements were material to the assessment. Policy AD1 stated that consent would be given for the display of an advertisement where it respected amenity when assessed in the context of the general characteristics of the locality, and where it did not prejudice public safety. In assessing the impact of a sign on amenity, Policy AD1 required consideration of several matters, which were outlined on the slide. The amplification text stated that care must be taken to ensure that an advertisement would not detract from the place where it was to be displayed or its surroundings, and that it was particularly important to prevent clutter and adequately control signs involving illumination. Amenity, in relation to advertisements, was understood to mean the effect upon the appearance of the building or immediate neighbourhood where it was displayed, or its impact over long-distance views. Further images of the site and the sign were shown. The officer explained that the unauthorised free-standing sign was located adjacent to the public road at the vehicular access to Cardy Gospel Hall. Members were shown the dimensions of the sign, which was a two-sided fixed prismatic sign with a two-sided static electronic message display, panel-mounted on galvanised support poles, measuring 2m wide and 2m high.

Images of the original sign were shown, and the officer advised that the sign under consideration had replaced the original free-standing sign in the same position and of similar dimensions; therefore, it was considered replacement signage. It was considered reasonable that during daylight hours, when the electronic sign was not illuminated, it had no significantly greater visual impact than the original sign and did not harm the character or appearance of the area.

However, when functioning and illuminated, the sign had a significantly different appearance to the original sign. Members were shown an image of the sign illuminated.

The officer advised that the sign was visible from both approaches along Cardy Road East: from approximately 185m away on approach from the east, and from approximately 160m away on approach from the west, although it was partially screened from the west at certain points by the existing roadside church hall.

In relation to illumination, Members were advised that guidance in Annex A, relating to pole-mounted signs, stated that the height, size and levels of illumination of such signs may result in visual intrusion within the locality. They could be extremely dominant over long distances and detract not only from the character and appearance of the area in which they were sited but also from the area from which they were viewed. In addition, where proposed close to residential properties, they could be detrimental to the amenities enjoyed by local residents. One of the stated design guidelines also advised that they should not be sited adjacent to, and wherever possible should not directly face, residential properties.

Images of nearby residential properties were shown. In terms of residential amenity, the officer advised that the sign was highly visible from five existing dwellings located on the opposite side of the road from the church: Nos. 2a, 2b, 2c, 4 and 10 Cardy Road East. Given the distances ranging from 35.6m to 135.3m away from the sign, it was considered that the separation distances were sufficient to ensure that the lighting of the sign would not impact on the residential amenity of these properties to an unacceptable degree. However, it was noted that this issue had been a main theme of objections raised by neighbouring properties.

The officer then referred to paragraph 4.8 of PPS17, which stated that the amenity of the countryside was particularly important and that there was a need to protect its unique qualities from the negative effects of advertising. The only advertisements likely to be acceptable in the countryside were those proposed on site and which related to existing or approved commercial enterprises. These should be small in scale and should not detract from the quality and character of the local landscape.

It was considered that the advertising structure did not meet the guidance within the policy. The two electronic screens measured 2m x 1m and over 2m in height, both of which would be illuminated to display electronic messages. The illuminated electronic function of the sign was not acceptable in a rural setting. The sign was commercial in appearance, more characteristic of signage found in an urban setting, particularly at commercial premises. It was uncharacteristic of the countryside setting and would cause detrimental harm to the visual amenity of the immediate area. Supporters of the illuminated sign had mainly referred to the ability to update on church events, rather than the principle of the sign itself. Other issues raised by objectors included concerns relating to road safety and bat activity.

In conclusion, the officer advised that, taking all factors into consideration, the illumination within the countryside setting was not acceptable, adversely impacted upon the rural character of the area, and refusal of consent was recommended.

The Chair invited questions from Members for clarification.

Alderman McIlveen appreciated that the sign was of similar dimensions to the previous wooden structure and noted that, interestingly, DFI Roads usually objected to such applications but had not done so in this case.

The officer had been surprised that DFI had not objected and referred to the location being on a slightly curved section of road – she was concerned that it would be distracting for motorists.

Alderman McIlveen noted that objections had focused largely on bat activity rather than visual impact of the sign and the officer confirmed that they had also related to appearance. She confirmed that the Council's biodiversity officer had raised no concerns over bat activity.

In a further query, Alderman McIlveen asked whether the level of lighting could be controlled so that it would not be as bright, or whether such a condition could have been attached.

The officer advised that, as the matter had arisen from enforcement action, the Planning Department had to consider what was already in place. While the upcoming speaker had suggested conditions, the officer added that conditions could not be recommended. A new application could be considered but this would also require consultation with Environmental Health and DFI Roads.

Alderman McIlveen asked if Environmental Health had been consulted in this case and the officer explained that it had recommended conditions being attached with regard to lighting but again, conditions were not being applied due to this being retrospective and arising from enforcement. Officers would be willing to consider a new application however with changes to the sign and lux levels.

Given it had not objected in this case, Alderman McIlveen questioned why Environmental Health would need to be consulted again as part of a new application.

It was explained that the sign was unauthorised and the application was being assessed on the existing lighting levels. The officer acknowledged that this was a church in the countryside and that signage was necessary, and for balance, the other retrospective sign on the gable end had been granted consent with conditions on timing and lighting levels.

Alderman McIlveen noted that the other sign was also retrospective and subject to enforcement action but had been granted consent with conditions.

The Chair asked if the only way for mitigations to take effect would be through submission of a new application and if such mitigations would overcome the Planning Department's objections in principle. The officer confirmed that the Planning Department would be willing to consider a new application and clarified that while the other sign had been acceptable, this one differed due to the size of the illuminated sign and amenity impact. There were concerns about the intensity of the light at night.

The officer added that if a new application was submitted with a different size and lux level, the application could be considered afresh. The Chair noted the Committee would then be able to make its own judgement and decide what conditions it felt appropriate.

Councillor McCollum expressed concern at the level of illumination and its location on the bend in the road and was shocked that DFI had not made any objection regarding safety. She asked what options were available to the Committee and

whether it was procedurally possible to grant planning consent with conditions attached that evening.

The Head of Planning and Building Control reiterated that the sign was unauthorised and explained the difficulties this presented the Planning Department in terms of making amendments on the spot. It was also unknown if it was technically feasible for the applicant to meet the suggested conditions in terms of controlling timings and lighting levels of the sign.

In terms of procedure, she referred to the relevant protocol and advised that Members could add, amend and remove conditions to an approval if they overturned.

The Chair introduced Mr Thomas Bell and Mr Brian Ambrose who were in attendance to speak in support of the application. They made the following points:

- The Council had already confirmed that the principle of a sign at this location was acceptable, leaving illumination and its potential impact on rural character as the only remaining issue.
- The issue had to be considered in the context of the site's existing character, which was highly relevant regardless of whether the sign was illuminated.
- The site was:
 - (i) bounded by urban form including a boundary wall, railings, road and path;
 - (ii) located within and adjacent to a large car park with floodlighting;
 - (iii) within and backed by church buildings, all of which had lighting;
 - (iv) surrounded on all sides — north, south, east and west — by residential development, all of which had lighting; and
 - (v) since late last year, overlooked by a 2.7m x 1.2m illuminated sign on the gable of the church hall, which had longer critical viewpoints into the rural area due to its elevated position.
- This illuminated baseline context would have remained even if the current proposal were refused.
- All consultees had raised no objections.
- This was significant, particularly as DfI Roads - responsible for road safety and assessing visual distraction - and Environmental Health - responsible for residential amenity and light impact - had had no concerns.
- The expert consultees' professional assessments, which were visually based, indicated no issues with character or amenity.
- The proposed illumination level complied with the Institution of Lighting Professionals Report No. 5 on nighttime luminance for illuminated advertisements.
- In the spirit of compromise, the applicant was willing to accept conditions requiring a reduction in brightness from the recommended 300 candelas to 200 candelas, noting that 300 candelas was the level recently approved for the church hall gable sign; and automatic switch-off of the sign at 10 pm each day.
- The scheme provided an important community service.

- The Council had suggested that the Church could communicate events through traditional means such as social media and that the sign was not essential.
- The Church did not accept this, as many elderly members did not use social media regularly and the sign was an essential tool for sharing real-time or short-notice information.
- Third-party objections were acknowledged, but there had also been significant support for the proposal.
- When scrutinised, none of the objections were determining.
- The proposal was policy compliant, supported by consultees, and provided a key information service for both the congregation and the wider community.
- Reference was made to Section 55, noting that the Council had the ability to grant permission with conditions, including retrospective conditions, as had occurred in other cases.
- Two existing signs required replacement due to age, and the Gospel Hall had believed they were permitted to replace them, although it had become clear that this was not the case.
- The sign on the gable end had been approved, but the sign at the roadside served the public rather than church members.
- WhatsApp and social media were the usual means of communication with the congregation.
- An event had been cancelled the previous week due to a storm, and the digital sign had provided the necessary flexibility to communicate that message quickly.
- The church wished to work in harmony with the local community and was willing to accept the conditions proposed.
- Clarified that the church was located on the straight part of the road and not on a bend.

The Chair invited questions from Members and Councillor Wray asked the speakers if it was technically possible to change brightness levels and timings of operation and if any form of engagement had taken place with those residents who had objected.

Mr Bell advised that the supplier of the sign had confirmed that the technology could be controlled both in terms of lighting levels and timing and there was no reason for the sign to be in operation after 10pm. Mr Ambrose had not engaged with objectors as there had been no proposal but he indicated a willingness to do so, pointing to previous community engagement over an unrelated matter.

Alderman McIlveen noted the suggested reduction in brightness and wondered how that would impact on the sign in terms of visibility and its purpose.

Mr Bell advised that the applicant had engaged with the supplier of the sign and they had advised that 300 candelas would be acceptable but when pressed – in the spirit of compromise – had confirmed that it would still work adequately as a messenger service if reduced by 100 candelas.

Alderman McIlveen asked for proposed timings of operation and Mr Ambrose felt 9am to 10pm would be appropriate.

The Chair noted that DFI Roads recommended conditions in these situations that images on signs should be static. Mr Bell responded that there were no objections to that, advising that it was a messenger service and not commercial in nature. It was about providing information to elderly and mother and toddler groups, for example.

As there were no further questions, Mr Bell and Mr Ambrose returned to the public gallery.

For clarification, the officer advised that typical conditions attached to any advertising consent related to the drawing of the structure, that the sign must remain static with no moving images, and that timings would also be conditioned.

While accepting the condition of static images, Alderman Graham felt there was no need to place a condition on timing because late at night and early in the morning most people would have their curtains drawn anyway.

Alderman Graham proposed, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that the Council grant advertising consent.

The proposer noted that illuminated signs were now more common in commercial premises and increasingly in church premises. He was content to make the proposal and for officers to include all relevant conditions. He clarified to the Char that the applicant’s suggested conditions would be included - illuminated from 9am to no later than 10pm, and that the candela level would be reduced from 300 to 200.

The seconder, Alderman McIlveen, agreed with that approach and felt the conditions offered by the applicant had been generous which would help community relations. He felt that the hall was located in a semi-rural area rather than open countryside, and having checked the map, he noted that it was situated on a straight section of road rather than a bend. This, along with DFI Roads having no objection, had eased his road safety concerns. Therefore, he believed that with the conditions proposed, the sign would not be detrimental in terms of locality and amenity.

Councillor Morgan opposed the proposal, arguing that consultees had not supported it, only raised no objections. She accepted the Planning Department’s concerns about the impact on rural character and warned of setting a precedent. She added that the hall already had one illuminated sign, which she considered adequate.

On being put to the meeting, with 9 voting FOR, 4 voting AGAINST, 1 ABSTAINING and 2 ABSENT, the proposal was declared CARRIED.

FOR (9)	AGAINST (4)	ABSTAINED (1)	ABSENT (2)
Aldermen	Aldermen	Aldermen	Aldermen
Graham	McAlpine		
McIlveen	McDowell		
Smith			
Councillors	Councillor	Councillor	Councillor

PC.03.02.2026

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Hennessy
Kerr
McClellan
McCollum
Smart
Wray

Kendall
Morgan

McKee

Cathcart
Harbinson

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Graham, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, with 9 voting FOR, 4 voting AGAINST, 1 ABSTAINING and 2 ABSENT, that the Council grant advertising consent, subject to the conditions outlined.

RECESS

The meeting went into recess at 9.01 pm and resumed at 9.16 pm.

(Councillor Cathcart and Councillor Harbinson entered the meeting – 9.16 pm)

4.3 LA06/2025/0790/F – SINGLE STOREY DWELLING WITH SHARED ACCESS

(Appendix IX)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Case Officer's report.

DEA: Comber

Committee Interest: Call-in by a member of the Planning Committee

Proposal: Single storey disabled accommodation with shared driveway access with 31a Ballygowan Road

Site Location: Site directly north of 31a Ballygowan Road, Comber, BT23 5PG

Recommendation: Refuse Planning Permission

The Principal Planner (G Kerr) outlined the planning application. It was before Members due to a call-in by Alderman McIlveen in the week beginning 8 December 2025, to consider whether the site was located within the inner cluster of the two clusters identified in 2019/A0024 and accepted in LA06/2023/2450/F, and to assess whether it met the criteria set out in Policy CTY2a of PPS21.

It was noted that there were no third-party representations in respect of the application and consultees were content. The recommendation was to refuse planning permission.

Members were shown the PAC-identified cluster for context. The Officer explained that the site was located at the outer edge of a cluster identified by the PAC under appeal reference 2019/A0024, and that this had been a material consideration in the assessment. It was accepted that the site was located within a cluster. Turning to planning history, the Officer highlighted that since the PAC case in 2019 there had been a considerable number of approvals granted within the cluster, as illustrated on the slide.

The Officer then referred to the location of the application site, explaining that it was situated to the north of the dwelling at 31a Ballygowan Road, outside the settlement

limit of Comber, in the countryside. Slides showing the site and its wider surroundings were presented to provide context.

Members were shown the proposed design of the dwelling. The Officer advised that the dwelling was single-storey in height, with a ridge approximately 5.5m above finished floor level. The sloping nature of the site would assist integration. The walls were proposed to be finished in white render, with a flat-roofed rear return finished in stone cladding. The proposed site plan indicated that all boundaries would be suitably defined, with additional planting to reduce the visual impact of the proposal.

Turning to Policy CTY2a, the Officer reminded Members that as the site was located within the countryside as set out in the local area plan, the main policy consideration was PPS21, which dealt with development in the countryside. As the site had been deemed to be a cluster by the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC), the relevant policy was CTY2a, which stated that planning permission would be granted for a dwelling at an existing cluster of development provided six criteria were met. These criteria were shown on the slide.

The Officer advised that the proposal complied with five out of the six listed criteria. It was considered to fail the criterion requiring the identified site to provide a suitable degree of enclosure and to be bounded on at least two sides with other development in the cluster.

Members were shown the site layout. The Officer explained that there was no development to the immediate north, east or west of the application site. The dwelling at 31a bounded the site to the south, and although there was extant permission for a dwelling to the direct east (LA06/2023/2450/F), no works had commenced on that dwelling at the time of the site visits.

PAC decisions regarding CTY2a had also been taken into account in the overall assessment.

In summary, the Officer stated that it had been accepted by the PAC that there was a cluster of development at this location, and it was evident from the extent of development that further development had been enabled as a result of this finding. However, despite the existence of a cluster within the countryside, each application had to be assessed on its own merits in line with policy, the main one being CTY2a of PPS21. The policy was clear in stating that all six criteria had to be complied with, and more recent PAC findings appeared to support this view.

The Officer advised that not fully complying with the policy would result in further erosion of this area within the countryside, and it was important that all six criteria listed under the policy were met. Refusal of planning permission was therefore recommended.

The Chair invited questions for clarification to the officer.

Alderman McIlveen queried the location of the application site, stating that it appeared to be within the boundaries of the cluster. The officer accepted that it was part of the cluster but referred to clustering policy, which required the application site to be bounded. She pointed to the open countryside on the opposite side of the road

and compared the site with other areas within the cluster to show examples where there was a clear sense of development providing enclosure.

Alderman McIlveen considered there to be an inner cluster and an outer cluster, identifying the waste recycling centre and the cemetery as the two boundary developments. He asked how it was determined what could be included within an inner cluster when an outer cluster existed. The officer accepted that the site was within a cluster but referred to the single refusal reason: that the site was not bounded on at least two sides. Policy required all six criteria to be met, and more recent PAC decisions supported that interpretation.

Alderman McIlveen queried one of the approval sites shown on the map and asked whether the funeral church had been built yet. The officer undertook to clarify this but explained that the cluster test was a visual one, advising of some approvals in the area where development had not yet occurred. She referred to another site where construction was underway but noted that it did not bound the application site while another development - a dwelling under construction - did not directly enclose the site because a driveway lay between the two sites, and it was also located around the corner.

Councillor Morgan asked whether the road was deemed to be a boundary feature of the cluster and the officer explained that the road did not provide a sense of enclosure under the policy because the land opposite the road was open countryside.

Councillor Morgan then asked whether trees or a hedge could be regarded as an enclosure. These were not specified in the policy but determined through a visual test and a matter of judgement. The officer referred to the relevant policy, CTY2A, which stipulated that enclosure must be present on at least two sides, and that the road was not accepted as an enclosure.

The Chair invited Ms Una Somerville forward, who was speaking in support of the application, She made the following points:

- The application should have been considered for adjournment, and a refusal would have been contrary to the PAC ruling on the cluster.
- The Council should have obtained legal advice on the previous legal opinion issued by William Orbinson KC in 2023, as there had been no change in circumstances since that time.
- There had been no statutory or other objections, and all policy matters were satisfied with the exception of one criterion relating to enclosure.
- The Planning Department's assessment was disagreed with, and the position maintained that the site was enclosed.
- The planning history of the location was of central importance, with reference made to PAC appeal 2019/A0024, which had confirmed the existence of both an inner and outer cluster in this location, and the application site lay within this well-established cluster.
- The site was therefore in a central location as defined by the PAC decision.

- Reference was made to the approval of application LA06/2022/1204/F, located east of No. 31, where the case officer had stated that the site “lies within the road that encloses the cluster which leads off the access to the Recycling Centre running up to the Cemetery.”
- Enclosure was not limited to high hedges or visual tests alone, and the primary road was a significant piece of infrastructure already accepted by the Council as an enclosing feature.
- There was a backdrop to the site with the existing garage and surrounding vegetation, and the road and the garage were considered two elements that complied with the relevant policy.
- Previous approvals to the west and east should have been taken into account.
- The case officer’s comments in the approval of application LA06/2022/1204/F were of key relevance, highlighting the assessment that “the site provides a suitable degree of enclosure, rounding off the cluster... with an existing dwelling to the west along with implemented, approved, and applied-for dwellings.”
- Previous approvals had been considered by the Council as a means for determination on enclosure, and this was the correct interpretation and should have been applied in this case.
- Approval LA06/2022/1204/F, currently under construction to the south-east of the application site, also contributed to enclosure on approach.
- The application site was wedged between two approved sites, both of which had been fully acknowledged by the Planning Department as lying within the cluster.
- The land to the west had been described as disused; however, it was a site with planning permission for a single dwelling.
- Work had started over the previous weekend on that site, and this approval should have been taken into account.
- The approved dwelling to the east was under construction up to roof level, and these approvals had been discounted without justification.
- The approval to the east had stated that the site was contained in the cluster and would visually read as part of the overall cluster.
- The Planning Department was not applying the policy properly, and the site was enclosed on four sides — two by approved developments and two by extant features.
- The proposed dwelling was modest, well-designed, integrated, and designed for disabled access.
- A contradiction existed in the assessment: the proposal had been considered acceptable under integration but not under enclosure, despite the case officer stating that no significant additional boundary vegetation was required. If it was integrated, why did the site also need to be enclosed.

The Chair invited questions to be put to the speaker and Alderman Smith asked Ms Somerville for clarification on the location of other existing application sites. Ms Sommerville responded that there was development to the right, which was under construction and had reached roof level; to the rear there was a two-storey dwelling; and to the left there was an approved site. She argued that the road formed the fourth side of that enclosure.

As there were no further questions, Ms Sommerville returned to the public gallery.

Councillor McCollum noted the speaker's claim that the Council had accepted the road as an enclosing feature in other applications within that area. She asked if that related specifically to development on the other side of the road. The officer referred to an application to the left of the application site and referred to the PAC's findings which deemed it to be totally enclosed by the graveyard, adjacent house and hard standing to the south. That differed in that it was bound on at least two sides.

Councillor McCollum queried the speaker's claim that CTY2A did not need to be met in its entirety. The officer explained that the PAC findings were a material consideration and she referred to a recent decision on 26 January 2023 where not all criteria had been met, and the site was not bounded on at least two sides with other development in the cluster. She referred to two other dismissals where applications had not met the policy in its entirety.

The officer added that the two cases referred to by Ms Sommerville dated back to 2017 and 2018 and were older examples. PAC findings evolved and officers looked at PAC decisions that were up to date.

Councillor McCollum queried the policy aims and the reported comments in relation to its thrust towards consolidating development and the officer clarified that the cluster policy within PPS21 required all criteria to be met and it was believed this failed to satisfy one specific criteria in relation to enclosure.

In a final point, Councillor McCollum queried the surrounding approvals and the officer explained she had visited the site earlier in the day and had observed a van parked on the site but there was no evidence of development. There was a dwelling being constructed at the curve which did not directly enclose the site due to the access lane. The officer confirmed that there were no approvals on the opposite side of the road where there was open countryside.

Alderman McIlveen had reviewed another application (LA06/2022/12040/F) to check how the Committee had treated the issue around roads in terms of enclosures and boundaries. Previous documentation for that had described the road 'enclosing' a cluster of buildings, implying that there was a clear limit defining the cluster's boundary.

He contrasted that with other cases where clusters were less clearly defined and referred to PAC decisions noting that clusters should have an identifiable boundary. In this case the road appeared to fulfil that requirement.

He also referred to another section of that report which made reference to CTY2a's requirement for suitable degree of enclosure and that the site be bounded on two sides. The report stated that the site was bounded by the road, supporting the view that road formed part of the necessary enclosure. He noted the policy referred to development rather than buildings and asked for the officer's opinion on whether the road could satisfy that policy.

The officer advised that each application must be assessed on its own merit. While acknowledging the presence of a road in the example provided, she believed that the context in that earlier application differed as there was a greater sense of existing development to the north and a clearer feeling of enclosure on the site. This was due in part to the proximity of the recycling centre which contributed to a more developed character that was not present in the application before Members.

Alderman McIlveen felt that if the Committee could accept that the road formed the boundary of the cluster, providing the necessary enclosure and being considered as a development, then it would meet the policy test.

The officer felt that while the wider cluster was shown by a dashed line it did not mean that every site within it would automatically meet the policy requirements. The designation simply recognised the broader extent of the cluster and recent permissions had reflected PAC findings as a material consideration. Recent PAC decisions had applied the six CTY2A criteria strictly and the current application had been assessed in line with that approach.

Alderman McAlpine wondered whether this was a question of sequencing of development, noting prior approvals in the area that had not yet commenced. She asked whether, had all of those developments been built, a sense of enclosure would have existed. She referred to land to the left of the site, which appeared to have a hardstanding but remained undeveloped, and questioned whether that would have contributed to enclosure.

The officer advised that it was a matter of policy interpretation and that the aim was to provide a balanced assessment. She noted that the surrounding land had not yet been developed, and this formed part of the visual test. She explained that while the gable wall of the garage created a boundary to the south, the land to the north remained open countryside. She stated that she had visited the site herself and felt the case officer recommendation was correct decision.

Councillor Cathcart asked if the road was adopted or a private road and the officer understood it was private.

Alderman McIlveen proposed, seconded by Councillor Morgan, that the Council grant planning permission.

Alderman McIlveen felt that it had been accepted that five out of the six criteria were met, and that the key question for the Committee was whether, in relation to the sixth criterion, the site was sufficiently enclosed. He felt that, for the sake of consistency, and taking into account the existing buildings and the road as an enclosing or bounding feature of the cluster, he was content to make a proposal to grant planning permission.

Councillor Morgan appreciated that officers had been thorough and understood the position they had taken, but she felt that the road did form a boundary. She believed the Council would be safe in accepting the road as a boundary and that a small house on the site would not cause any harm.

Alderman McIlveen indicated to the Chair that he would be happy to grant delegated authority for officers to attach appropriate conditions.

Unable to support the proposal, Councillor Hennessy accepted the officers' report and their findings that the proposal did not meet all six criteria. He accepted the professional opinion that the site was not enclosed and was, in fact, completely open.

Alderman Graham felt that if the proposed development had been on the north side of the road, the situation would have been different. However, he believed that the road itself constituted a form of development and created a defining line. He felt the cluster was an unusual set of circumstances and did not consider the road to be a heavily used through-route. He believed the proposal would not have a detrimental effect for anyone looking into the cluster. While the site looked out over open countryside, he felt this was a matter of judgement, but on balance he considered the proposal to be just about acceptable.

On being put to the meeting, with 9 voting FOR, 6 voting AGAINST, 1 ABSTAINING and 0 ABSENT, the proposal was declared CARRIED.

FOR (9)	AGAINST (6)	ABSTAINED (1)	ABSENT (0)
Aldermen	Aldermen	Aldermen	Aldermen
Graham	McDowell		
McIlveen	McAlpine		
Smith			
Councillors	Councillor	Councillor	Councillor
Cathcart	Hennessy	McClellan	
Harbinson	Kendall		
Kerr	McKee		
Morgan	McCollum		
Smart			
Wray			

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Councillor Morgan, with 9 voting FOR, 6 voting AGAINST, 1 ABSTAINED and 0 ABSENT, that the Council grant planning permission, subject to conditions.

(Alderman Graham, Alderman McIlveen, Councillor Cathcart and Councillor Kerr withdrew from the meeting having declared an interest in Item 4.5 – 10.08 pm)

4.5 LA06/2023/2221/F – FARM SHOP INCLUDING 1NO. CONTAINER AND LEAN TO BUILDING, 1NO. PORTACABIN, HARDSTANDING AND PARKING AREA (RETROSPECTIVE). NEW ACCESS TO SERVE BOTH FARM TRAFFIC AND FARM SHOP TRAFFIC WITH THE EXISTING ACCESS TO BE CLOSED UP (PROPOSED)

(Appendix XI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Case Officer's report.

DEA: Ards Peninsula

Committee Interest: Application by a member of the Planning Committee

Proposal: Farm shop including 1No. container and lean to building, 1No. portacabin, hardstanding and parking area (retrospective). New access to serve both farm traffic and farm shop traffic with the existing access to be closed up (proposed).

Site Location: 60m south-east of 26 Inishargy Road, Kircubbin, Newtownards

Recommendation: Grant Planning Permission

The Planning Officer (J Hanna) outlined the planning application which sought planning permission for a farm shop, including one container with a lean-to building, one portacabin, hardstanding and a parking area, together with a new access to serve both farm traffic and farm shop traffic, with the existing access to be closed up. The application was before the Planning Committee as it had been made by a member of the Committee. No objections had been received in relation to the application, and consultees were content and had raised no objections.

Members were shown the site location. The Officer explained that the site was situated on the northern side of Inishargy Road and was located outside any designated settlement limit as per the Ards and Down Area Plan 2015. The wider surrounding area was rural in character and lay within the Strangford and Lecale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Aerial imagery was presented to illustrate the site, identified by a star. The Officer advised that the site included one container with a lean-to addition currently operating as a farm shop known as Farm Gate Fruit and Veg. A small portacabin on the site was used for storage purposes. An area of hardstanding for parking and turning was also in place. The site occupied a roadside position and shared an access onto the road with the access serving the applicant's farmhouse and farm buildings at 26 Inishargy Road. Lands to the north and west of the site were associated with the farm, including the farmhouse and buildings.

The site layout was shown. While much of the development was already in place, a new access was proposed alongside a small parking area. The nearest receptors were approximately 46m to the south at No. 13 Inishargy Road. Given the intervening boundaries and separation distances, it was considered that there would not be a significant adverse effect on amenity.

Floorplans and elevations were presented, showing the arrangement of the retail area and storage on site. This aspect of the development was retrospective, as shown in the accompanying photographs.

Turning to policy, the Officer advised that the SPPS and Policy CTY11 (Farm Diversification) of PPS21 were material. Overall, the proposal was considered to comply with CTY11, as it had been demonstrated through the provision of a Farm Business ID that a farm business was active and had been established for more than six years. The scale and character of the proposal were considered appropriate to its location and would not have an adverse impact on natural or built heritage or nearby

residential dwellings. The Officer noted that the proposal was for a farm shop, a form of retail use. Under paragraph 6.286 of the SPPS, retailing was to be directed to town centres and inappropriate retail facilities in the countryside must be resisted. However, the SPPS also stated that, as a general exception, some retail facilities may be appropriate outside settlement limits, including farm shopping. In this respect, the proposal was considered to comply with policy, and conditions were recommended to restrict the nature of goods sold on site.

Members were shown justification for the new buildings. Under CTY11, proposals were intended to reuse or adapt existing farm buildings; however, new buildings could be allowed where no suitable existing buildings were available. The Officer advised that the existing buildings on the farm holding were in use and essential for the farm enterprise, and there were no other suitable buildings for adaptation or reuse. As such, the new buildings were considered to meet the policy test.

The proposed access arrangements were then outlined. The existing access was substandard and was to be closed up, with the new access serving both the farm and farm shop traffic. DfI Roads had been consulted and had raised no objections. The proposed site layout plan showed that the parking area could accommodate five cars in the main parking area, together with two parking spaces at the closed-up access. This was considered acceptable for the proposed development.

Members were shown views of the existing access to be closed up, and the Officer advised that the proposed new access represented a betterment to the existing situation. Further views along Inishargy Road demonstrated that the development was well screened from both eastern and western approaches. It was considered to integrate within the landscape and would not have an adverse effect on rural character, in accordance with CTY13 and CTY14.

In summary, the Officer advised that the Planning Department was satisfied that the proposal met the relevant planning policy requirements contained within the SPPS and PPS21. The development would not adversely affect any designated features, nor would it adversely impact residential amenity or access. On this basis, approval of planning permission was recommended.

Speaking in support of the application, Mr Stephen Dickson made the following points:

- The applicant was a 35-year-old part-time farmer who ran a farm shop in the rural area of Inishargy near Kircubbin.
- His father had grown potatoes and vegetables for sale locally for many years in the area, and a generation later this had been revived.
- With the trying time and difficulties brought about with Covid, he had set up a small stall with an honesty box for payment at the end of his lane which, with the demand and popularity, had very quickly developed into a regular manned outdoor fruit and vegetable stall.
- This business had become a popular rural community hub with all types of people coming to shop, meet and socialise, enabling him to raise awareness, funds and support for the numerous local charities that he supported.

- With time and customer product requests, this had developed into the current onsite facility to accommodate and adhere to Environmental Health and Health & Safety requirements.
- His passion had been about seasonal fresh local produce, fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as a range of special breed meats, home bakery produce and locally grown plants.
- He had been particularly proud to be able to provide his own rare breed “farm to fork” Dexter meats.
- Potatoes and basic vegetables had still been available daily in the form of the honesty box, and the shop had been open Wednesdays 10 to 6, Fridays 12 to 6 and all day on Saturdays.
- This application aligned with PPS21, CTY 11 on farm diversification, as the proposal ran alongside existing agricultural operations.
- Policies supported such projects if managed in conjunction with farm activities.
- DAERA had confirmed that the farm business was currently established and active.
- The applicant would manage this proposal in conjunction with the existing farm businesses, supplementing the farm business improvement and developing financially.
- The development consisted of small, low-set buildings appropriate for the rural landscape, positioned away from the road and visually linked to the farm.
- Existing buildings could not be repurposed due to their use for livestock and health and safety concerns; hence, a new building and siting was justified.
- This was a very small farm which had had no capital investment or improvement for a considerable number of years; therefore, there had been no suitable or vacant buildings on the farm as they were all used for the existing farm enterprise.
- Being a small farm, there had been development of the special breeds in the development of his Dexter cattle herd, rare breed sheep and special breed poultry, all of which had been highly placed and had won awards at local agricultural shows and events.
- Farm biodiversity security, Environmental Health and Health & Safety requirements and extremely high levels of cross-contamination control were difficult to maintain in farming.
- This was a small but busy working farm, with numerous farm machinery operating and moving through the farmyard where all farm buildings were situated.
- On Health & Safety grounds it would have been difficult to allow members of the public access to the main farm buildings to use a shop, so this site had been considered an acceptable alternative.
- This diversification proposal was of a scale and nature appropriate for this location and was capable of satisfactory integration into the rural landscape.
- Overall, adherence to policies, the scale, nature and integration of the proposal made it a suitable development within policy guidelines, demonstrating its acceptability.

As there were no questions, the speaker returned to the public gallery and the Chair sought a proposal.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Smith, seconded by Councillor McCollum, that the recommendation be adopted, that Council grants planning permission.

(Alderman Graham, Alderman McIlveen, Councillor Cathcart and Councillor Kerr returned to the meeting – 10.19 pm)

4.6 LA06/2025/0789/S54 – GREENWAY FOR APPROXIMATELY 3KM ALONG A TRAFFIC-FREE ROUTE FROM BELVEDERE ROAD, NEWTOWNARDS

(Appendix XII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Case Officer's report.

DEA: Newtownards

Committee Interest: Application by Ards and North Down Borough Council

Proposal: Variation of Condition 13 of previously approved application

LA06/2020/0940/F for a greenway for approximately 3km along a traffic-free route from Belvedere Road, Newtownards turning NE following the former railway track in the most part to the Somme Heritage Centre. A section of the former railway track between Victoria Road and Belvedere Road is also included. Widening of existing footways, new 3m wide paths, pedestrian crossings, fencing, ancillary car parking, a shared-use bridge and associated site, access and other ancillary works.

From: Bridge: No other development hereby permitted shall be commenced operational until the road works indicated on Drawing No 27A bearing the date stamp 27/07/2021 have been fully completed in accordance with the approved plans.

To: Bridge: No other development hereby permitted shall be operational until the road works indicated on drawing 60572431-SHT10-LD-3105 have been fully completed in accordance with the approved plans.

Site Location: From Belvedere Road, Newtownards to the Somme Heritage Centre, 233 Bangor Road, Newtownards

Recommendation: Grant Planning Permission

The Planning Officer (J Hanna) outlined the planning application. It fell under Section 54 seeking the variation of Condition 13 of previously approved application LA06/2020/0940/F for a greenway of approximately 3km along a traffic-free route from Belvedere Road, Newtownards, turning northeast and following the former railway track for the most part to the Somme Heritage Centre. A section of the former railway track between Victoria Road and Belvedere Road was also included, along with widening of existing footways, new 3m-wide paths, pedestrian crossings, fencing, ancillary car parking, a shared-use bridge and associated site, access and ancillary works.

The officer explained that the condition was proposed to change from:

“Bridge: No other development hereby permitted shall be commenced operational until the road works indicated on Drawing No. 27A bearing the date stamp 27/07/2021 have been fully completed in accordance with the approved plans.”
to:

“Bridge: No other development hereby permitted shall be operational until the road works indicated on drawing 60572431-SHT10-LD-3105 have been fully completed in accordance with the approved plans.”

The application was before the Planning Committee as it had been made by the Council. One letter of support had been received, and consultees were content with no objections raised.

Members were shown the site location. The officer advised that the scheme formed part of the overall greenway connecting Newtownards and Bangor. A car parking area was proposed adjacent to the south of properties at 237 and 284 Bangor Road, and a shared-use bridge would cross the dual carriageway to facilitate access to the Somme Heritage Centre and Whitespots Country Park.

Site photographs were presented. Condition 13 specifically related to the car parking areas located adjacent to the bridge. Construction work had already commenced on site, with the bridge in place and the area for the car park cleared in preparation for construction.

Further context was provided through the site layout. The Officer explained that recently approved application LA06/2024/0532/F provided a new access to the Ark Farm. The area highlighted in yellow on the slide indicated this access, which lay over an area originally designated for parking provision. The variation of the condition would allow this new access to be built and would enable the works on site to become operational at a later date in compliance with the revised condition.

Members were shown the originally approved layout. The officer noted that the parking area to be supplanted by the Ark Farm access had formed part of a scheme that included a high number of car parking spaces, exceeding the standards required by the Parking Standards document. This higher number had been justified because, at peak times, a significant number of vehicles had been observed parking along Bangor Road, largely due to visitors to the adjacent Ark Open Farm. The greenway car park had therefore been seen as a means to alleviate on-street parking pressure. However, the subsequent Ark Open Farm approval would significantly reduce this pressure by providing a new on-site car park with 102 spaces (including five disabled spaces), cycle parking and a bus lay-by.

The proposed new layout was shown. The officer advised that the changes did not conflict with the SPPS or PPS3. Although there was a reduction in the number of parking spaces, the number provided remained in excess of the four spaces required by the parking standards.

Members were also shown the proposed changes to landscaping. Areas no longer included within the car park would be seeded with grass, which was considered to improve visual amenity and lessen the impact of the works.

In summary, the officer advised that the Planning Department was satisfied that the variation of the condition met relevant planning policy requirements. The development would not adversely affect any designated features, nor would it adversely impact residential amenity or access. On this basis, approval of planning permission was recommended.

The Chair invited questions from Members for clarification.

Councillor McKee felt that the proposal would make a more attractive environment for residents and visitors, rather than having additional car parking that might not be used. He asked if there was any indication of when the previously approved Ark Farm redevelopment might begin, given that it was closely linked with this scheme. His concern was that the reduced parking resulting from this application could result in unsafe parking on the dual carriageway.

The officer was unaware of when the Ark Farm redevelopment was due to commence but he confirmed that land had been successfully transferred to the organisation which meant that it now owned the relevant part of the site. He explained the importance of the Council proceeding with this application, as it could no longer complete the access works originally conditioned as the land was no longer in its ownership. The condition meant that the Greenway could not become operational until those works were carried out and the Council therefore wished to future-proof its development.

There were no further questions so the Chair sought a proposal.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Smart, seconded by Councillor Morgan, that the recommendation be adopted, that the Council grants planning permission.

4.7 LA06/2025/0914/F – ERECTION OF ART INSTALLATION WITH ASSOCIATED LIGHTING AND SITE WORKS WITHIN PROPOSED PUBLIC REALM ASSOCIATED WITH QUEEN'S PARADE REDEVELOPMENT (APPROVAL LA06/2024/0559/F)
(Appendix XIII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Case Officer's report.

DEA: Bangor Central

Committee Interest: Application by Ards and North Down Borough Council

Proposal: Erection of art installation with associated lighting and site works within proposed public realm associated with Queen's Parade redevelopment (planning permission reference LA06/2024/0559/F)

Site Location: Approx. 46m northwest of 12 Queen's Parade, Marine Gardens, Queen's Parade, Bangor

Recommendation: Grant Planning Permission

The Principal Planner (G Kerr) outlined the planning application, advising that no third-party comments had been received in relation to the proposal and all consultees were content. The recommendation was to grant planning permission.

For context, the Officer explained that, as detailed in the case officer report in March 2024, the Council had obtained funding from the Department for Communities and had commissioned a trio of public art installations for Bangor Waterfront to be designed by artist Colin Davidson. The trio of sculptures, named Eclipse, had as its centrepiece a bronze sculpture of hands (referred to as The Dove), which was the subject of this application and was proposed to be located in a central position within the new Marine Gardens Public Realm. The Council had outlined that the sculptures were intended to symbolise peace, resilience and Bangor's journey of renewal, celebrating grace and community and honouring Bangor's coastal heritage. The Officer advised that, should Members agree with the recommendation, installation was planned for Autumn 2026.

Members were reminded of the location through previous presentations regarding Queen's Parade, situated within the settlement of Bangor and within the proposed Bangor Central ATC as designated under dBMAP. The wider surrounding area comprised a mixture of uses, including retail and commercial uses along Queen's Parade, with residential uses further away along Mount Pleasant and Seacliff Road. The Officer noted that work had commenced on the Marine Gardens public realm scheme, which would consist of lawns, benches and pathways and would surround the proposed location of the structure.

Members were advised that the proposed location lay within a number of designations and policies. The Urban Waterfront Area identified in Draft BMAP focused on Bangor Marina and its surroundings and identified the area as offering potential for the development of a vibrant and attractive waterfront in association with tourism and recreation.

Turning to the proposal, the Officer explained that it consisted of two 6m-tall bronze hand sculptures, one 10m-tall lighting column, a 1.2m information panel and associated works to paving. The structure would be the largest bronze sculpture on the island of Ireland. The proposed lighting column would be set to the south of the sculptures and would project a shadow in the shape of a dove on the paving to the north. The information panel was proposed to be finished in white polished concrete with a galvanised steel panel on top, positioned to the southwest of the sculptures. Slides were shown illustrating the detail and arrangement of the installations.

Given the scale of the structure, the officer advised that it would be prominent and visible from a number of viewpoints. This was intentional in order to create a focal point of interest within the Marine Gardens redevelopment scheme and beyond. The proposed lighting column associated with the sculpture would not have any greater visual impact than typical streetlighting.

The design statement submitted with the application detailed that the intention was for the hand sculpture to be viewed alongside the other two sculptures—a swan and a crab—which were subject to separate planning applications and located elsewhere along the waterfront, allowing visitors to explore the area. The information panel

would contain a QR code linking to a website providing information on the artworks and the history of the area.

In conclusion, the officer advised that, given the considerations detailed in the case officer report and summarised in the presentation, the recommendation was to grant planning permission.

The Chair invited questions from Members to the officer for clarification.

Alderman McIlveen queried if any other permissions were in place for additional lighting on what was a main thoroughfare. He felt the image of the proposed sculpture appeared to be dark and raised concerns around safety.

The Head of Planning and Building Control advised that all existing street lighting for Queen's Parade would remain in place, and the Principal Planner added that Environmental Health, DFI Rivers, HED and Shared Environmental Service had been consulted. She advised that it had not been necessary to consult with DFI Roads, given that the area was pedestrianised.

Councillor McCollum asked whether additional landscaping proposals included further lighting, and the officer suggested that the upcoming speaker might be able to clarify this.

Speaking in support of the application, Mr Nick Salt addressed the Committee, making the following points:

- He welcomed the Planning Department's recommendation to approve the application before the committee, as part of the wider enhancements to Bangor.
- 'The Dove' artwork proposal formed a focal point for the wider Marine Gardens regeneration project, which was now under construction.
- The lights to create the shadows would be column mounted. The height of the light fittings and distance from the Hands was critical to delivering the shadow as intended. For the Dove, this required a mounting height of 10m above surface level, positioned 10m from the Hands. The light fittings would have colours that combined to produce a white-light beam, with splashes of coloured light then hitting the ground around the sculpture.
- As part of the overall composition, the lighting column was proposed to have a tapering curved form, located to the east of the main path (out of direct line of sight of the Hands). The column would be steel, painted dark grey, which assisted in it having a low visual profile, avoiding drawing attention to itself relative to the Hands and the shadows.
- The beam angle and light distribution of the projectors was critical to the installation as the light and shadow formed an integral part of the artwork itself. This also ensured that the light was pointed to where it should be and did not result in excessive light spill or glare outside the area.
- There were no objections from any consultees including Historic Environment Division, and no public objections.
- Finally, the proposal fully accorded with all relevant planning policies.

The Chair invited questions from Members and Alderman Graham and Councillor Harbinson raised queries regarding the timings of the lighting for the sculpture. Mr Salt advised that the lights would automatically come on at dusk and go off in the morning, explaining that the system was operated by a sensor, although manual control was also possible.

As there were no further questions, Mr Salt returned to the public gallery.

Alderman Smith proposed, seconded by Councillor McCollum, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor McCollum remarked that the Council was delighted to see the proposal reach this stage, noting that the sculptures were generating great excitement. The sculptures would be an iconic piece of heritage for Bangor, providing a focal point for visitors and a legacy for the city.

Councillor Cathcart pointed out that the Committee was simply granting planning permission and that this was not part of a wider discussion on the sculptures value for money and hoped that, once on the ground, he would like the sculptures. He recognised that the proposal represented another encouraging step forward in the wider regeneration of Bangor.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Smith, seconded by Councillor McCollum, that the recommendation be adopted, that the Council grant planning permission.

4.8 LA06/2025/0913/F – ERECTION OF ART INSTALLATION WITH ASSOCIATED LIGHTING AND SITE WORKS WITHIN PROPOSED PUBLIC REALM ASSOCIATED WITH QUEEN'S PARADE REDEVELOPMENT (APPROVAL LA06/2024/0559/F)
(Appendix XIV)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Case Officer's report.

DEA: Bangor Central

Committee Interest: Application by Ards and North Down Borough Council

Proposal: Erection of art installation with associated lighting and site works within proposed public realm associated with Queen's Parade redevelopment (planning permission reference LA06/2024/0559/F)

Site Location: Public open space approximately 10m East of 1-6 Mount Pleasant, Bangor

Recommendation: Grant Planning Permission

The Principal Planner (G Kerr) outlined the planning application, advising that planning application LA06/2025/0913/F was for a public art installation with associated lighting and site works. As this was the second of three installations, and the first had been detailed in the previous presentation, the Officer did not reiterate the detail of the area, plan designations or wider context, as these remained the same as previously presented.

It was noted that five objections from four addresses had been received, with any material issues raised fully addressed in the Case Officer Report. All consultees were content.

Members were shown the site location. The Officer explained that the proposal was located approximately 10m east of the easternmost boundaries of dwellings at 1–6 Mount Pleasant, within the settlement of Bangor, in an area of public open space. The installation was proposed to be positioned within a circular portion of the open space to the west of the path leading around Bangor Marina. The site sat at a lower ground level than Queen's Parade, with steps leading up to the road. It had boundary vegetation and was largely out of view when walking along the Marina.

The wider area comprised a mixture of uses, including an open-air church directly northwest of the site and dwellings further west along Mount Pleasant, over 40m away and at a higher level than the application site.

Slides showing the site and wider area were presented.

Turning to the proposal, the officer advised that it included a "Swan Sculpture" consisting of two bronze hands, a lighting column, an information panel, paving alterations and a screen wall with an exposed aggregate finish.

The proposed sculptures would be approximately 2.8m in height at their highest point, set in the centre of the site. The screen wall, positioned to the west of the sculptures, would be 3m in height and finished with an anti-graffiti application, which would be conditioned.

The 4.5m lighting column would be set to the east, with lighting operating only during night-time hours, controlled via daylight and a timer, with programmable Wi-Fi sensors and controls. The information panel, 1.4m in height, would be located at the northeastern corner of the site. When light was cast upon the hand sculptures, it would form a swan-shaped shadow on the screen wall.

The officer advised that this proposal formed part of a series of initiatives intended to contribute to the overall improvement of this area of Bangor seafront. As the proposal met planning policy and raised no concerns from consultees, the recommendation was to grant planning permission.

Attending to speak in support of the application, Mr Salt invited any questions from the Committee but there were no indications so he returned to the public gallery and the Chair requested a proposal.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Smith, seconded by Councillor McCollum, that the recommendation be adopted, that Council grants planning permission.

5. REQUEST FOR NOMINATIONS TO NILGA'S PLANNING LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME

(Appendix XV)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that the NILGA Executive Committee had written to Council Planning Committee Chairs to advise of DFI and NILGA developing an enhanced and coordinated approach to planning learning, engagement and continuous improvement for councillors, building on the Planning Improvement Programme.

Details of the proposed approach were set out in the attached letter, and the request was for nomination of up to two Members from Planning Committee to participate in a Task and Finish Advisory Group of councillors drawn from across all councils. The NILGA Executive was seeking details of nominations by 28 February.

RECOMMENDED that Council nominates up to two members of Planning Committee to the Task Force as detailed in the attached letter.

Proposed by Councillor McKee, seconded by Councillor Smart, that Councillor Kendall be appointed to the Task Force.

Proposed by Councillor Harbinson, seconded by Councillor Hennessy, that Councillor McCollum be appointed to the Task Force.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, that Councillor Kendall and Councillor McCollum be appointed to the Task Force.

6. PLANNING APPEALS UPDATE
(Appendix XVI – XVIII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailed as follows:

Appeal Decisions

1. The following appeal was dismissed on 05 December 2025.

PAC Ref	2024/A0098
Council Ref	LA06/2021/0490/O
Appellant	Paul McGouran
Subject of Appeal	Refusal of planning permission for: Proposed farm dwelling and domestic garage
Location	50m NW of 100 Carrickmannon Road, Ballygowan

The Council refused the application via the delegated list on 29 August 2024 for the following reasons:

- i. The proposal was contrary to the Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland and Policy CTY1 of Planning Policy Statement 21, Sustainable Development in the Countryside in that there were no overriding reasons why this development was essential in this rural location and could not be located within a settlement.

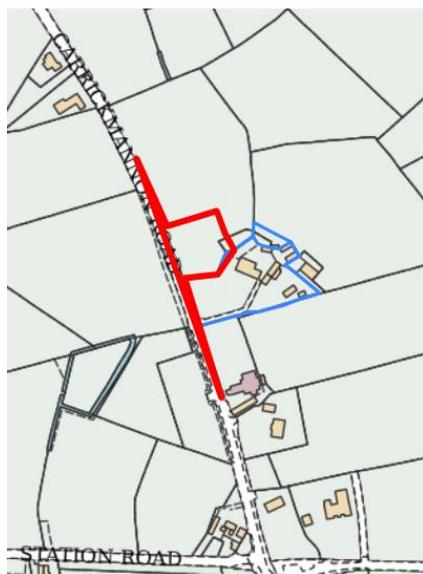
- ii. The proposal was contrary to the Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland and Policy CTY8 of Planning Policy Statement 21, Sustainable Development in the Countryside in that the proposal if permitted, would have resulted in an extension of ribbon development along Carrickmannon Road.
- iii. The proposal was contrary to the Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland and criteria (a), (b) and (c) of Policy CTY 13 of Planning Policy Statement 21, Sustainable Development in the Countryside in that it would, if permitted result in a prominent feature in the landscape, the site was unable to provide a suitable degree of enclosure for the building to integrate into the landscape and it would rely primarily on the use of new landscaping for integration.
- iv. The proposal was contrary to the Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland and criteria (a), (b) and (d) of Policy CTY 14 of Planning Policy Statement 21, Sustainable Development in the Countryside in that it would if permitted be unduly prominent in the landscape, would result in a detrimental change to the rural character of the countryside and create a suburban style build-up of development when viewed with existing and approved buildings and would extend a ribbon of development along Carrickmannon Road.

Whilst the proposal fulfilled all the policy criteria for a dwelling on a farm under Policy CTY 10 of PPS 21, it was found to fall foul of Policy CTY 8 which stated that planning permission would be refused for a building which created or added to a ribbon of development. The policy allowed for a gap site, however, no case was advanced that the exception was engaged.

It was accepted that there was a substantial and continuously built-up frontage at this location for the purposes of the policy; however, 3no. roadside trees were to be felled at the request of the PSNI in the interests of pedestrian and road safety, and their removal would create a visual linkage on the ground between the appeal site and the qualifying buildings in the frontage, thus adding to an existing ribbon of development.

Lack of enclosure for the proposed site, contrary to Policy CTY 13 on Integration, and removal of c32m of existing roadside hedge, was also fatal to the proposal. The proposal also failed under Policy CTY 14 on Rural Character given that the proposal would result in a suburban style build-up of development when viewed with existing buildings and extend a ribbon of development along Carrickmannon Road.

All four of the Council's reasons for refusal were sustained.



50NW of 100 Carrickmannon Road, Ballygowan

2. The following appeal was dismissed on 15 January 2026.

PAC Ref	2025/A0073
Council Ref	LA06/2025/0228/O
Appellant	Phillip Kerr
Subject of Appeal	Refusal of planning permission for: Replacement Dwelling
Location	13A (Approx 500m NE of No. 13) Cunningburn Road, Newtownards

The Council refused the application via the delegated list on 04 June 2025 for the following reasons:

- i. The proposal was contrary to the Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland and Policy CTY 1 of Planning Policy Statement 21: Sustainable Development in the Countryside, in that there are no overriding reasons why this development was essential in this rural location and could not be located within a settlement.
- ii. The proposal was contrary to Paragraph 6.73 of the Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland and Policy CTY 3 of Planning Policy Statement 21: Sustainable Development in the Countryside, in that it had not been demonstrated that the building was ever used as a dwelling, the building did not exhibit the essential characteristics of a dwelling.

Whilst the Commissioner found that historical maps showed something present on the site at the time of the 1860 valuation, even if the in-situ building were the same building, given the limited level of detail the Commissioner found this evidence of itself to be inconclusive and of little assistance in demonstrating that the building to be replaced exhibited the essential characteristics of a dwelling. If there were internal dwelling characteristics such as walls and a fireplace or chimney they had now been removed; and even if the building had been used as a dwelling in the past,

those essential characteristics could no longer be observed. As such the building to be replaced did not exhibit the essential characteristics of a dwelling as required by Policy CTY 3 of PPS 21, and therefore the Council’s reasons for refusal were sustained.

3. The following appeal was dismissed on 16 January 2026.

PAC Ref	2024/A0139
Council Ref	LA06/2024/0676/F
Appellant	Robert Anderson
Subject of Appeal	Refusal of planning permission for: Extension to residential curtilage and erection of single storey detached ancillary residential accommodation
Location	55 Woburn Road, Millisle

The Council refused the application on 04 December 2024 via the delegated list for the following reasons:

- i. The proposal was contrary to The Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland and Policy CTY 1 of Planning Policy Statement 21 ‘Sustainable Development in the Countryside’ in that there were no overriding reasons why the development was essential in this rural location.
- ii. The proposal was contrary to Policy EXT 1 of the Addendum to Planning Policy Statement 7 ‘Residential Extensions and Alterations’ in that the proposal, if permitted, would result in development that was not considered to be subordinate ancillary accommodation demonstrating dependency on the main residential dwelling as it could practically and viably operate on its own as a separate dwelling.

An application for Outline Planning Permission had previously been submitted in 2023 in the same location as the appeal proposal but was subsequently withdrawn.

The appeal proposal for a 94.5m² single storey building, consisting of a hallway, kitchen/living area, two bedrooms, and a shower/wet room, was proposed as being required to provide ancillary residential accommodation for an immediate family member with ongoing health issues, whereby providing a degree of independence whilst allowing immediate family to meet their future care needs.

The J&A to the policy was explicit that ‘ancillary’ residential accommodation was within the existing curtilage of the host dwelling and planning unit – in this case the Commissioner noted a considerable separation from the host dwelling outside of the established residential curtilage

Given that it was a self-contained unit physically removed from the host dwelling with a generous kitchen/living area and two bedrooms with separate W/C, the Commissioner judged that the appeal building could quite easily operate as a completely separate planning unit with no need to share facilities.

The appellant asserted reasons as to why an extension to the host dwelling was not practicable, but the Commissioner, in the absence of any structural/ground survey analysis, was not persuaded that an extension could be provided or conversion of the stables or outbuildings undertaken.

Notwithstanding that the appeal proposal satisfied the criteria in Policy EXT 1 of APPS 7, given that a separate unit of accommodation was being proposed rather than attached to the host dwelling as advocated by the J&A of Policy EXT 1 of APPS 7, the J&A went on to state that such a separate dwelling would not be acceptable unless it would be granted planning permission in its own right.

Both of the Council's reasons for refusal were sustained.

New Appeals

4. The following appeal was lodged on 04 January 2026:

PAC Ref	2025/A0112
Council Ref	LA06/2025/0549/F
Appellant	J McNinch
Subject of Appeal	Refusal of planning permission for: Replacement Dwelling (retrospective)
Location	14 Ballyvester Road, Donaghadee

5. The following appeal was lodged on 02 January 2026:

PAC Ref	2025/E0064
Council Ref	LA06/2021/0360/CA
Appellant	Peter Kelly
Subject of Appeal	Appeal against Enforcement Notice – alleged unauthorised agricultural shed and area of hardstanding
Location	Land adjacent to the rear boundary of 2A Ballyblack Road, Portaferry

6. The following appeal was lodged on 16 December 2025:

PAC Ref	2025/A0109
Council Ref	LA06/2022/0262/F
Appellant	Ronald Shields
Subject of Appeal	Refusal of planning permission for: Retention of private amenity/shelter building made from sustainable recycled materials, wildlife hide, timber footbridge and associate landscaping and planting
Location	Land approx 200m South-East of 110 Kempe Stones Road, Newtownards with existing access to Greengraves Road

7. The following appeal was lodged on 05 December 2025:

PAC Ref	2025/A0104
Council Ref	LA06/2022/0708/O
Appellant	W J Law Bespoke LLP
Subject of Appeal	Refusal of planning permission for: Erection of 5No. detached dwellings with associated landscaping, internal road layout and access provision
Location	Lands to the south and adjoining No. 90 Crawfordsburn Road and to the west of No's 71, 83, 85, 87, 89, 91 and 97 Crawfordsburn Road, Newtownards

8. The following appeal was lodged on 02 December 2025

PAC Ref	2025/A0103
Council Ref	LA06/2023/2012/F
Appellant	Peter Thompson
Subject of Appeal	Refusal of planning permission Dwelling - change of house type from approval W/2011/0015/RM (Retrospective)
Location	Land between 3 and 4 Sheridan Grove, Helen's Bay

9. The following appeal was lodged on 18 November 2025:

PAC Ref	2025/A0095
Council Ref	LA06/2025/0326/O
Appellant	Hugh Torney
Subject of Appeal	Refusal of planning permission 2 No. infill dwellings & garages, access and associated site works
Location	Between 18 & 22 Upper Ballygelagh Road, Kirkistown

Appeals Withdrawn

10. The following appeal was withdrawn on 16 December 2025:

PAC Ref	2025/E0046
Council Ref	LA06/2022/0262/F
Appellant	Ronald Shields
Subject of Appeal	Appeal against Enforcement Notice re alleged: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Unauthorised erection of outbuildings being used for recreational purposes; 2. Unauthorised provision of pathway and hardstanding area with fixed picnic tables, barbecue area and playframes; 3. Unauthorised pergola/outbuilding being used as a nature hide with associated jetty area; 4. Unauthorised laying of hardcore in areas; 5. Unauthorised erection of two bridge structures;

	6. Unauthorised erection of fixed picnic tables
Location	Land approx 200m South-East of 110 Kempe Stones Road, Newtownards

Details of appeal decisions, new appeals and scheduled hearings could be viewed at www.pacni.gov.uk.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report and attachments.

Proposed by Councillor Smart, seconded by Councillor Kerr, that the recommendation be adopted.

Alderman McIlveen sought the officer's view on whether there was anything within the PAC update reports that the Council should be challenging, or if the opinions presented were just being accepted.

The Head of Planning and Building Control accepted the point, acknowledging that significant weight was placed on PAC decisions. She noted that, as confirmed by legal advice, that PAC decisions carried material weight, but emphasised that it was for Members to determine what weight to attribute to it in the circumstances of each case.

Alderman McIlveen felt it would be helpful that in future reports, officers advise Members of any matters that they were unhappy with.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Smart, seconded by Councillor Kerr, that the recommendation be adopted.

7. SPPS EDITION 2 AND DRAFT PLAN STRATEGY (Appendix XIX – XX)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that on 11 December 2025 the Minister for Infrastructure published a policy revision to the Strategic Planning Policy Statement for NI ("the SPPS"), marking the conclusion of a focused review of the former SPPS (2015) on the subject of renewable and low carbon energy.

The new policy, agreed by the Executive Committee, was contained in the SPPS, Edition 2, and set out at pages 86-91. Consequently, the former subject policy titled "Renewable Energy" ceased to have effect from the date of this publication and the SPPS (2015) was now revoked. All other policy provisions within the former SPPS were unchanged, except for some technical changes, such as amendments to the contents page, paragraph numbers, and factual clarifications, where relevant.

Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 18: Renewable Energy (August 2009) was now cancelled and its provisions ceased to have effect however, the guidance contained in Best Practice Guidance to PPS 18 - Renewable Energy would continue to have effect (where relevant) unless and until such guidance was updated, revised or replaced by new Departmental guidance on this planning issue.

The provisions of the SPPS, Edition 2, took immediate effect and had to be taken into account in the preparation of Local Development Plans and were also a material consideration to all decisions on individual planning applications and appeals.

The SPPS, Edition 2 could be accessed following this link:

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/strategic-planning-policy-statement>

DFI Advice / Guidance

In a letter to Council Chief Executives dated 21 October 2025 (reported to Planning Committee 04/11/25 and reattached to this report), DFI (Regional Planning Policy and Casework) highlighted to councils the importance of considering the SPPS, and any forthcoming revisions to it, during plan-making and decision-taking.

The letter also noted the Department's intention to prepare a new Development Plan Practice Note on the issue of the role of the Department and of councils in respect of taking account of the regional planning policy framework; however, attached at Annex A to the letter was 'advice and guidance' to councils on the implications of new or updated regional policy for Local Development Plans.

'Good Practice Advice' for when new or revised regional planning policy was published refers, in the situation where a council had published its draft Plan Strategy, to the council undertaking a written assessment of the implications of the new or updated regional policy for draft policies (in ANDBC's case).

The assessment should demonstrate the council had an awareness of the new or revised policy and understands its aims and objectives. It should have identified significant differences or conflicts which the new or revised regional policy might introduce with draft plan policies. It should have also considered whether policy approaches might need to be revised in response to the new regional policy.

Action Undertaken

The LDP team had undertaken a comparison of its policy on Renewable Energy with the revised regional policy in the SPPS Edition 2, as set out in Table 1, attached. It was concluded that the draft Plan Strategy (dPS) continued to take account of the regional strategic approach to renewable and low-carbon energy, cognisant of the opportunity for the Council to consider minor changes through the plan-making process, further to the completion of the public consultation (including counter-representation stage) and the analysis of all representations received.

It would be the intention to consult upon all initial proposed minor changes at the same time. This would include a consideration of whether changes or addenda were necessary to any supporting reports (e.g. Sustainability Assessment) as part of the iterative process of plan-making. A further period of consultation would be held on any proposed changes and advertised in line with legislation.

Detail had been included on the LDP pages of the Council's website for public information accordingly.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report and attachments.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Wray, seconded by Councillor McCollum, that the recommendation be adopted.

8. QUARTERLY UPDATE ON TREE PRESERVATION ORDERS AND WORKS REQUESTS

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that this report represented the quarterly update to Planning Committee regarding detail relating to Tree Preservation Orders served and applications for consent to carry out works to protected trees. This update provided information from 13 August 2025 (date of previous report) to 16 January 2026.

The table attached set out the figures from the date of the last report to Committee.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the content of this report.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Morgan, seconded by Councillor Hennessy, that the recommendation be adopted.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Alderman Graham, seconded by Councillor Kerr, that the public/press be excluded during the discussion of the undernoted item of confidential business.

9. QUARTERLY UPDATE ON ENFORCEMENT MATTERS (Appendix XXI)

****IN CONFIDENCE****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

SCHEDULE 6 - Exemption: 6a. statutory provision

This report is presented in confidence to Members under Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 2014, Exemption 6a – Information which reveals that the council proposes to give under any statutory provision a notice by virtue of which requirements are imposed on a person. It relates to the status of current Planning Enforcement cases or Summons in respect of proposed actions.

It provides updates for Members in respect of the status of live enforcement notices, court proceedings and proposed summons action.

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Councillor Wray, seconded by Councillor Morgan, that the public/press be re-admitted to the meeting.

CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

The Chair advised that, due to the Easter period, the date of the April committee meeting would be brought forward to Tuesday 31 March. It was preferred to hold the meeting before the public holiday period to allow sufficient time between the April and May meetings. Members indicated agreement to that.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 10.54pm.

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid meeting of the Environment Committee was held at the Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards, and via Zoom, on Wednesday 4 February 2026 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT:

- In the Chair:** Councillor Harbinson
- Aldermen:** Adair Cummings
Armstrong-Cotter McAlpine
- Councillors:** Ashe Douglas
Boyle Edmund
Blaney Newman
Brady Wray
Cathcart

Officers in Attendance: Director of Environmental Services (G Bannister), Head of Parks and Cemeteries (S Daye), Head of Waste and Cleansing (K Patterson), Head of Assets and Property Management (P Caldwell) and Democratic Services Officer (H Loebnau).

1. APOLOGIES

The Chair sought apologies and those were noted from the Chair (Councillor Kendall) and Councillor Irwin.

NOTED.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman sought Declarations of Interest and none were noted.

NOTED.

3. ARDS AND NORTH DOWN OFF-STREET PARKING (PUBLIC CAR PARK ORDER) 2026 (Appendix I & II)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that at a meeting of the Environment Committee on 3 September 2025, a deputation on behalf of Ards and North Down Business Forum took place in respect of the draft Ards and North Down Off-Street Parking (Public Car Parks) Order 2025. As a result, the Council agreed the following in respect of Item 5 of that Committee agenda (attached at Appendix 1):

“The report is deferred for members to give consideration to the proposals set on in the deputation from the Borough’s chambers. A detailed officer’s report will consider the costs and implementations of the Chamber’s proposals, including the potential use of new number plate recognition technology. A report will also examine the proposed tariff changes in other Council areas throughout Northern Ireland.”

This report sought to respond to that decision.

Automated Number Plate Recognition

Officers had considered the proposals brought forward by the AND Business forum in respect of using number plate recognition to implement a 2-hour free parking tariff and undertook further research into the feasibility of implementing this technology. Officers acknowledged that this would be effective in implementing a period of free parking if that was part of the Council’s tariff structure, however challenges would remain as highlighted below.

Enforcement

- Parked in a disabled persons' parking space without clearly displaying a valid disabled persons' badge
- Not parked wholly within the markings of the bay/space
- Parked in an electric vehicle charging place during operating hours without charging.

Those contraventions accounted for approximately one third of the Penalty Charge Notices issued across our car park estate. Those offences could not be enforced using ANPR technology, resulting in the need for a traffic attendant patrol to remain:

Legal Ability to use Technology

It was the understanding of the Regional Off-Street Parking Group, Department for Infrastructure and Council’s enforcement partner Marston Holdings Ltd, that there was no legal provision for the Council to use these devices in its off-street car park enforcement under the current legislation. The use of these devices in car parks in Northern Ireland was currently for the issue of parking charge notices, enforced by civil law, i.e. issued by private car park operators.

As such, the Council’s enforcement partner was unable to provide definitive costs for the implementation of such a system of enforcement or negotiate any changes to the enforcement contract without a full legal opinion. Approximate camera installation costs, based on one camera at each car park entrance and one camera at each car park exit, was expected to be in the region of £640,000 for the Council’s 22 Pay and Display Car Parks.

Should Members be minded to further consider the implementation of ANPR, a full legal opinion would be required and if it was found that the understanding outlined above was correct, a legislative change was required to remedy that. It should be noted that a legislative change of this nature was not currently planned in line with the revocation of the Off-Street Parking Order 2000, therefore further liaison with the Department for Infrastructure would be required and a change of this nature was likely to take considerable time to implement, if necessary.

Following this, further exploration from a contractual perspective with the Council's car park enforcement service provider would be required. The Council was currently in year two of its five-year contract with Marston Holdings Ltd, which was procured through a Consortium of eight Councils. Officers were unable to establish if suitable contract negotiations would be possible without a full legal opinion on its enforcement powers.

Officers were currently working towards obtaining a full legal opinion through the Regional Off Street Parking Group, however, the process of contract negotiation and procurement and installation of ANPR technology across the car park estate was likely to be a timely process and would take at least 12-24 months to implement, subject to appropriate legal powers, successful contract negotiations and budget allocation. No budget allocation had been made for ANPR technology or contractual changes within the 2026/27 year.

Furthermore, as had been previously reported and requested by Members, officers were continuing to lobby the Department for Infrastructure and hoped that they would revoke the Off-Street Parking Order 2000 in Autumn 2026, Ards and North Down Off-Street Parking Order 2025 must be ready to enact at that time (both orders could not co-exist).

Proposed tariffs in other Council areas.

A summary of the proposed tariff changes by Council area was provided below:

Council	Current tariffs	Proposed tariffs	New cost of 2 hour stay
<i>Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council</i>	30p per 3hrs or 40p per hour	No current proposals, tariffs will be reviewed at a later stage.	30p - 80p
<i>Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council</i>	10p for 3 hours and 20p per hour thereafter (1 car park only) or 20p - 40p per hour	No current proposals.	10p in 1 car park / 40p - 80p
<i>Belfast City Council</i>	20p - £1.20 per hour	30p - £1.20 per hour (30p tariff being introduced in car parks which are currently free + 4 non-city centre car parks currently charged at 20-30p per hour)	60p - £2.40
<i>Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council</i>	50p - £1 per hour	No current proposals, new tariffs have been implemented.	£1 - £2
<i>Derry City & Strabane District Council</i>	50p - 80p per hour	No current proposals, some new tariffs have been implemented.	£1 - £1.60

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Fermanagh & Omagh District Council	40p - 50p per hour	No current proposals, some new tariffs have been implemented.	80p - £1
Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council	£1 for 3 hours and then 30p-70p per hour thereafter	No current proposals, tariffs will be reviewed at a later stage.	£1
Mid & East Antrim Borough Council	60p-70p per hour or all day rate of £2.60 (10 hours)	No current proposals, new tariffs have been implemented.	£1.20 - £1.40
Mid Ulster District Council	£1 for 3 hours and 40p per hour thereafter	No current proposals.	£1
Newry Mourne & Down District Council	50p per hour	No current proposals, some new tariffs have been implemented.	£1

Analysis of the current and proposed tariffs across the 11 Councils showed that the proposed tariffs in Ards and North Down could be interpreted as better value for money for car park users than the active or proposed tariffs in most other Council areas. For example, in Ards and North Down a two-hour stay would cost 50p and a two-hour stay in most other areas would cost between 60p and £1.20 (i.e. with the exception of some of the charged car parks in Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council and Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council).

That was also expected to result in less expensive parking for most of our users when compared to our current DFI set tariff of £1 for up to four hours (see section 4.0 below).

In addition, it was expected that the proposed tariffs in Ards and North Down would increase turnover per parking space, with financial modelling predicting that this should yield up to £0.5M in additional annual income for Council. When new tariffs could be introduced, the projected additional income would provide much needed additional funds to support an expansion of our annual capital programme for car park maintenance and enhancements. That would ensure that the car park users pay for that service (which was not a statutory service provided for by default rates income), rather than the cost being levied through general rates to all ratepayers irrespective of whether they used car parks.

Car Park Usage

When developing the Car Park Strategy, consultants advised that most car park users stayed for a period of two hours, which informed the concessionary tariff of 50p for two hours.

Officers completed a survey of car park usage from September to December 2025. Using information gathered by RingGo, 54% of RingGo users across the Council's 22 car parks were staying for less than two hours, and a further 10% staying for less than three hours. That data showed that the average length of stay of car park users remained at two hours and supported the implementation of the 50p for two hours tariff to subsidise/incentivise shorter stay parking events for the period of time that

the majority of shoppers/visitors stay. That was better value for users who would currently paid £1 for a stay of two hours. An in-person sample survey supported that data.

Therefore, under the new tariff structure, over half of Council’s car park users would pay less than they currently did for their stay.

20% of RingGo users were staying in car parks for more than five hours, resulting in long stay parking/space blocking by those less likely to be contributing to local business revenues.

The tariff A & B structure would encourage the 20% of long stay users to utilise the car parks on the periphery of the city/town centre with no tariff or lower Tariff B, which prevented all day town/city centre space blocking and encouraged more shorter stay parking events. It followed that that should therefore increase the footfall within city/town centres, benefiting businesses, and raise additional revenue for the Council which could be used to maintain and enhance its car park estate.

The new tariff structure also encouraged long stay car park users to utilise public transport and car share options, supporting the sustainable travel elements of the Car Parking Strategy and supporting the Council’s vision of A Sustainable Borough and the priorities laid out in the Corporate Plan.

Season Tickets

At present there were Season Tickets available across a number of the charged car parks in Bangor, Newtownards and Holywood. A season ticket allowed regular car park users to purchase a Monthly or Quarterly Monday – Friday car park ticket for a discounted rate.

It was proposed that Season Tickets should continue to be made available which assisted in alleviating a number of the concerns raised in responses to the public advertisement, with new rates as follows:

Tariff	Monthly discount	Quarterly discount
A	25%	27.5%
B	25%	27.5%

The number of available tickets per car park and car parks where monthly and quarterly tickets were available would be monitored and amended as necessary by the Car Park Management Officer and responsible Service Unit Manager in line with the priorities of the Car Parking Strategy.

Officer Recommendations

While officers recognised the benefits of enforcement using ANPR technology, the challenges it presented in the current legal and contractual context would take a considerable length of time to overcome.

As a result, officers recommended that Members proceed with the implementation of the Ards and North Down Off-Street Parking (Public Car Parks) Order 2025 as laid out in Appendix 1 at this time. Officers would continue to work with the other

Councils through the Regional Off-Street Parking Group to explore new technology and would work towards the introduction of ANPR technology or a suitable alternative in future, either by way of enforcement contract negotiations (if possible) or at the end of the current enforcement contract.

With the implementation of Tariff A and B, the technology within the Council's current pay and display machines and the RingGo app would allow officers to review car park usage and report this to Members, while working closely with Council's Economic Growth Service to support the city and town centres.

Enactment Process

The enactment process was as follows:

1. Council approved Ards and North Down Off-Street Parking (Public Car Parks) Order 2025.
2. DfI would inform Council of the date of revocation of the Off-Street Parking Order 2000. This would determine the date of implementation for Ards and North Down Off-Street Parking (Public Car Parks) Order 2025.
3. Council would advertise the Order in the local press, social media channels and on sites with the date of implementation, as required.
4. The Order would come into effect on the implementation date. Appropriate signage and communications with car park users would be put in place in advance of the changes.

RECOMMENDED that Council:

1. Agrees the draft Order as detailed in Appendix 2.
2. Agrees to implement the Ards and North Down Off-Street Parking (Public Car Parks) Order 2025, in line with the enactment process outlined in this report, with an implementation date which enables continuous service provision, as soon as DfI revoke the Off-Street Parking Order 2000.
3. Agrees the season ticket rates as detailed in this report.

Councillor Cathcart made an alternative proposal which was seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter:

that Council:

1. Agrees to the draft Order as detailed in appendix 2 with the amendment that parking charges end at 5pm rather than 6pm.
2. Recommendation 2 and 3 remain the same
3. That an officer's report is brought back to the Committee on options around introducing free or reduced price parking during the Christmas period when the new order is implemented, similar to other local Councils
4. That a review of the Order is carried out six months as well as a year into its implementation
5. That a parking app which sets a time limit on parking (rather than stop/start) is introduced as soon as possible
6. That the Chambers of Commerce and city/town advisory groups are consulted on their views on the introduction of 2 hour waiting restrictions

(instead of one hour) for Department for Infrastructure managed on street parking spaces, to inform the Committee before the Council lobby the Department on any potential changes.

Referring to his amendment Councillor Cathcart reminded Members that the proposal for two hours' free parking had largely been agreed several years earlier, but significant difficulties had since emerged around enforcement, recording, and legal compliance of that if it were to be introduced. He noted that providing two hours free would result in a significant loss of income to the Council per year, which he considered too substantial to justify without the evidence to strongly support it.

He reported that data from the RingGo app indicated that most users of on-street parking in towns and cities stayed for around two hours only. He went on to say that adjusting the charging period to finish at 5 pm rather than 6 pm aligned with existing enforcement capacity since enforcement officers were only on duty until 5 pm and that would help to support the evening economy within the city and town centres. He was of the view that the wider proposal would generate considerably more income overall while still supporting the local economy including 'early bird' hospitality initiatives.

Councillor Cathcart also referred to earlier discussions about reduced charges at Christmas and suggested that options could be explored through the parking app and observed that many users forgot to stop their parking session on the app when they returned to their vehicles. He suggested that a two-hour waiting restriction on street, rather than free parking in car parks, would likely receive support from the Chambers of Commerce, and he agreed that lobbying of DFI on that would be appropriate.

He concluded that the 50p for two hours proposal represented a cost reduction for most users in the Borough and that it would be prudent to reserve judgement on any further changes until more detailed data had been reviewed, hence the request for a review after a period of time.

Councillor Boyle explained that he had not viewed the amendment in advance of the meeting and had come with the intention of supporting the officers' recommendation. He said that he would not support the amendment since the contents of the report had been undergoing work for a considerable period of time and thought the Council should be acting together to reach a decision.

Councillor Brady queried the lunchtime charges and the Chair advised that would be addressed in Councillor Cathcart's summing up. Councillor Brady referred to charges running on in the app if a person forgot to close a parking session and he thought there should be a time limit such as that on the Just Park app.

Councillor Wray was happy to support the alternative recommendation and considered that engagement with the traders and Chambers was very important going forward. He had been surprised to read that one third of fees had come from incorrect parking but felt a review was sensible and urged officers and Members alike to sell the message and get it out to support local businesses.

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Councillor Ashe rose to support thinking that it was a fair amendment and it was also right that car park users themselves would pay rather than levying the charge more widely across all ratepayers. She was pleased that season tickets were also an option to help people to save money.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter appreciated the hard work that had gone into this and wanted to get it as right as possible. The position was very good currently but there were minor issues that could be improved upon, and this was not a removal of what had been suggested but was more an enhancement.

Councillor Cathcart thanked Members for their comments and explained that the 50p lunch charge had been agreed some time ago and was not a radical change. He thanked officers for working with him and the broad support being shown.

Councillor Boyle asked to be recorded as opposing.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Cathcart, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that Council

- 1. Agrees to the draft Order as detailed in appendix 2 with the amendment that parking charges end at 5pm rather than 6pm.**
- 2. Recommendation 2 and 3 remain the same**
- 3. That an officer's report is brought back to the Committee on options around introducing free or reduced price parking during the Christmas period when the new order is implemented, similar to other local Councils**
- 4. That a review of the Order is carried out six months as well as a year into its implementation**
- 5. That a parking app which sets a time limit on parking (rather than stop/start) is introduced as soon as possible**
- 6. That the Chambers of Commerce and city/town advisory groups are consulted on their views on the introduction of 2 hour waiting restrictions (instead of one hour) for Department for Infrastructure managed on street parking spaces, to inform the Committee before the Council lobby the Department on any potential changes.**

4. NOTICE OF MOTION 673 EXTENSION OF PUBLIC TOILET OPENING HOURS DURING THE SUMMER MONTHS (FILE NOM 673)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that Ards and North Down Borough Council provided 26 public conveniences across the Borough. In September 2025, Council agreed to the following motion:

“That this Council notes the popularity of public spaces such as beaches during the summer months.

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Further to this Council will task officers to bring back a report to explore options for the extension of public toilet opening hours during the summer months to 9pm near beaches and other busy areas.”

At a meeting of the Environment Committee on 7 December 2025 when a report was tabled, Members asked officers to return a further report outlining more details on the costs and options for extending summer opening hours at high footfall locations. Members indicated a wish to extend opening hours at facilities located at beaches, promenades, piers and other areas of high summer footfall.

The report identified selected Council facilities located in higher summer footfall areas, estimated the time needed to travel between all sites, and provided an estimate of the additional costs required.

Current service profile

The Council maintained 26 public conveniences across the Borough. This included four Automatic Public Conveniences (APC) which were accessible 24 hours a day. Table 1.0 provided a list of all Council-maintained public conveniences and their current opening hours during the summer and winter seasons.

Table 1.0 Council-maintained public conveniences and their opening hours

		Summer hours (May to August)	Winter hours (September to April)
Bangor	Abbey Street	0800 to 1900	0800 to 1800
	Bank's Lane	0800 to 1900	0800 to 1800
	Ballyholme Promenade	0800 to 1900	0800 to 1800
	Castle Park	0800 to 1900	0800 to 1800
	South Pier	0800 to 1800 Open to 2100 during July and August APC open 24/7 all year	
	Ward Park	0800 to 1900	0800 to 1800
Ballyhalbert	Harbour Road	0800 to 1900	0800 to 1800
Ballywalter	Springvale Road	0800 to 1900	0800 to 1800
Cloughey	Main Road	0800 to 1900	0800 to 1800
Comber	Castle Park	0800 to 1800	
Donaghadee	Parade	0800 to 1800 Open to 2100 during July and August	
Donaghadee	The Commons	0800 to 1900	0800 to 1800
Greyabbey	Main Street	0800 to 1900	0800 to 1800
Groomsport	Harbour Road	0800 to 1900	0800 to 1800
Holywood	Hibernia Street	0800 to 1900	0800 to 1800
	Seapark	0800 to 1900	0800 to 1800
Kircubbin	Shore Road	APC open 24/7 all year	
Millisle	Ballywalter Road	0800 to 1900	0800 to 1800
Newtownards	Cunningburn	APC open 24/7 all year	
	Kiltonga	0800 to 1900	0800 to 1800
	Londonderry Park	0800 to 1900	0800 to 1800
	Mill Street	0800 to 1800	
	Cairn Wood	0800 to 1900	0800 to 1800
Portaferry	Castle Park	APC open 24/7 all year	
Portavogie	Anchor Car Park	0800 to 1900	0800 to 1800

APC, Automatic Public Convenience

The service utilised two shifts to ensure public conveniences were opened in the morning, serviced during opening hours, and secured each evening. Those comprised an early shift and a late shift. The teams were responsible for cleaning each facility, reporting any incidents of vandalism, opening and closing.

NI Local Authorities

Officers contacted four Northern Ireland Councils to benchmark practices in similar areas. The survey identified broadly similar practices, over the summer period between them. Most public toilets in other areas were unmanned and generally operated on extended hours during the summer months, with variations depending on location and demand. However, approaches differed.

- Causeway Coast and Glens provided late openings in key tourist areas, including three APCs, from April to September. The Council resourced this through a mix of agency and in-house staff.
- Fermanagh and Omagh extended the opening of all its public toilets to 8pm throughout its longer April–October season.
- Newry, Mourne and Down (NMD) used a tiered seasonal model, with the longest hours limited to Newcastle and Warrenpoint during July and August only. Many of NMD’s facilities had timed automatic closure.
- Antrim and Newtownabbey did not vary hours seasonally and maintained a consistent 8am–6pm schedule year-round.

Extended summer opening in AND

In considering the specifics of the discussion at Committee, such as higher footfall areas in the summer, officers had identified eleven public toilet locations where there may be a public benefit from extended summer opening hours. Table 2.0 listed those facilities, which included four APCs which were available 24 hours a day, and the potential extension of opening hours for consideration.

Table 2.0 Public conveniences in areas of high summer footfall

		Current summer closing time	Potential later summer closing time
Bangor	Bank’s Lane	1900	2100
	Ballyholme Promenade	1900	2100
	South Pier	1800 2100 during July and August	2100
	APC		
	Ward Park	1900	2100
Ballywalter	Springvale Road	1900	2100
Cloughey	Main Road	1900	2100
Donaghadee	Parade	1800 2100 during July and August	2100
Donaghadee	The Commons	1900	2100
Groomsport	Harbour Road	1900	2100
Hollywood	Seapark	1900	2100

Kircubbin	Shore Road	APC	
Millisle	Ballywalter Road	1900	2100
Newtownards	Cunningburn	APC	
Portaferry	Castle Park	APC	

Cost and challenges of extending opening hours

It was estimated that it would take an individual approximately three hours each evening to visit and secure the eleven identified facilities. The proposal to extend opening hours from April to September inclusive represented 183 days.

There would be significant challenges in requiring existing staff to oversee the extended opening hours. The first lock up would be at 2100 and the last lock up could be around midnight. Resourcing the later lock up over a six-month period with the Council’s existing team could mean either extending overall working hours or delaying the start time of the late shift. Both approaches presented challenges as the former would result in a contravention of working time regulations, and the latter would require a renegotiation of terms and conditions of employment.

As an alternative and as suggested at the committee, a contractor used by Parks and Cemeteries had been considered. Based on that, the indicative additional cost of engaging a contractor would be in the region of £20,000 per season.

That additional cost would only deal with late locking up and the current in house team would continue to be required to inspect, service and clean the identified facilities at the normal lock up time in advance, however it was likely to be the most effective method of extending opening hours.

RECOMMENDED that Council considers the option to extend public toilet opening hours as described in this report, subject to resource being identified in year, or agreed for the summer of 2027.

Councillor Cathcart asked to make an alternative proposal that was seconded by Councillor Edmund; that we accept the officers’ recommendation with the addition of a review in one year’s time to ascertain usage and value for money.

Councillor Cathcart spoke about how fortunate the Borough was to have so many wonderful beaches and referred to complaints he was always sure to receive from Easter onwards and through the summer season due to the toilet facilities being closed early in the evenings. People often reported to him that other Council areas with coastlines like our own had toilet facilities that were open for longer hours during the summer season.

Councillor Edmund said that he was delighted to second the amendment and felt that longer opening should be trialled and he referred to walking groups he was aware of who appreciated the use of the Council’s facilities in the early evenings during the summer.

Councillor Cochrane, having been given speaking rights for the Environment Committee, said he fully supported the extension of the public toilet opening hours and thanked Councillor Cathcart for bringing the amendment.

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He said he supported opening times until 9 pm from April through to September using the contractor suggested by Parks and Cemeteries. He felt the proposal was not an open-ended commitment but would be a defined trial, with a full review thereafter. That review could look carefully at cost effectiveness, actual usage at each site, and any issues around antisocial behaviour. In other words, the Council would be testing, learning, and then deciding rather than committing to a change indefinitely.

He appreciated the £20,000 cost for the contractor was significant and that was why he believed a trial approach was the responsible way forward, since it allowed for evidence to be gathered such as; were people really using the facilities in the extended hours, did it improve the visitor experience, and were there any operational or community issues that the Council should be made aware of.

He thought there were also very practical, site specific reasons why that mattered. He referred to the toilets at Seapark, Holywood, as an example. During the summer months, Seapark was extremely busy, particularly because of the play park, which attracted families well into the evening. At that area there were no nearby restaurants or cafés where people could reasonably rely on alternative facilities.

Extending toilet hours here could not be considered a luxury but rather a basic service that supported families, children, and visitors staying longer and enjoying the space responsibly.

It was also worth noting that Alderman Graham had been pushing for that, reflecting ongoing concerns raised by the community and a clear recognition of the demand during peak months.

Similarly, he said that The Commons, Donaghadee, was a hugely popular location during the summer, especially given the volume of people walking and spending time in the area. Extended daylight hours naturally meant people could be out later, and extending toilet access would significantly improve the experience for residents and visitors alike.

For those reasons, he would strongly support moving forward with the trial and reviewing it properly at the end of September 2027.

Alderman Adair shared the view that a trial was important. He suggested that if other Councils with coastlines could do extended hours in the summer months then so should Ards and North Down since why should it consistently lag behind in terms of its tourism offering.

Councillor Boyle was happy to support and while not perfect a trial could show what was possible and lessons could be learnt from other areas. He asked how other councils operated and referring to the detail included in the report the Head of Waste and Cleansing described that there was a mix of options, employing seasonal staff and in house, and also varying closing times for toilets within an area according to how they were prioritised by need.

Councillor Wray considered the cost of the extended opening to be astronomical for what it was whilst agreeing with the need to improve the situation for residents and tourists. He was willing to trial it to test its value for money and he questioned the means of assessing usage during the trial itself and measuring evidence. Alderman McAlpine agreed and supported longer hours during the lighter evenings but felt the cost was high and that public concerns and performance measures were unclear.

Councillor Blaney was broadly supportive but described the cost as excessive. He questioned whether all eleven sites were suitable for late opening and suggested prioritisation with the possibility that in-house teams and revised lock-up routes be costed before any approval or commitment to additional funding was made. The Director confirmed that if it was agreed to proceed in 2027 that the best costed practical option would be deployed for the 11 locations listed and would report on the detail nearer the time.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter noted that several Council teams already operated across the Borough and she supported reviewing the proposal, including reducing sites and keeping work in-house. She stressed the need for value for money and proper scrutiny before committing the £20,000.

Councillor Cathcart thanked Members for their comments and looked forward to a further report.

A recorded vote had been requested.

On being put to the meeting with 10 voting FOR, 0 voting AGAINST, 4 ABSTAINING and 2 ABSENT, the amendment was CARRIED.

The voting was as follows:

FOR (10)	AGAINST (0)	ABSTAINED (4)	ABSENT (2)
Aldermen		Councillor	Councillor
Adair		Blaney	Irwin
Armstrong-Cotter		Harbinson	Kendall
Cummings		Newman	
McAlpine		Wray	
Councillors			
Ashe			
Boyle			
Brady			
Cathcart			
Douglas			
Edmund			

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Cathcart, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the recommendation be adopted with the addition of a review after one year’s time to ascertain usage and value for money.

5. PARKS AND CEMETERIES CLIMATE READY UPDATE (FILE CW22) (Appendix III)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that an action from the Parks and Cemeteries Service Plan for 2025/6 agreed by Council in March 2025, was to provide an annual update on how the Service was ready to deal with climate change and how it would support the Council's broader climate goals. The attached report met that initial requirement in the form of a Climate Ready Statement and Action Plan.

In 2019, Ards and North Down Borough Council declared a Climate Emergency and was committed to making a positive contribution to the fight against climate change. The climate emergency was one of the defining challenges of our time, and its impacts were already being felt across the Council's communities. From more frequent storms and heavy rainfall to prolonged droughts and rising temperatures, climate change was putting increasing pressure on how the Council managed both natural and built environments.

This Parks and Cemeteries 'Climate Ready' statement outlined a clear and practical plan for how the Parks and Cemeteries Service would support the Council's broader climate goals. It aligned closely with policies such as the Roadmap to a Green Fleet, the Tree and Woodland Strategy, and the Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

Through coordinated action on energy, land use, procurement, workforce training, operational changes and community engagement, the strategy placed parks at the heart of the Council's sustainability journey. It reflected its commitment to ensuring that those cherished spaces were resilient, inclusive, and climate-ready both now and for future generations.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the attached Parks and Cemeteries Climate Ready Statement and Action Plan, progress with which will be reported on annually.

Proposed by Alderman Adair, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that the recommendation be adopted.

Alderman Adair opened the discussion by commending the work of the Head of Parks and Cemeteries and sought an update on sand dune restoration on the Ards Peninsula. It was noted that the Marram Grass had not established due to the stormy weather conditions, and officers confirmed that restoration work was expected to take place in that area during September 2026 when conditions should be more settled. The Alderman welcomed the comprehensive information provided, emphasised the urgency of protecting the sand dunes, and asked about funding. In response the officer confirmed that the Strangford and Lecale Partnership, along with other community partners, would be assisting in that work.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter welcomed the report and stated her desire to prioritise the work. She explained that she lived beside a biodiversity area and it experienced flooding during bad weather, creating her love-hate relationship with the site. She asked how often these biodiversity pockets were checked for health and safety. The Head of Parks and Cemeteries advised that every Council-owned tree was labelled, numbered, and risk-assessed, and that active management had helped prevent

issues. He noted that January 2026 had been the wettest in 137 years, which could bring vermin into the open, and confirmed that the Council contacted relevant services to ensure such issues were controlled.

Councillor Cathcart welcomed the significant elements of the report, particularly the creation of new biodiversity areas. He asked whether a further report would be brought back to the Committee so Members could review proposals, stressing the need to balance recreation with environmental protection and suggesting that several key sites would benefit from rewilding. Officers confirmed that consultation and Member approval were essential and that updates would be brought back, with opportunities for Members to raise issues which were arising in their own areas.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that the recommendation be adopted.

6. NORTH DOWN COASTAL PATH WORKING GROUP MINUTES (CW30) (Appendix IV)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- A meeting of the North Down Coastal Path Working Group was held on 6 October 2025. Minutes of that meeting were agreed by the group at its last meeting on 5 January 2026.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the attached minutes.

Proposed by Councillor Brady, seconded by Councillor Newman, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Brady, as Chair of the North Down Coastal Path Working Group, reported that the recent clearance work along the coastal path had, in his opinion, and that of many others, gone far beyond what the Working Group had agreed. The instruction had been for a light-touch approach, restoring the path only to its original boundaries, but the photographs he distributed showed that approximately four metres had been cleared on either side. He stated that that level of work had not been authorised and that the resulting environmental impact had been described by residents as decimation rather than maintenance. He noted that public kickback had been considerable, with residents having campaigned on the issue for some time, and he questioned whether the contractor had exceeded the remit or whether officers had issued instructions that differed from what had been agreed.

The Head of Parks and Cemeteries explained that the contractor had been instructed by a member of his team and that he had no concerns about what had been asked nor what had been done. He stated that the area required significant work and that the results would be beneficial in the coming months. On another point he informed the Committee that the minor damage to the stone ground wall was being repaired and that discussions had taken place with the contractor about that. On the issue of Japanese Knotweed, he stated that although a strimmer had been used, the plant had already been treated with a strong chemical bi-annual spraying and in some cases stem injection and that was part of routine annual management by the Council. The plant had therefore been dealt with appropriately.

He maintained that the heavier work completed now would allow for lighter maintenance in future and described that as a normal horticultural practice.

Councillor Newman thanked officers for their earlier responses and noted that her first Working Group meeting in January had already revealed tension between residents, Members, and officers. She also referred to the minutes of the October 2025 agreement, which had been limited to vegetation and verge clearance, and stated that the recent work had gone significantly further. She emphasised that trust could not be built if agreed plans were not followed and asked whether changes to plans would be communicated clearly and whether officers monitored contractor activity to ensure compliance.

The Head of Parks and Cemeteries acknowledged that a delay caused by an overrunning capital project had affected the timing of the contractor's work. He reiterated that a substantial amount of work had been completed and that future maintenance would be lighter as a result and cutting back at times was good horticultural practice, although he recognised that some residents were unhappy with the outcome. He did not agree that there was tension within the Coastal Path Working Group but accepted that residents questioned matters relating to the path.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND on the proposal of Councillor Brady, seconded by Councillor Newman, that the recommendation be adopted.

7. ASHBURY PLAY PARK – UPDATE REPORT (FILE CW4)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that the purpose of this report was to update Members on the current status of the proposed Ashbury Play Park.

Background

Under the North Down Borough Council Play Park Strategy (2014) and reaffirmed in the Ards and North Down Borough Council Play Strategy (2021–2032), East Bangor was identified as having a significant shortfall in play provision.

Public consultation undertaken in 2019 identified two potential sites:

- Site A: Green space in front of Ashbury Shops (not Council-owned)
- Site B: Within Linear Park (Council-owned)

Public Consultation Results

- Residents in Area: 97% of respondents lived in Ashbury/Ballycrochan.
- Need for Play Facility: 81% agreed a play facility is required.
- Preferred Location:
 - Site A: 42%
 - Site B: 46%
 - Either: 3%
 - No preference: 9%



The results of the consultation were reported through the Community and Wellbeing Committee in August 2020, and Council decided that the play park should be delivered at Site A.

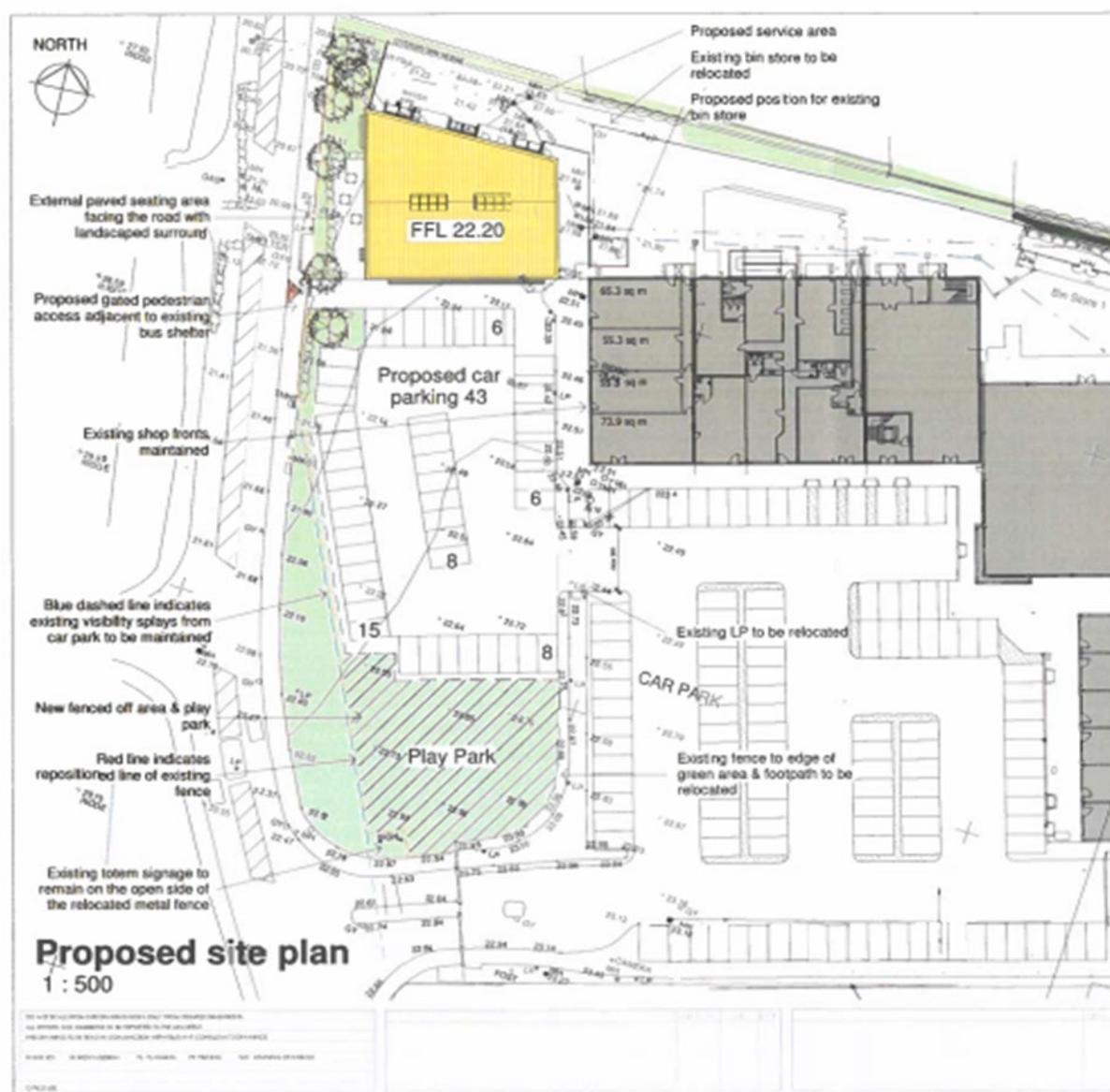
Negotiations then commenced with the landowners and Land and Property Services regarding acquisition of Site A. The landowners at the time were also considering an extension to their existing commercial units, and so they agreed to the playpark site subject to them including it in a combined planning application incorporating:

- Additional commercial units
- Car park extension
- The proposed play park

The Council provided the play park design drawings and paid the planning fee attributable to the play park (£848). The landowners indicated that, upon planning approval, they would then transfer the required land to the Council and Council would develop the facility.

Planning Application

Planning application LA06/2022/0750/F was submitted on 20 July 2022, proposing: *Two Class 1 shop units, one hot food unit, first-floor accommodation for Class B1(a) or Class A2 use, associated car parking, and a children's play area.*



Officers were pleased to advise that Planning approval was granted on 24 November 2025 subject to conditions including pre commencement conditions, and that those conditions were in the process of being discharged.

No development shall take place on site until the method of sewage disposal has been agreed in writing with Northern Ireland Water (NIW) or a consent to discharge has been granted under the terms of the Water (NI) Order 1999.

The site owners along with their agents had now progressed with the detail of this planning condition in order to discharge NIWs requirements.

Officers were continually liaising with the landowner's agent and had recently been advised that they were progressing well with addressing the NI Water requirements as they had submitted a proposal and had addressed additional requests for information from NI Water. The landowner's agent had indicated that they would only begin the land transfer process when they had obtained the necessary approvals from NI Water.

Current Position

The play park would be delivered as soon as

- The developers proposals had been finalised and agreed by NI Water
- Land transfer terms were agreed
- The land had been transferred to Council

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report and Council officers continue to liaise with the site owners and their agents to progress the land transfer to enable the delivery of the play park.

Councillor Chambers and Councillor Cochrane were in attendance they had required speaking rights for that item.

Proposed by Councillor Cathcart, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Cathcart noted that the decision had been a long time coming for the east side of Bangor. He stated that it had been his proposal that secured approval for the play park and that he had pushed the matter forward. He expressed disappointment at the time taken to reach this stage but welcomed the progress, emphasising that this part of Bangor did not have a play park despite having a significant population. He also praised the work of Peter Martin MLA to get the project to this stage and he said it was good to see the project finally moving towards delivery.

Councillor Edmund said he was delighted to second the proposal on behalf of Councillor Cochrane who represented that area.

Councillor Chambers said he was pleased to be present, noting that Bangor East and Donaghadee had very little representation on the Committee and that the issue had been ongoing for around thirty years. He said it had been one of the top issues he had worked on over his time as an Elected Member. He expressed regret that many residents had missed out on having a play facility when they had been young and that was particularly regrettable given the densely populated area. He reported that there was a perception that the Council had failed, although he believed the responsibility lay more with NI Water, who may have gone too far in the requirements laid out. He asked whether there were any indications of when NI Water would sign off on the project and whether planning approval would be required, along with how much of a priority delivery would be once planning was secured.

The Head of Parks and Cemeteries advised that the last correspondence had been on 24 November 2025 and that it was hoped to finalise the planning condition set by NI Water and complete the land transfer to the Council, after which progress could be made. He added that officers had heard clearly the need expressed and that it would be treated as a high priority.

Councillor Cochrane thanked officers and said it was very welcome to see real progress on Ashbury Playpark. He said that when he was first elected, he had

promised the people of the Ashbury area that he would see the play park delivered. After many phone calls, emails and discussions, he was pleased that the project was now close to becoming a reality. He also placed on record his thanks to Peter Martin MLA for his efforts and reflected that, having grown up in the Ashbury area, his own generation had never had the opportunity to enjoy such a facility, but he was glad that future generations would.

He asked how long the land transfer process would take once agreement with NI Water had been reached and the Head of Parks and Cemeteries indicated that a land transfer could potentially be completed within a month, and that the Council could prepare work in the background meantime.

Councillor Boyle commended the efforts made and welcomed progress towards delivering a playground in such a densely populated area. He asked how matters with NI Water were progressing. The Head of Parks and Cemeteries noted that some significant steps were still outstanding and the Member said he hoped the next steps would proceed smoothly.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Cathcart, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the recommendation be adopted.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES DIRECTORATE BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT – DECEMBER 2025 (FILE FIN23 / 40012)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that the Environmental Services Budgetary Control Report covered the nine-month period 1 April 2025 to 31 December 2025 and it reflected the recent Organisational changes. The net cost of the Directorate was showing an underspend of £834k (3.6%).

Explanation of Variance

The Environmental Services budget performance was further analysed on page 3 of the report into three key areas:

Report	Type	Variance	Page
Report 2	Payroll Expenditure	£320k favourable	3
Report 3	Goods & Services Expenditure	£350k favourable	3
Report 4	Income	£164k favourable	3

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

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Type	Variance £'000	Comment
Payroll	(320)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waste & Cleansing (£148k) – vacancies within Waste Collection. Estates (£150k) – vacancies within Technical & Maintenance Service Unit and Transport. Parks & Cemeteries (£23k).
Goods & Services		
Waste & Cleansing	105	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainly due to waste disposal plastic costs being more than anticipated (£41k).
Estates	(523)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technical & Maintenance – (£644k). Capitalisation of Aurora Storm Damage from 24/25 – (£232k) Other Maintenance – (£364k) Utilities – (£76k) Transport running costs - £73k – mainly Borough Cleansing vehicles.
Parks & Cemeteries	65	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Range of small variances in Parks & Cemeteries.
Income		
Parks & Cemeteries	(147)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cemeteries income (£87k) Outdoor Leisure (£61k)
Estates	(61)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wind Turbine (£67K)
Waste & Cleansing	44	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waste Collection £31k

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REPORT 1 BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT					
Period 9 - December 2025					
	Year to Date Actual	Year to Date Budget	Variance	Annual Budget	Variance
	£	£	£	£	%
Environmental Services					
4100 Environmental Services HQ	163,999	160,000	3,999	214,500	2.5
4200 Waste and Cleansing Services	11,930,407	11,929,200	1,207	15,214,200	0.0
4300 Estates	6,297,410	7,032,400	(734,990)	9,595,400	(10.5)
4400 Parks & Cemeteries	4,218,788	4,323,400	(104,612)	5,925,700	(2.4)
Total	22,610,604	23,445,000	A (834,396)	30,949,800	(3.6)
REPORT 2 PAYROLL REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Environmental Services - Payroll					
4100 Environmental Services HQ	136,641	135,100	1,541	180,500	1.1
4200 Waste and Cleansing Services	7,712,438	7,860,500	(148,062)	10,451,900	(1.9)
4300 Estates	1,847,884	1,998,200	(150,316)	2,658,100	(7.5)
4400 Parks & Cemeteries	3,800,387	3,823,700	(23,313)	5,048,100	(0.6)
Total	13,497,350	13,817,500	B (320,150)	18,338,600	(2.3)
REPORT 3 GOODS & SERVICES REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Environmental Services - Goods & Services					
4100 Environmental Services HQ	27,359	24,900	2,459	34,000	9.9
4200 Waste and Cleansing Services	6,956,238	6,851,000	105,238	8,986,200	1.5
4300 Estates	5,417,152	5,940,600	(523,448)	8,170,100	(8.8)
4400 Parks & Cemeteries	1,159,205	1,093,500	65,705	1,645,800	6.0
Total	13,559,955	13,910,000	C (350,045)	18,836,100	(2.5)
REPORT 4 INCOME REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Environmental Services - Income					
4100 Environmental Services HQ	-	-	-	-	-
4200 Waste and Cleansing Services	(2,738,270)	(2,782,300)	44,030	(4,223,900)	1.6
4300 Estates	(967,626)	(906,400)	(61,226)	(1,232,800)	(6.8)
4400 Parks & Cemeteries	(740,804)	(593,800)	(147,004)	(768,200)	(24.8)
Totals	(4,446,700)	(4,282,500)	D (164,200)	(6,224,900)	(3.8)

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Wray, seconded by Alderman Cummings, that the recommendation be adopted.

9. NOTICES OF MOTION

9.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Cochrane and Councillor Thompson

That this Council notes the growing popularity of Linear Park in Bangor East as a hub for the local community.

Further to this, officers will bring back a report exploring options for providing path markings in both Upper and Lower Linear Park for runners, such as distance indicators e.g. 1 km, 2 km, along with appropriate signage to assist those who wish to keep fit in the Park.

Officers will also examine options for upgrading the path and accompanying drainage system in Lower Linear Park between the bridge and the Ring Road, in light of persistent flooding and drainage issues.

Proposed by Councillor Cochrane, seconded by Councillor Thompson, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

Councillor Cochrane rose to speak in support of the Motion, which recognised the growing importance of Linear Park in Bangor East as a vital asset for its local community and sought practical, sensible improvements that would benefit residents of all ages.

He said Linear Park was not just a green space but a place where people came to walk, run, meet friends, exercise their dogs, enjoy nature, and improve both their physical and mental wellbeing. Over recent years, there had been a significant increase in how much people relied on outdoor spaces and for many people Linear Park had become part of their daily routine and part of their lifestyle.

It was, in many ways, one of Bangor East's greatest assets providing a safe, accessible, and scenic environment where people could keep active without having to travel far from home. That was something residents were proud of, and something the Council should continue to invest in.

He explained that the Motion did three important things.

Firstly, it formally acknowledged the growing popularity of Linear Park as a community hub and recognition mattered since it showed that the Council was listening to residents and understood how valued the space had become. Councillor Cochrane put on record his thanks to the Parks team and Friends of Linear Park for the excellent work they did to help improve this key community asset.

Secondly, it asked officers to explore options for providing path markings and signage to support runners and walkers. Simple distance markers such as 1 kilometre, 2 kilometres, and so on may seem like small changes, but they could make a significant difference.

For many people who were trying to improve their fitness, having clear distance indicators provided motivation, structure, and encouragement. It allowed people to set goals, track their progress, and feel a sense of achievement. For beginners, it

could be the difference between giving up and keeping going and for more experienced runners, it helped them train more effectively.

Those markings would not just benefit runners but walkers, parents with buggies, older residents trying to stay active, and people recovering from illness or injury could all use them to pace themselves and manage their exercise safely. It fitted directly with the Council's wider public health objectives since it was known that encouraging people to be more active reduced pressure on health services, improved mental health, and strengthened communities. Investing in small, practical measures like this was a cost effective way of supporting those goals.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the Motion addressed the persistent flooding and drainage issues in Lower Linear Park, particularly between the bridge and the Ring Road.

He thought that local residents would be well aware that this section regularly became waterlogged and, at times, almost unusable. After heavy rain, large parts of the path could be submerged and that created inconvenience, safety risks, and discouraged people from using the Park.

For runners and walkers, it broke up the routes and forced them onto slippery grass. For older residents or those with mobility issues, it could make the area completely inaccessible and for families with children or buggies, it became a serious obstacle.

Over time, repeated flooding also damaged the path surface, increased maintenance costs, and undermined the long-term sustainability of the Park. He urged officers that if the Council did not address the drainage properly, it would simply continue to patch up the same problems year after year.

The Motion did not demand an immediate expensive solution but rather it simply asked officers to examine options and bring back a report. He considered that to be a responsible and measured approach and it allowed the Council to understand the scale of the problem and consider different engineering solutions.

He appreciated that the Parks team had started topping up stones on the existing path however, preventative investment in infrastructure saved money in the long run. Well-maintained paths and effective drainage reduced repair costs, reduced liability risks, and reduced the need for repeated emergency works.

Furthermore, investment in public spaces was an investment in community wellbeing since parks like Linear Park were free and open to all.

Concluding, he said that the Motion also reflected what residents had been telling Members, they had raised concerns about flooding and about damaged surfaces and they were proud of their Park and wanted to see it looked after. By supporting the Motion, it was showing that the Council took those concerns seriously. It was also worth noting that those proposals aligned with broader strategic objectives around sustainability, active travel, and environmental responsibility. Encouraging walking and running reduced car journeys. Improving drainage

protected local ecosystems and prevented soil erosion. Better signage improved accessibility and inclusion.

He appealed to Members that the Motion was balanced, practical, and forward-looking. It was focused on everyday quality of life, grounded in community needs, and aimed at long-term benefit and he asked Members for their support.

Councillor Thompson was pleased to second the Motion explaining that the area was popular with young people and elderly residents for walking and leisure, Pathways, signage and drainage had always been a problem and he hoped that the changes described would make the Park a safer place for all residents and visitors while supporting the Council's Age Friendly strategy.

Councillor Wray rose to support the Motion and noted that the changes proposed were relatively cheap but would be very effective. Improvements would provide scope for more park runs and that should be maximised. He looked forward to the report.

Councillor Cathcart welcomed improvements as a resident of the area and thanked the Council for listening to the calls and it would be terrific to have the problems that had been outlined addressed. He hoped the markings for running on the path would provide the incentive he needed to take up running too.

Councillor Cochrane thanked Members for their support and agreed that it was a cheap solution and much of the work was community led and he looked forward to the officers report in due course.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Cochrane, seconded by Councillor Thompson, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

9.2 Notice of Motion submitted by Alderman McIlveen and Alderman Armstrong-Cotter

That this Council notes that the natural stone blinding pathways around Londonderry Park are prone to saturation with water resulting in significant standing water and sludginess which adversely impacts on the use and enjoyment of the park.

Council therefore requests that officers prepare a business case with a view to paving or tarmacking the paths in the park to improve the user experience.

Proposed by Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

Alderman McIlveen stated that the Council's Corporate Plan for 2024-2028 had three key priorities, one of which was a social priority of improving wellbeing through social inclusion and reduced inequality. Among the seven outcomes, the Council supported opportunities for people to be active and healthy and wanted a vibrant, attractive and sustainable Borough with social, environmental and economic benefits for all its residents and stakeholders.

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In the Corporate Plan we talked about “focussing resources and delivering services which contribute to active, happy and healthy citizens and employees will contribute to better quality of life for all citizens” and also how we should “focus on developing and enhancing our natural, built and coastal heritage and encouraging others to enjoy the assets within our Borough”.

There was no doubt that Londonderry Park was a fantastic facility with fantastic staff. It could cater for most sporting needs and included community facilities. However, not everyone was involved in team sports like football, cricket, hockey or lawn bowls. Londonderry Park had never just been about sports facilities and its primary purpose was as a public park for the town gifted by the Marquis of Londonderry to provide open space and recreational grounds for the townspeople.

There was not a huge amount of open space left for the public to use if 3G hockey pitches, pavilions, play parks and toilets were removed. Those who came to the Park to enjoy the open space often walked the path around the perimeter which was approximately one mile. Those who lived in and represented the town would be aware of grumbling and dissatisfaction with the condition of that path.

He personally considered it to be in a shocking state and it was getting progressively worse. He explained that the path was covered in blinding, but instead of draining properly it became waterlogged, sludgy, and uneven. Large pools of standing water sat on it for days at a time and not just after heavy rainfall. Those conditions were evident recently, in dry weather, the whole way around the Park.

As a result, walkers were forced off the path and onto the grass and pitches to avoid the mud and children ended up covered in sludge with parents lifting prams over puddles. Older residents and those with mobility issues were left with no safe option at all. He did not think that was acceptable for a public park that was meant to be accessible and enjoyable for everyone.

He stated that this was not about cosmetic improvements, it was about basic infrastructure and having a path that did not flood and a surface that could be used year round. It was for that reason that he was bringing this Motion to task officers with installing a proper hard surface around the Park path to address the ongoing issues.

He explained that when he had publicised that he was bringing this Motion before the Council the response from the Newtownards public had been overwhelmingly positive. He did not think it did the Council any favours to be ignoring the matter. When significant investments such as Ward Park and the Marine Gardens in Bangor, were being put in place he did not think it was much to ask for a proper path to walk on to enjoy one of the few green spaces left for the people of Newtownards.

He asked Members to support the Motion and ensure that Londonderry Park was a Park the public could use fully.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter was happy to second and thought it was disappointing to hear about the neglect of the facilities and she was urging the Committee that this was not to be taken as a run of the mill situation but a call to action that needed to be

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taken urgently. Londonderry Park was extremely well used and was a central hub for exercise in the area, indeed it was listed as one of Northern Ireland's gentle park runs it was an asset that needed care and attention and she thanked her colleague for bringing it forward.

Councillor Edmund gave his support to the Motion and drove past it regularly advising that the area was once attracting older people for walks but that no longer seemed to be the case. Alderman Cummings rose to support the Motion being aware of the path and noting that the surface was unfit for those with mobility issues, or for people with prams.

Alderman McIlveen summed up thanking Members for their support and positive words and he hoped that it would be upgraded soon.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

9.3. Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Cathcart and Councillor McClean

That this Council recognises its responsibility to ensure that our city, towns and villages are looking the best that they can be, to be welcoming places for visitors and our residents. It is therefore essential that the correct structures and policies are in place to ensure that within the resources made available all expected maintenance is being carried out efficiently and effectively.

A proactive maintenance regime was agreed when this Council was created and has worked well in some areas but hasn't had the desired impact in other areas. Basic maintenance and upkeep of our public realm particularly in our centres and prominent areas can and should be improved.

The Council therefore commits to reporting on a review of its current proactive maintenance and cleansing regimes, highlighting options and opportunities for improvement and associated budgetary requirements, so as to allow members to consider potential improvements in outcomes concerning the maintenance of Council property and the public realm.

Proposed by Councillor Cathcart, seconded by Councillor McClean, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

As proposer Councillor Cathcart was urging the Council to adopt a back to basics approach to ensure that the Borough's city, towns and villages were looking their best and were well maintained. Poor maintenance gave a bad impression that the Council did not care about the appearance of the local environment and that message irritated people. Undoubtedly the Council was focused on large capital projects but it could not be that work at the expense of basic care which was often viewed more as a reactive rather than proactive task.

The Christmas incident involving the dirty City Hall sign had highlighted long-standing concerns to local people. It had gone viral on social media and

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showed that the Council did not appear to care about basic maintenance. Members noted that while the issue seemed minor, it was noticeable, and symbolic of wider problems. A strategy had been agreed ten years previously but it was felt that maintenance now needed to be reviewed, particularly in relation to the assets of the public realm.

Other examples were raised such as the roundabout outside the train station which had wildflowers for two months of the year, but for the rest of the time it was left as a muddy mess, despite being a key focal point and gateway to the city. Members felt that was unacceptable. The Cleansing teams were said to perform well, but more work was needed to keep the area consistently clean.

The Council itself had acknowledged the issues through the Place and Prosperity assessment and the condition survey. After ten years, Members believed it was the right time to review policies to ensure the right outcomes and looked forward to those proposals progressing.

Councillor McClean stated that the matter was common sense: the towns and the city had not been kept as clean as they could have been. Traders and Chambers of Commerce had repeatedly raised concerns. He thought the Council operated within a credibility gap, and one way to address it was to keep the public realm clean and tidy. He stressed that strategic ambitions would be undermined if the basics were not delivered noting that actions spoke louder than words and that greater pride needed to be taken in the streets. He asked whether, having committed £12M to the public realm, the Council was going to keep it clean. If the Borough wished to support regeneration, it needed to take care of its streets.

RECESS 9.00 pm

RECOMMENCED 9.15 pm

Alderman Adair commended the proposer and seconder and was delighted they had included the villages. Millions of pounds had been spent on the public realm and it should be kept clean and celebrated. Examples in his mind were dirty signage, seating unmaintained and general care and attention to storm damage. Well kept property assets improved longevity and increased civic pride so the Motion was timely and getting back to basics was a huge concern of residents.

Councillor Boyle emphasised positivity and congratulated officers saying that the Council was proactive and willing to support local areas. He felt Bangor had not always been well looked after, while smaller places sometimes “lose out,” but he praised residents who step up to attract visitors. He acknowledged there was tidying up to do, yet highlighted that when he contacted officers they responded quickly. He noted that many parts of the Peninsula were well-kept, showing good work already happening.

Councillor Newman agreed with the positive tone but raised a practical concern: pavements on the High Street were in poor condition. She pointed out that shops must meet high hygiene standards, yet many shop keepers also had to clean the pavements outside their premises and she felt that was wrong.

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Councillor Cathcart said the report showed staff were doing good work, but the issue was also about policies and procedures. After ten years, it was the right moment to reassess what the Council was doing and the message should be that it was committed to maintenance to the highest standards.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Cathcart, seconded by Councillor McClean, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

10. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

There were no items of Any Other Notified Business.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Councillor Edmund, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that the public/press be excluded during the discussion of the undernoted items of confidential business.

11. EXTENSION OF TENDER FOR SUPPLY OF ELECTRICAL FITTINGS (FILE 77001)

****IN CONFIDENCE****

****ITEM DELEGATED FOR APPROVAL****

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that Council officers had previously reported on a tender exercise for the Supply of Electrical Fittings expiring on 22 February 2026 with an option to extend for a final one year.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that the recommendation be adopted.

12. EXTENSION OF GULLY WASTE HAULAGE CONTRACT (FILE 77060)

****IN CONFIDENCE****

****ITEM DELEGATED FOR APPROVAL****

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that the contract for the Treatment, Recycling and Disposal of collected Street Sweeping and Gully Waste was awarded to Heatrick Ltd on 1 August 2023 initially for a one-year period, with the option to extend the contract for a further three 12- Month periods, reviewed annually.

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AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that the recommendation be adopted.

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the public/press be re-admitted to the meeting.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 9.25 pm.

ITEM 9.3

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ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid (in person and via Zoom) meeting of the Place and Prosperity Committee was held at the Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards on Thursday 5 February 2026 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Councillor McCracken

Aldermen: Adair
Armstrong-Cotter
McDowell

Councillors: Blaney McCollum
Brady Morgan
Edmund Newman
Gilmour Smart
Hennessy Thompson
Hollywood

Officers in Attendance: Director of Place and Prosperity (B Dorrian), Head of Tourism (S Mahaffy), Interim Head of Regeneration (A Cozzo), Economic Development Manager (K McGuickin) and Democratic Services Officer (S McCrea).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Kennedy for being unable to attend.

NOTED.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair (Councillor McCracken) declared an Interest in Item 3: Proposed Business Improvement Districts for Bangor – Update report. As no other declarations were received, he reminded Members of their ability to declare throughout the meeting.

NOTED.

[Councillor McCracken left the meeting at 19:02 due to his declaration of interest in the following item with Alderman Adair as Vice Chair taking his place]

3. PROPOSED BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS FOR BANGOR – UPDATE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that Members would have recalled 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 had 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 had continued to provide on-going support to the BID Steering Group. This support had included officer engagement, ongoing advice, and the provision of resources. The Steering Group met with officers approximately every two months, or more frequently if required, in line with the Contract for Funding. The Steering Group also provided quarterly progress reports to Council officers.

The BID Steering Group continued 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 had been accepted and final administrative steps are under way.

- A BID Project Officer had been appointed, and would commence employment on 5 January 2026.

Next Steps

The BID Steering Group would continue to work towards the regulatory timeline outlined above. Given the length of time required to complete all statutory stages, it was 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 had also secured budget provision for the 2026/27 financial year to allow for exploration of a potential second BID. Officers would engage with local Chambers of Trade through the newly established Local Action Groups to consider this further.

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.

Councillor Gilmour proposed, seconded by Councillor McCollum, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Gilmour thanked officers for providing the updated report and timeline, noting that a manager had now been appointed to lead the BID scheme. She recalled that, during earlier discussions, local businesses had raised questions about what the BID would involve and what would be expected of them, adding the importance of ensuring clear information reached all businesses in the area. She asked whether there were plans to highlight the process or introduce the BID Manager publicly. The Interim Head of Regeneration explained that the BID Manager was responsible for keeping businesses informed and that a steering group, which included Chamber of Commerce representation, was already in place. He added that the Strategic Development team was keen to work closely with the group and, as this was the first BID in the Borough, officers were open to improving communication wherever possible.

Councillor Gilmour emphasised the need for strong communication to prevent misinformation and offered her thanks to the Interim Head of Regeneration for his work and best wishes for the future.

Councillor McCollum welcomed the progress and supported the points raised about communication, noting that the Chamber could inform its members but that user-friendly updates on the Council website would also be helpful. She also expressed her thanks to the Interim Head of Regeneration. The Director of Place and Prosperity stated that the Council intended to work in partnership with the BID Manager and the board of directors, and that the soon-to-be-established local action group could invite them to participate as advisers. He confirmed that all available channels would be used to share information and noted that the incoming Head of Service, David Johnston, would meet with the relevant groups shortly after taking up post.

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Councillor Morgan welcomed the initiative and asked whether issuing a letter of variance posed any risk to funding. The Interim Head of Regeneration confirmed that it did not, explaining that officials in the Department for Communities had been supportive of the approach. He noted that this was the first BID since before the pandemic and that Newtownards had shown some interest, but there was no risk to the Bangor process.

Councillor Smart endorsed comments made and asked whether Newtownards would be the natural location for a second BID, as the report referenced the possibility without directly naming it. The Interim Head of Regeneration advised that other chambers had not expressed interest, though Newtownards had shown some, and that further exploration might take place in 2026/27.

Councillor Brady welcomed the BID as a positive development for Bangor and hoped it would support the revitalisation of the Main Street. He agreed that businesses needed regular updates, noting that some had previously been unaware of regeneration schemes. He also thanked The Interim Head of Regeneration for his contribution during his time in post.

Alderman Adair commented that the bid model had transformed Ballymena and that similar benefits had been seen elsewhere in Northern Ireland which should provide confidence of its abilities.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Gilmour, seconded by Councillor McCollum, that the recommendation be adopted

[Alderman Adair relinquished his position to Councillor McCracken as he returned to the meeting at 19:12]

Councillor McCracken, upon his return as Chair, informed Members that Item 18 had been placed in confidence due to staff recruitment which had since concluded and asked if members would be willing to agree for the item to be discussed out of Committee.

Agreed, on the proposal of Councillor McCollum, seconded by Councillor Gilmour, that Item 18 be removed from In-Committee.

REPORTS FOR APPROVAL

4. SEA BANGOR UPDATE 2026

[FILE REF: TD189]

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that, as part of an annual review of Sea Bangor, the independent market research conducted at the 2025 event had been assessed by officers. Outlined below were some findings that were pertinent to the planning for the 2026 event.

The main audience for this event would be 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 was to be carried out.

Other commentary suggested that the event needed 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 had been working with PSNI, Traffic Management and Council Licensing Service to 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 would 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 were to work with participants to ensure an even spread of activities and develop more innovative activities. They would 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 had 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 were launching 'Full Circle,' a 2,000-nautical-mile circumnavigation of the UK by two tall ships. Full Circle was 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 – would undertake the 2,000-nautical-mile journey, calling at ports across all four nations.

The voyage would carry the inspirational message of the Games through the Invictus flag as it was 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 was due to begin on 17 March 2026, departing from Falmouth and travelling anticlockwise around the UK before returning to Falmouth on 11 June 2026. The journey would 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 were 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 were putting in requests to Headquarters for support in the form of the Royal Marine Band and a P2000 vessel. Full details of the programme still needed to be finalised, but the officers had been advised by event

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managers, Turn to Starboard, that there were opportunities for members of the public to have tours of the ships and the intention was 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 were proposing maintaining the same weekend as Sea Bangor 2025 to coincide with the ships' arrival i.e. 23 and 24 May 2026.

The chosen weekend also marked 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 could 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 would remain cognisant of the continuing work at the Waterfront and would consider the impact of parking, attendee arrival and how best this can be managed.

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

Councillor Blaney proposed, seconded by Councillor Gilmour, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Blaney spoke of how the event had been a fantastic opportunity for Bangor and suggested that linking it with the Royal Navy would add an extra dimension, particularly given the fortunate timing of visiting ships. He welcomed the return of a nautical theme and thanked the Interim Head of Regeneration for his work.

Councillor Gilmour also welcomed the report, noting that the event aligned well with the Invictus Games and that the presence of naval vessels would further enhance it. She reflected on last year's challenges, including poor weather that affected food vendors and led to reductions in performances and recalled that in past years, a large tent had been used in the car park and suggested that relocating traders to the pedestrianised area could offer more shelter than the pier. She added that some local producers lacked weather-resistant setups and that discussions with Food To Go about providing trucks might be helpful. Councillor Gilmour anticipated strong public interest from the Royal Navy's involvement and hoped the Sea Cadets would also participate. She noted the success of last year's RAF visit to Ward Park and the Irish Guards parade, both of which had generated significant footfall.

Councillor McCollum supported the comments made and asked whether the timing of the Belfast Maritime Festival would have any positive or negative impact on Bangor's event. She also reported engagement with representatives of the Sea Horse Model Boat Club, who had previously taken part in Sea Bangor, and suggested that involving such groups would strengthen the nautical theme. The Head of Tourism advised that Maritime Belfast was scheduled for September 2026, though she would confirm the dates, and noted that changes were possible in 2027. She added that neighbouring events could create opportunities for shared

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efficiencies and thanked Councillor McCollum for the Sea Horse Model Boat Club contact.

Councillor Hollywood raised concerns about parking and access, asking whether these issues had been assessed and whether any feedback had been received on pedestrianisation. The Head of Tourism explained that the team was working with the information currently available, recognising the impact of the waterfront development and the associated consultation process. She confirmed that some works were due to begin the following week before the wider consultation progressed.

Councillor Newman asked whether officers would meet with the Royal Navy to discuss the possibility of their assistance in highlighting local history and encourage family engagement which Head of Tourism agreed to explore.

Councillor Brady asked whether the previous location would be available for car parking. The Head of Tourism confirmed that the Eisenhower car park would not be available and that the event would retain the same footprint across the car park and pier, with the possibility of expanding the footprint to ease some of the challenges previously experienced on the pier.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter made reference to Bangor's strong naval heritage and asked whether ex-service personnel from the Royal Navy could be included, noting that while there was great pride in both historic and contemporary figures, modern veterans equally deserved recognition. The Head of Tourism stated that the Senior Naval Officer intended to host veterans at a function and that she would explore any further involvement that was proportionate to the event.

Councillor Edmund added that the Merchant Navy had also played a significant role in both world wars, with many losses, and suggested that their involvement would also be very fitting.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Blaney, seconded by Councillor Gilmour, that the recommendation be adopted.

REPORTS FOR NOTING

5. ARTS SERVICE PROGRAMME 2026/27

[ART 08/02 26]

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that, as Members would have been aware, the Arts and Heritage Service reported to the Place and Prosperity Committee. The Arts Service offered a comprehensive annual programme of activity that included 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 aligned 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.

Programming took 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 was delivered by the Arts Service on an annual basis. The festivals included 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 attracted 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 were 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. <https://andculture.org.uk/whats-on>

Arts Programme

The annual programme at Ards Arts Centre focused on attracting footfall and engaging a regular/repeat visitor. This was 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 provided visitors with something new on a regular basis. Exhibitions were 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 were programmed until early 2027.

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

Outreach programming took 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 ensured equity of geographical access for the arts.

Summary of activity 2026/27

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

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

Councillor Smart proposed, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Smart said he was pleased with the report, noting that the panel meeting held the previous day had included input from The Head of Tourism. He commented that the cross-overs, new layout and revised structure would create many opportunities.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter also welcomed the report and asked that the Ards Arts Centre be referred to as Ards Town Hall, stating that it was deserving of that recognition given the name was often used warmly by locals in the same way as Bangor Castle.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Smart, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that the recommendation be adopted

6. AND EXPERIENCES, WALKS AND TOURS END OF SEASON REPORT 2025/26

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity which explained that in 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 took 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 could develop and operate a pilot experience at zero or limited financial risk to themselves. The total Council budget associated with the Experience Programme was £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 had been delivered at the time of writing the report (one was programmed for February and another one, which offers a variety of dates, was 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 had 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 could 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 was to be two strands to the programme delivered through an Expression of Interest (EOI) process.

Strand one outputs included 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 would also be offered up to four mentoring sessions. The Experiences were required to run between April 2026 – March 2027.

Strand two would 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 was not concluded at the time of writing the report. Following the assessment process, businesses would 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 continued 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 had since been incorporated into planning. These included 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
- 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 had formed a Tour Guide Collective called "Coast and Country Tours", the Tourism team was 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 were due to begin in May and finish on New Year's Day 2027. The programme would seek to complement wider Council and events activity. Two new walks were to be delivered by two of the newly qualified OCN Level 2 tour guides. The "pilot" guided walks had 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.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report and appendices

Alderman Adair proposed, seconded by Councillor Smart, that the recommendation be adopted.

Alderman Adair found it encouraging to see so many people enjoying the outdoors and noted the wide range of walks available across the Borough. He highlighted that 55 cruise ships had visited Greyabbey in the previous year and that many tourists came specifically to see Rosemount Gardens, which was often closed but would be open this year for walking tours. He also commended the work of Bridget Watson of Ards Peninsula Tours, who had developed a number of walking tours. The Head of Tourism explained that the programme focused on sustainable tours and that Bridget had been working closely with the Council on sustainability as part of its ongoing activity programme.

Councillor Smart agreed that it was an excellent programme with much to offer across the Borough. He queried the number of walking tours in Ards in 2025/26 and asked whether the reduction to one tour in 2026/27 could be reconsidered, possibly in partnership with the local historical society. The Head of Tourism believed there was also a New Year's Day tour in Newtownards and undertook to confirm the details.

Councillor Morgan supported the positive comments but noted that Comber and the Comber DEA appeared to feature only minimally, aside from Whiterock, and asked why this was the case. The Head of Tourism explained that a walking tour had previously operated in Comber alongside the Comber Earlies Food Festival, but feedback indicated that the local group preferred to run it independently. She added

that the programme aimed to support businesses to develop and deliver their own guided experiences and agreed to confirm this was the case.

Councillor McCollum reflected on the insight she had gained through Mayoral engagements and praised Bridget Watson as a strong advocate for the area, noting her involvement in the sustainability group of 18 members. She reported that the recent visit from Laura McCorry, Chief Executive of Tourism NI, had been positive and that Ms McCorry had expressed willingness to present a deputation to the Council. Councillor McCollum asked about learning opportunities from the previous year's 12 planned experiences, of which only six had taken place, and whether insufficient sales had been the main factor. The Head of Tourism confirmed that the team had reviewed the programme and found that low sales and early agreements with providers had contributed to cancellations, including one provider who withdrew directly. Some experiences remained open for bookings, and eight were now expected to run. She explained that a midseason and end-of-season review had been carried out to identify gaps and market demand, leading to a more curated and marketed approach this year. She added that out-of-Borough sales had been strong and that the visit from the Tourism NI Chief Executive had been valuable, covering destination promotion, coastal and urban offerings, food and sustainability, with a deputation presented to Council likely to happen toward the end of 2026.

Councillor McCollum noted that collaborative research with Ulster University had shown scenery and landscape to be the strongest motivators for visitors, ahead of events and activities.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter welcomed the update, explaining that she was pleased to see over 80% of walking tour tickets sold. She noted that her own family had been keen to attend and highlighted the contribution of local teacher Mrs Montgomery, who had led some tours. She remarked that the 30% of participants from outside the Borough was impressive, while also recognising the strong local appetite for such experiences.

Councillor Hennessy asked whether pricing might have contributed to low ticket sales and whether the Council had any influence over pricing. The Head of Tourism explained that pricing was commercially led and that the Council's role was to support businesses in developing experiences, testing the market and establishing sustainable pricing. Businesses would have operated in ways that would offer some form of financial gain as opposed to undercutting themselves.

Councillor Thompson advised that he was looking forward to seeing the programme develop further, noting that 17 walks were planned across the Borough. He acknowledged that Comber appeared to have been overlooked but was confident officers would work to ensure coverage and highlighted the strong offering in Donaghadee.

Councillor Gilmour said the report showcased the wide range of experiences available and recalled promotional work undertaken during her Mayoral year at a local walled garden. She noted that while some experiences were priced at a level more suited to visitors from further afield, later walking tours priced at around £4 were very accessible. It was noteworthy to consider that free events sometimes

struggled with attendance and that small ticket prices often motivated people who had pre-booked to attend. Councillor Gilmour reiterated that the Borough was oftentimes regarded as a great place to work, live and visit, with the report demonstrating strong public interest.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Councillor Smart, that the recommendation be adopted

7. DESTINATION CAMPAIGN OVERVIEW SPRING AND AUTUMN 2025

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that, 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 was 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.

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 was 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 Connelly 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 RoI publications Irish Independent and The Gloss helping to further extend destination awareness in this key target market.

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 allowed for accurate measurement of visibility and engagement. The digital-led approach for these destination awareness campaigns ensured that content was precisely targeted to the key audiences. Statistics for both campaigns showed 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 demonstrated 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.'

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 continued 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.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the report.

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Councillor McCollum proposed, seconded by Councillor Hennessy, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor McCollum acknowledged the comprehensive nature of the report which offered a strong overview and detailed analysis, and she was happy to recommend it while thanking officers for their work.

Alderman Adair welcomed the initiative but expressed concern about the limited funding support received from Tourism NI. He noted that while the Borough promoted itself well, Tourism NI advertising tended to focus on areas such as the north coast. He acknowledged the recent visit from the Tourism NI Chief Executive but said he hoped to see greater support and stronger relationships in future to help attract more visitors.

Councillor McCollum added that the issue raised by Alderman Adair had also been discussed during the NI Tourism Chief Executive's visit the previous week. She reported that the Chief Executive had been impressed by the Borough, particularly the scale of the Bangor Waterfront project, and that discussions had centred on how the Borough could better market itself. She advised that the Chief Executive had provided helpful context on how the area compared with the rest of Northern Ireland and had indicated that much depended on Tourism NI's own funding position. Councillor McCollum concluded that the Council had received enthusiastic reassurance that the Chief Executive would return as soon as possible.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor McCollum, seconded by Councillor Hennessy, that the recommendation be adopted

8. UPDATE ON RURAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT GRANT SCHEME 2025/26

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that, 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 was funded through the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs 'Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation' (TRPSI) Programme and was delivered in partnership with local Councils.

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

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 had not received funding under the RBDGS in the past.

Grant Award to ANDBC as the Delivery Agent for RBDGS

DAERA had confirmed that a grant of up to a maximum amount of £14,230.02 would 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.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report.

Alderman Adair advised that he had an amendment that he wished to put forward.

“That Council note the report and write to DAERA thanking them for the delivery of the Rural Business Development scheme and request that funding be allocated annually to the scheme going forward to support opportunities for local rural business and the development of rural main streets in our Borough”

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Alderman Adair proposed, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the recommendation be adopted and that a letter of thanks be sent to DAERA, including a request that funding be allocated annually to the scheme in the future.

Alderman Adair explained that several rural schemes were planned across the Ards Peninsula and that many rural businesses saw them as a lifeline, particularly those seeking to improve or expand upon their businesses. He stressed the importance of acknowledging the support received, not only highlighting future needs and thanked Council officers for their assistance. He noted that many rural businesses were family-run and that staff had played a key role in guiding applicants through the process and ensuring funding was delivered promptly. Alderman Adair suggested that, given the above points, the scheme should become an annual initiative and hoped Members would support that aim.

Councillor Edmund agreed, stating that the scheme was integral to rural communities, where most businesses were family--owned and that the support helped them remain viable and encouraged local shopping. He highlighted the success of the Farmer Rural Partnership, which had benefited many businesses in the Ards Peninsula and beyond.

Councillor Smart acknowledged the value of the scheme and noted the challenges of implementing it, particularly given central government timelines. He observed that the application window was only open for a month which could cause difficulties for small businesses, and asked whether the Council could lobby for an extension in future. He also queried whether similar needs existed among urban businesses. The Interim Head of Regeneration advised that the Council had raised concerns about application timeframes in previous years but that there had been no flexibility. He reiterated that the funding was appreciated and well used. As an additional point, the Interim Head of Regeneration noted that business support funding for urban areas was becoming available, but capacity and timeframes remained challenging. Local action groups were effective mechanisms and preparatory work would help position the Council more strongly in future cycles. Councillor Smart suggested that a multi-year cycle or future lobbying might help address the issue.

[Councillor Hollywood left the chamber at 20:00, returning at 20:02]

Councillor Morgan thanked DAERA for the funding and welcomed the increased interest from businesses compared with the previous year. She asked why only 35 applications had been successful. The Interim Head of Regeneration explained that officers had worked closely with applicants, including offering three pre-application workshops, but that unsuccessful applications had generally failed to meet procurement requirements. Officers would look to increase early engagement to support applicants further.

Councillor Thompson supported Alderman Adair's amendment and echoed comments about the importance of assisting family-run businesses to access all available support, reiterating that funding was essential and welcomed both the report and the amendment.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the recommendation be adopted and that a letter of thanks be sent to DAERA, including a request that funding be allocated annually to the scheme in the future.

9. PLACE AND PROSPERITY DIRECTORATE BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT – DECEMBER 2025

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that the Place and Prosperity Budgetary Control Report covered the 9-month period 1 April 2025 to 31st December 2025 and reflected the recent Organisational changes. The net cost of the Directorate (excluding Planning and Building Control) was 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

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.

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Type	Variance £'000	Comment
Income		
Economic Growth	(4)	

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)

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report

Councillor Gilmour proposed, seconded by Councillor Smart, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Gilmour noted that the report referenced payroll variances arising from vacant posts, querying whether those had since been filled. She referred to previous discussions about increasing the Borough's digital presence, particularly on platforms such as TikTok to appeal to younger audiences, and asked whether staffing levels had improved sufficiently to support this work. She also queried whether consideration had been given to creating an additional post to address these needs. The Director of Place and Prosperity explained that, as the service was currently in the midst of a wider restructure (of which it was at the second stage), it would be difficult to bring in new staff during that process. Once the restructure was complete, new roles and job descriptions would be reviewed. It was possible that the service might be understaffed in the interim and may require agency support. He added that Corporate Communications were exploring the digital engagement issue raised, though as this fell outside his remit, he was unable to provide further information.

Councillor Smart asked about the underspend relating to building vacancies, noting that underspends were usually welcome but sought clarification on this instance. The Director of Place and Prosperity advised that the figures represented a monthly snapshot and that the year-end position would provide the more meaningful reference point for members.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Gilmour, seconded by Councillor Smart, that the recommendation be adopted

10. NOTICES OF MOTION REFERRED TO COMMITTEE BY COUNCIL

There were no Notices of Motion referred to February's Place and Prosperity Committee.

[As per record of discussion before Item 4, proposed by Councillor McCollum, seconded by Councillor Gilmour, it was agreed that Item 18: LMP Update could be brought out of Committee and was to be heard before the public and press were excluded.]

18. LMP UPDATE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that Ards and North Down Labour Market Partnership (LMP) was established on 17 August 2021. The 2025-26 Action Plan was developed to follow the achievements of the 2021/23, 23-24 and 24-25 Action Plans. The Council provides the secretariat to the LMP.

LMP Funding and Action Pan for 2025-26

The LMP Secretariat received a Letter of Offer to cover administration and operational costs on 15th May 2025. Delivery of the 2025-2026 Action Plan is progressing well.

On 11th November 2025, LMP Secretariat received an additional Letter of Offer for additional Operation costs for £109,792.26. A revised budget schedule agreed by the LMP Board was submitted to DfC to cover the additional funding along with two change requests. The revised budget schedule and change requests covering the additional operational costs were approved by DfC on 27th November 2025.

2025-2026 Action Plan Update

Signposting Employability and Skills Register:

Two had been created, one for Employers, and one for Individuals and were available on the LMP website for downloading. Printed versions are also available.

From April 2025 the following downloads of the guides had been tracked (figures as of 5th January 2026):

Employer Register: 66

Participants Register: 107

The following registers have been given out at recent events:

Name of event	Number handed out
Entrepreneur Road Show- Employer Guide	1
West Winds- Skills and Employment Support Clinic	1
Donaghadee - Skills and Employment Support Clinic	5
Millisle – Skills and Employment Support Clinic	3
Total	10

Overall total of 183 guides have been distributed/downloaded.

Transport Academy

The tender for this academy was extended to the current provider for another year. All 34 participants for the HGV element and 10 participants for the driving licence element of the academy had been recruited and notified.

11 have already completed the HGV element and five have moved into employment.

Due to the additional funding received, this academy had been uplifted by another 22 participants, taking it to 66 participants. This uplift would be for the HGV/ Coach driving element of the academy only. Recruitment for the additional participants was underway at the time of writing.

Academy for People with Disabilities

The tender for this academy was extended to the current provider for another year. 35 participants had been recruited (initial target was 30). The Employability Academy and Customer Services academy had both started with the catering academy due to start soon.

Due to the additional funding received, this academy had been uplifted by 15 participants taking it to 45 participants. Recruitment for the additional participants was underway.

Greentech Academy

This was awarded to SERC, training and recruitment is ongoing with the hope that more sign up in the quieter time of January/February. Currently 41 were scheduled to complete by the end of March.

Catering Academy

Recruitment for this academy was still ongoing. The first cohort started at the end of November with six candidates registering. All six had completed and five have moved into employment. The recruitment for the second cohort was due to start in January with a target of 20 participants.

Classroom Assistant Employability Academy

This had been awarded and recruitment for cohort one started mid-August with training undertaken at the end of August. 12 were recruited and to date, 9 had moved into employment. The second cohort recruitment closed early December with almost 60 applications for 13 places (25 places in total for both cohorts). Anyone not eligible would be offered the other academies. Schools were reaching out to AND LMP to assist them finding classroom assistants.

Health and Social Care Academy

Recruitment for this academy was done prior to the Christmas break however feedback from the participants was not to start the training before Christmas. Therefore training for this academy was due to start on the 26th January. It was anticipated that 22 participants will be recruited for that academy.

Employer Led Upskilling Programme

This programme opened on 8th September and closed on 17th October, the panel assessed the applications on 23rd October. The budget for this was £20,000, in total £20,073.90 was awarded. 23 out of the 25 companies who applied were awarded a grant, covering a total of 61 employees.

An additional £3,000 was allocated to this budget with the uplift in budget. A survey had been sent to the businesses this week to establish what short training they wished to undertake. Once the results are compiled, the trainers/ venue/ catering would be booked to facilitate the requested training.

SIA Academy

The delivery agent for this academy had been appointed and training had been booked to start on 23rd February- 4th March 2026. All dates must be attended and the training would be in person. Upon completion, the licence would take around 12 weeks to receive. Recruitment for this academy was underway at the time of writing. The target for this academy was 12 participants.

Taxi Academy

The delivery agent for this academy was appointed just before the Christmas break. The initiation meeting had taken place early January with recruitment starting

immediately after all the necessary documents had been completed and signed. The target for this academy was 16 participants.

Skills and Employment Support Clinics

The target on this year's Action Plan was for two clinics to be hosted however three were hosted:

Location	No. of Exhibitors	Participants attended
West Winds PS	19	6
Donaghadee PS	17	39
Millisle PS	13	9

(The schools halls differed in sizes hence the variation in the number of exhibitors.)

At West Winds only six attendees came, however, one signed up with an agency and four signed up to training programmes.

At Donaghadee, 39 attendees came of which 11 signed up to programmes. Belfast Works Connect (BWC) contacted a community worker, who attended, who worked with economically inactive women and had arranged to call and do a talk to around 20 women about their available programmes.

At Millisle, nine attendees came, one signed up to an agency and four signed up to programmes. BWC also contacted another community rep who has asked them to meet three groups within the area. Action Mental Health also made a contact and have presented to other economically inactive groups.

Disability Employment and Support Days

Two dates have been booked:

25th November- Portavogie Community Centre (10am-1pm). 6 attendees turned up to the event, there were 16 exhibitors. Feedback from the six attendees was very good.

26th February 2026- Aurora Aquatic and Leisure Complex (1pm-4pm). This had always been a busier event and there were plans to promote this event on Facebook etc due to the increased budget. Posters were to be put up in Aurora after the Job Fair on the 5th February.

All 19 exhibitors had been recruited, the flyers, posters and social media square have been produced.

Job Fairs

The 5th February 2026 had been agreed to host the Bangor Job Fair with a dedicated Health and Social Care area in Aurora Aquatic and Leisure Complex. At the time of writing, there were 17 exhibitors confirmed for the Health and Social Care area and 25 for the main Job Fair area (total so far of 42 exhibitors).

Ards Blair Mayne Sports hall and relevant rooms had been booked for 19th March 2026 for the Ards Job Fair, recruitment for exhibitors would start shortly.

Apprenticeship Careers Fair

The Apprenticeship Careers Fair was booked for 19th February from 4pm-7pm (set up from 3pm) in Aurora Aquatic and Leisure Complex. There were 15 exhibitors signed up to attend. This would be marketed to all the post primary schools, it was aimed at year 11 and above and would have all level of apprenticeships and would be available to anyone else, outside of schools, interested in an apprenticeship.

PR Campaign

The next PR Campaign was planned for approx. end of Jan- March 2026.

Employer Information Session

In partnership with NIHE and Radius Housing on 20th November, the Council hosted a Supplier Sourcing Event, promoting the LMP, Go Succeed, Job Start and the grants approved work in Ards and North Down. 32 attended plus speakers and on the day nine companies signed up to be suppliers.

2026-2027 Revised Action Plan

The 2026-2027 Action Plan was reviewed, revised and submitted to DfC along with three change requests on 11th December 2025. We are currently awaiting feedback and approval on these.

Year to date Job Outcomes update

To date AND LMP had been responsible for filling 320 jobs, with many outcomes from the 2025-2026 Action Plan still to be completed. See breakdown below.

Action Plans	Jobs outcomes
2021-2023	85
2023-2024	99
2024-2025 (outcomes still ongoing)	117
2025-2026 (so far)	19
Total	320

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report.

Councillor Gilmour proposed, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Gilmour thanked officers for the report, noting the positive range of categories covered and the efforts made by the Labour Market Partnership to deliver targeted information sessions. She welcomed the decision to hold sessions in Westwinds, Donaghadee and Millisle rather than solely in larger population centres.

She asked whether the classroom assistant training and employability academy provided participants with a recognised qualification, as this was often, if not always a mandatory requirement of schools The Economic Development Manager explained that the programme offered an introductory level designed to support individuals moving out of unemployment, with placements arranged as part of the process. A second--phase academy would then provide the upskilling needed to progress into

permanent positions. Councillor Gilmour found the information reassuring, given the staffing pressures faced by schools.

[Councillor Brady left the meeting at 20:20, returning at 20:22.]

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter welcomed the engagement work and, although attendance numbers had not been as high as hoped, she was pleased to see events held in smaller communities. She noted that word of mouth would help increase awareness and thanked the officer responsible, expressing hope that similar initiatives would continue.

Councillor McCollum agreed, observing that smaller venues could feel more accessible for economically inactive individuals who might be apprehensive about attending larger fairs. She referred to the Aurora jobs fair which Councillor McCollum had attended in her role as Mayor where officers had worked hard to secure a wide range of exhibitors, particularly from the healthcare sector, which faced significant recruitment challenges. She expressed disappointment at the low turnout during her visit but did not believe officers could have done anything more than they already had.

The Economic Development Manager emphasised that the focus should be on the quality of engagement rather than the volume of attendees. She noted that the job fair was intended for those actively seeking employment rather than general advice, and that some attendees had been recruited or offered interviews on the day. She confirmed that feedback would be provided in due course and that higher attendance would not necessarily have changed the outcomes.

Councillor Morgan also noted that the smaller clinics had attracted committed participants, with six attending in Westwinds and nine in Millisle, and she asked how exhibitors might feel about returning in future given the numbers. The Economic Development Manager explained that in the early years of the LMP, there had been efforts to reaching large numbers of people, but the current approach aimed to be more focussed and also would be able to reach those who were hardest to engage. She noted that holding events near schools could help reach parents who might not otherwise attend or those living local to the schools. While low numbers could appear discouraging, the important factor was the impact on individuals who signed up for support, some of whom had never worked before. She stressed that this was long-term work that would not produce immediate largescale results but was already helping to change perceptions-scale results but was already helping to change perceptions and build confidence.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Gilmour, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that the recommendation be adopted

11. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

11.1. UPDATE – FRINGE FLEADH EVENT 2026 (VERBAL UPDATE)

The Director of Place and Prosperity explained that, at the January Council meeting, he had indicated the possibility of bringing a report to this evening's Place and

Prosperity Committee. However, some of the necessary information had only been received the previous day. Rather than providing a piecemeal report with such notice, the Director confirmed that a full and complete report was being compiled for the end of the month so that Members would have all the information required and the matter could proceed to Council with full preparation.

NOTED.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the public/press be excluded during the discussion of the undernoted items of confidential business.

12. DELEGATED AUTHORITY TO PLACE AND PROSPERITY COMMITTEE 05 FEBRUARY 2026 – VARIANCE REQUEST URBAN REGENERATION PROGRAMME (REQUESTED AT COUNCIL 28.1.26)

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION - SCHEDULE 6

Exemption Reason: 3. Exemption: relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person

This report details the intention to submit a variance request to DfC and the proposed projects pending their approval, therefore thje report is in confidence due to pending negotiations.

13. LOCAL ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP COSTED ACTION PLAN

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION – SCHEDULE 6

Exemption Reason: 3. Exemption: relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person

The report highlights potential sites for development as well as potential budgets for these which have not been agreed by DfE. Once the plan is agreed a “public version” can be released. The associated minutes highlight LEP members conflict of interest declarations.

14. GO SUCCEED

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION – SCHEDULE 6

Exemption Reason: 3. Exemption: relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person

The reports contains confidential information on the operational delivery of the Go Succeed service as well as negotiations on funding that are currently ongoing.

15. WAR YEARS REMEMBERED UPDATE REPORT

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION – SCHEDULE 6

Exemption Reason: 3. Exemption: relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person

This report contains financial information regarding commercial quotations relating to necessary expenditure required by the Grant Recipient.

16. SUPPORTING THRIVING HIGH STREETS GLOW UP GRANT – UPDATE AND VARIANCE REQUEST

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION – SCHEDULE 6

Exemption Reason: 3. Exemption: relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person

This report details the financial information of businesses in the 5 urban areas of the Borough, additionally, it details the intention to submit a variance request to DfC and the proposed projects pending their approval, therefore thje report is in confidence due to pending negotiations.

17. SUPPORTING THRIVING HIGH STREETS – CLEAN CITY AND TIDY TOWNS PROPOSAL

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION – SCHEDULE 6

Exemption Reason: 4. Exemption: consultations or negotiations

This report details the intention to submit a significant financial application to DfC and summarises a proposed project pending their approval, therefore the report is in confidence due to pending negotiations

PP.05.02.2026 PM

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RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, seconded by Councillor Gilmour, that the public/press be re-admitted to the meeting.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 22:04.

Unclassified

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ITEM 9.3.1**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	26 February 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Tourism, Arts and Heritage
Date of Report	17 February 2026
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	Report requested by Council - Proposed Fringe Fleadh event
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Ards CCE correspondence Appendix 2 - Indicative Estimated Outline Budget Appendix 3 - Summary of Proposed Activity

Background

In January 2026, a report was approved by the Place and Prosperity Committee concerning a proposed Fringe Fleadh event to take place on 1 August 2026. Further to this, at the Council meeting on 28 January 2026, the following amendment was agreed:

‘That item 4 was referred back to the Place and Prosperity Committee for further consideration and that officers provide a supplementary report to look at: what other days the Fleadh fringe event could be held on; what the financial and operational implications would be of each option; and, how we ensure proper member oversight and value for money for events going forward’.

Not Applicable

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The Place and Prosperity Committee received a verbal update on 5 February 2026 stating that the report would follow and be presented at the February Council meeting.

Other Days for the Fringe Fleadh Event - Factors

The report to the Place and Prosperity Committee advised that to deliver the event a procurement exercise to appoint an event management company would be undertaken. There would be a requirement in the brief 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 a quality performance.

At the Council meeting a query was raised as to whether the event could be held on an alternative date and not the same day as the Pipe Band contest. Officers contacted Ards CCÉ to gain insight into their views on what other days the Fringe Fleadh could be held. The Ards CCÉ Committee discussed this at a meeting on 30 January and responded confirming their position on the matter. Within the correspondence, the Committee outlined points as to why the Saturday 1 August was suggested as appropriate for the event. See Appendix 1.

The Council, in considering the event date and whether it would be possible to hold it on a different day was advised that to gain the best advantage it would need to be before the main event dates which are 2-9 August 2026. Therefore, Friday 31 July 2026 was reconsidered by Officers as an alternative date. The information below outlines key factors regarding delivery of the event on Friday 31 July:

- This date is unlikely to maximise the opportunity to gain visitors travelling to the Belfast Fleadh. The competition starts on Sunday 2 August and currently the advice is that participants and attendees will arrive earlier, but as Friday is a working day it is anticipated that attendees will arrive Friday evening or Saturday morning in NI.
- The proposed event concept for Saturday 1 August is to hold the event between 1-9pm. As Friday is a working day the potential available audience will be reduced. Therefore, an event time of 6-9pm is likely more appropriate meaning the estimated attendance could potentially be reduced by up to c.50% (c5,000 to c.2,500). It should be noted that attendee numbers are indicative as this proposed event is a new Fringe concept and in a new event location.
- The proposed event concept with the support of Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association NI (RSPBANI) was to showcase Bangor for 'the day' as a place of musical excellence and to gain best potential advantage from that aspect, i.e encourage more attendees – this would not be the case with two separate dates and with the Friday evening event most likely having lower numbers of spectators.
- The use of the car park will be closed for up to two days i.e closed late Thursday through to all day Friday (Saturday event would mean the car park would close late Friday/evening).
- Ards CCÉ have indicated they are not available to participate in July dates.

Not Applicable

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The day after the Belfast Fleadh event finishes is a Tuesday, and the weekend after the Belfast Fleadh event is four days after the final Belfast event, whereby it is anticipated visitors will have enjoyed the finale and returned home. Both of these date options are deemed not appropriate to maximise best potential economic return.

The Belfast Fleadh event is running between 2-9 August. During these dates there are events in Belfast including competitions, street performances and concerts running each day in a series of venues with a variety of performances. There will also be a daily Gig Rig at Belfast City Hall acting as the Main Stage (performers for this aspect are currently being requested). Businesses in Belfast are being encouraged to run additional fringe activity. It is unlikely that any Fringe Fleadh event held in the borough during this time would be able to 'compete' with the offering in Belfast.

Information on Proposed Event Location

The Holborn Square site has been reviewed by Officers. 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. This concept would be very similar to the popular and well attended element of the Wexford event in 2025. The venue is proposed as it is in easy walking distance from the Translink station (visitors arriving via public transport), there has been pressure for many years from retailers on High Street for support and it is close to the hospitality hub; businesses which are most likely to benefit from visitors to this event. It is also using a space that has been specifically redesigned by the Council to host events. Officers have since had meetings with Translink which has advised they will be able to have a bus stop for a 'drop off' from a Park and Ride (this will be further developed if the event concept is approved). The Council would engage ambassadors to point people to the two events within the City and a signage plan will be implemented as required at orientation points. This site is deemed as the one which is appropriate for the scale and nature of the event taking on board learnings from the familiarisation visit.

Financial and Operational Implications of both Options

Option 1 – Saturday 1 August 2026

As per the report to Place and Prosperity on 8 January 2026, a budget of up to £40,000 is estimated to deliver the event with the appointment of an event management company. This is included within the Events budgets.

The event concept indicative budget was scoped by Officers, using knowledge and market costs based on similar event requirements for other events, for the delivery of the proposed event at the site of Holborn Square. At this juncture, there has been no further work completed on a budget as this would be determined by the successfully appointed event management company, subject to a successful procurement exercise. See Appendix 2.

Not Applicable

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It is anticipated that marketing and promotion of the event would be closely aligned to Belfast City Council's Fleadh Fringe promotion and will maximise the Council's Regional Tourism Partnership with Visit Belfast. This will help gain the best exposure of the event campaign.

As per previous Pipe Band events, the Council would work closely with RSPBANI on collaborative promotion and seek to maximise the opportunities afforded with all activity linked to musical excellence on Saturday 1 August 2026 in the Borough. All marketing costs are included within this budget.

As per the report to Place and Prosperity on 8 January 2026, the Events delivery team will be assisting with the RSPBANI 73rd Ulster Championships on Saturday 1 August 2026. This includes the core Events delivery team, Assets and Property team, Parks, Risk and Waste team members as relevant. The costs associated with delivering the event and staffing are included in the budget of £36,700.

A team member would be responsible for project managing the Fringe Fleadh event and the remainder of the Events team would be responsible for events support attributed to the Pipe Band event.

Shared operational elements would be discussed and coordinated by the Events team for both events. Shared Joint Advisory Group meetings (including PSNI and Neighbourhood Enforcement Team members) would be undertaken and coordinated by the Council, and if determined, Safety Advisory Group meetings would be undertaken by the Event Management Company and the RSPBANI respectively.

The two events on one day option will allow synergies and potential economies of scale with regard to traffic management and marketing to include both events.

Option 2 – an alternative date, Friday 31 July 2026

As indicated earlier in the report, an alternative date is not likely to position the Council optimally to gain best advantage from the Belfast Fleadh event, however, financial and operational implications for an event held on 31 July, which is the most reasonable alternative date, are considered below.

As the Council has approved a notional budget of £40,000 within the Rates Setting process, this is the budget which would be available for the event. On this basis, Officers have reviewed the delivery of the event without procuring an event management company. The Council budget would include: similar costs for hire of event infrastructure, traffic management, security, event dressing, waste/recycling and marketing. The fees associated with event management would be redirected to Council labour costs and contingency. The one area which Officers would wish to procure independently is programming expertise to ensure quality musical performances. Timings for the event would be reviewed once further scoping work is completed, however as indicated Friday is a working day and therefore likely to gain less attendees overall as the time of the event would be shortened. The reduction in event times would have some impact on the overall budget. Many items cost the same for lesser hours. See Appendix 2

Not Applicable

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At this juncture, the Council is advised that Ards CCE is not available to perform at an alternative date – see Appendix 1. This reduces the local authenticity of the event both for local attendees and visitors.

A key consideration of this approach is the Council labour resource management of two events in close proximity over two days, which require project collaboration with external partners e.g PSNI, traffic management and internal partners. Timings for both events being managed will be challenging for set up, take down, and allocation of Council event infrastructure and internal project management and would add further complexity to operations management, rather than reducing it.

Member oversight and value for money

It is the intent that going forward the Events Service will attend the new Local Action Groups (LAGs) and present on upcoming events giving Elected Members and broader LAG membership the opportunity to engage. This will be the case for events aligned to each city/town. Where an event is not in a town with a LAG, it is intended the Events Service will utilise the existing Village Group co-ordinated by the Regeneration Service or the existing localised Event stakeholder group.

An end of year report is presented to the Place and Prosperity Committee on an annual basis for Tourism Events. This includes budget, actual spend, out of borough attendance, estimated attendee spend and cost per attendee. A return on investment calculation can be added to this report for Elected Members' consideration and future planning. It is acknowledged that this report is brought later in the season, when all events are complete. Consideration will be given to the practicalities as to when an earlier report can be brought to the Place and Prosperity Committee.

Summary

The timeline to deliver any proposed Fringe Fleadh event is a concern. Opportunities to successfully secure either an events management company or support for programming and the individual artists may reduce as the event becomes closer.

Having reviewed an alternative date, it is felt the timing of the event on Saturday 1 August 2026 has the potential for most benefits:

- On advice, most participants and visitors to the Belfast Fleadh will be arriving in NI closer to the Belfast Fleadh event. Holding an event on Saturday is likely to have the ability to attract most attendees and most spend into the Borough.
- Saturday 1 August is likely to maximise the opportunity available for the Council to promote the City and the wider Borough via the profile of the Belfast Fleadh event.
- The proposed event concept with the support of RSPBANI on the Saturday is to showcase Bangor for 'the day' as a place of musical excellence and to gain best potential advantage from that aspect.
- The proposed event concept is to incorporate local talent and recognise the local connection of the successful Belfast Fleadh event bid partner.

Not Applicable

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- The cost of running the proposed event on an alternative date, with factors as set out in the report, is not one which will likely achieve Council outcomes as intended for the Council investment.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council approves:

1. the proposed Fringe Fleadh event to be held on Saturday 1 August 2026, as outlined above, at a budget of £40,000 subject to 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 on Saturday 1 August 2026 and;
3. other related activity where partners and performers can be secured (Appendix 3).

Appendix 1

Email received from the Committee of Ards CCÉ by Council on 1 February 2026

Further to your recent telephone conversation, Ards CCÉ Committee met last Friday night and it was unanimously agreed that Ards CCÉ (host branch of Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026) cannot change the proposed date of Sat 1st August 2026 for the Fleadh Fringe event in Bangor.

The reasons for this decision are outlined below.

Hosting the event on Saturday 1st August is critically important as it aligns with the arrival of All-Ireland Fleadh visitors from across the world. It is anticipated that upwards of 700,000 people will attend the All-Ireland Fleadh overall, and even a small proportion of this audience travelling to Bangor for the Fringe event would generate maximum footfall. Furthermore, as this event will be advertised on the All-Ireland Fleadh official website it would encourage visitors to stay in Bangor on the Saturday night and most likely for the duration of the All-Ireland Fleadh, using local bus/train transportation networks to travel with ease to Belfast. This would provide amazing global exposure for the city of Bangor and deliver immense economic benefit to local businesses.

In addition, this date offers the strongest opportunity to promote the All-Ireland Fleadh to local residents. Holding the Fringe event on Saturday 1st August would best effectively encourage attendance at the Opening Ceremony in Belfast on Sunday 2nd August, as well as engagement with the many other events planned throughout Fleadh week.

Unfortunately, there are no alternative dates available in July for Ards CCÉ to participate. This is due to Provincial competitions, scheduled group practices, a cultural tour to Italy, and pre-arranged holidays for many of our musicians. Dates prior to July are also not viable as they would neither maximise footfall nor effectively promote the All-Ireland Fleadh in Belfast. As the host branch, it is vital that Ards CCÉ is present and fully represented at the Fleadh Fringe event.

In closing, if Saturday 1st August 2026 cannot be approved for the Fleadh Fringe event, Ards CCÉ would respectfully request that the event does not proceed as we believe it would not represent an effective or appropriate use of public funds.

Thank you for your understanding, and we are happy to discuss this further if required.

Ards CCÉ Committee

Appendix 2

Indicative Estimated Outline Fringe Fleadh Event Budget

Item	Estimated Costs Sat 1 July 2026	Estimated Costs Fri 31 July 6-9pm
Event Infrastructure, Equipment	£11,140	£11,140
Security	£2,800	£2,138
Event Management and Event Staffing	£11,300	£4,440*
Cleansing and Recycling	£1,000	£813
Marketing	£5,000	£5,000
Programming and Dressing	£8,300	£6,500**
Total	£39,540	£30,031

* this figure is indicative as programming expertise would need to be procured.

** this figure is indicative as performers' rates would need to be procured.

NB

The above table includes indicative estimated outline budgets only. Upon procurement, the final full budget breakdowns would be determined by the appointed event management company (the market) or budget elements procured.

Appendix 3

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

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid (in person and via Zoom) meeting of the Corporate Services Committee was held at the City Hall, The Castle, Bangor and via Zoom, on Tuesday 10 February 2026 at 7.30 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Councillor Cochrane

Aldermen: Graham McRandal
McIlveen Smith

Councillors: Chambers (Zoom) W Irvine
Gilmour McCracken
Kennedy (7.31pm) Moore
S Irvine Thompson

In Attendance: Alderman Cummings
Councillor Ashe (Zoom)
Councillor Hennessy (Zoom)

Officers in Attendance: Acting Director of Corporate Services (C Jackson), Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development (R McCullough), Community Planning Manager (P Mackey) and Democratic Services Officer (P Foster)

1. APOLOGIES

The Chairman (Councillor Cochrane) sought apologies at this stage.

Apologies were received from Alderman Brooks and Councillor McBurney.

NOTED.

(Councillor Kennedy entered the Chamber at this stage – 7.31pm)

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman sought Declarations of Interest at this stage and none were made.

NOTED.

Reports for Approval

3. ARMED FORCES COVENANT (Appendix I)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from Acting Director of Corporate Services detailing that as members would recall, Ards and North Down Borough Council signed the Community Covenant in September 2015, demonstrating cross-party support for local Armed Forces personnel and their families. The Covenant represented a public pledge to uphold the principles of fairness and respect for those who served, or had served, in the Armed Forces, including the Army, Naval Service and Royal Air Force.

In signing the Covenant, the Council focused on those issues that were not devolved and could not be accessed through civilian military partnerships as part of local government. Those included:

- a. Recognition, understanding and communications
- b. Local community activities and community integration
- c. Leisure and culture
- d. Co-ordination and delivery of support to the armed forces community

Key Elements of the Council's Commitment:

- Veterans' Support: The Council worked closely with the Veterans Commissioner for Northern Ireland and the Office of Veterans Affairs (NI) to ensure that veterans in the area received appropriate care and assistance as they transition to civilian life.
- Veterans' Champion: Alderman Trevor Cummings served as the Council's Veterans' Champion, acting as a dedicated point of contact and advocate for veterans and their families. He helped bridge the gap between veterans and community services.
- Community Engagement: The Covenant encouraged local initiatives and partnerships that support the Armed Forces community. This included access to services, recognition of military contributions and opportunities for civic involvement.

The Covenant also aligned with broader UK principles, ensuring that:

- Armed Forces personnel and their families faced no disadvantage in accessing public and commercial services.
- Special consideration was given in cases involving injury or bereavement.

Update

Given that ten years had now elapsed since the Council's commitment, it was proposed that the Council reaffirmed its dedication to the welfare of service personnel with a formal signing of the Armed Forces Covenant as part of the Veteran's Day Parade in 2026. As part of signing the Covenant, organisations were asked to choose from a list of suggested pledges.

Proposed Pledges

The Council wished to recognise the contribution that Service personnel, reservists, veterans, the cadet movement and military families made to the organisation, the community and to the country. The Council would seek to uphold the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant by pledge under the following themes:

- Employment
- Communications, engagement and outreach
- Civic responsibilities

The proposed commitments under those themes were detailed in the attached Appendix.

RECOMMENDED that Council reaffirms its dedication to the welfare of service personnel by signing the Armed Forces Covenant in Appendix 1 at the Veteran's Day Parade in 2026.

Councillor W Irvine proposed, seconded by Councillor McCracken, that the recommendation be adopted.

The proposer, Councillor W Irvine, commented that the Armed Forces Covenant was very important to the Council and as such he was pleased that it was being reaffirmed.

Commenting as seconder, Councillor McCracken, welcomed the report, which he believed was fitting on the Covenant's ten year anniversary. He agreed that it was important to pay tribute to those in the Armed Forces who resided in the Borough and assist them with their transition back to civilian life. Continuing Councillor McCracken took the opportunity to express his thanks to Alderman Cummings in his role as Veterans' Champion and for his assistance with events such as Armed Forces Day 2025 and the hosting of the Irish Guards in Bangor, also in 2025. Councillor McCracken added that he looked forward to the Sea Bangor event in May 2026, which would see the inclusion of a number of Royal Navy vessels visiting the city.

At this stage the Chairman welcomed Alderman Cummings to the meeting and invited him to make his comments.

Alderman Cummings thanked members for their comments stating that as Armed Forces and Veterans' Champion for the Borough he wished to place on record his thanks to Council officers for the time and energy invested to enable the report and recommendations to be brought before the Committee. He added that it had been his pleasure to work alongside them.

The Armed Forces Covenant by design had always been an evolving commitment and much had changed since the pledge was taken back in 2015. Of note, Alderman Cummings stated was the introduction of a Veterans Commissioner for Northern Ireland, and more recently support for the Armed Forces Covenant by the Northern Ireland Assembly, followed by the introduction of an Armed Forces Education Bill, by Minister Givan. In terms of national legislation, the introduction of the 'Covenant Legal Duty' passed by Parliament 2024, called upon public bodies, including local councils, to have due regard to the Covenant Principles and the UK Veterans Strategy that set

out ambitious goals for veterans' support across the country. On those latter points he wished to pay tribute to Jim Shannon MP and Alex Easton MP who had both supported the Bills and would welcome the Council's recommitment towards the Armed Forces Covenant.

Continuing Alderman Cummings stated that as an employer it was incumbent upon the Council to be the embodiment of good practice in the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant and he was pleased to see within the pledge, recognition of existing reservists through the Council's policies, processes and procedures. This, he believed, was needed in the current climate of global uncertainty and would offer reassurance. He recalled how last year the Council had hosted Armed Forces Day and adopted the theme of Innovation and Resiliency, a theme that recognised the crucial role of local employers and industries. Many employers had reservists on staff and were based in the Borough, and as fellow signatories of the Covenant he trusted that they would take encouragement from the Council's renewed commitment.

In summing up Alderman Cummings noted that the Borough had a longstanding tradition of expressing gratitude towards its Armed Forces and the Covenant served as an outworking of that gratitude. In his opinion, that was not extravagant or groundbreaking, it was how it should always be. However, in doing so he urged caution in respect of complacency. The evolving needs of the Armed Forces, their families and Veterans demanded a clear message of support and he trusted that was what they would hear this evening.

At this stage Alderman Graham recalled how back in 2015 in his role as Mayor he had signed the Armed Forces Covenant adding that the Council had always been a 'warm house' for the Armed Forces. He hoped that was something that would continue going forwards.

Rising to add his support, Alderman Smith said he believed that it was of crucial importance that the Covenant was reaffirmed to reiterate the Council's support to the Armed Forces. Alderman Smith also took the opportunity to express his thanks to Alderman Cummings for his work undertaken in the role of Veterans' Champion.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Councillor McCracken, that the recommendation be adopted.

4. BATTLE OF THE SOMME PILGRIMAGE 2026

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from Acting Director of Corporate Services detailing that the Council had participated annually in the commemorative events and wreath laying at the Thiepval Monument, Ulster Memorial Tower and the Memorial at Guillemont, to mark the anniversary of the Battle of the Somme on 1 July.

This had usually also included wreath laying at the Menin Gate, Ypres, a visit to the Island of Ireland Peace Tower at Messines and the laying of a wreath in honour of Edmund de Wind VC, from Comber, at the Pozieres British Cemetery. A visit to the Sir John Monash Centre at Villers-Bretonneux, where the Australian National Monument of the Great War was located, had also been part of the visit.

It was recommended that Council approved a small delegation to attend the commemoration events – departing 29 June and returning 2 or 3 July 2026. In line with previous years it was recommended that the incoming Mayor (or if unable to travel, the incoming Deputy Mayor) and another Member attend. It was further recommended that they were accompanied by the Chief Executive (or nominee) and one other officer. Nominations for the Member were now sought.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the attendance at the annual Battle of the Somme Commemorations in 2026, as set out in this report, of the incoming Mayor (or Deputy Mayor) plus one additional Member to be nominated by Council, and the Chief Executive, or their nominee, and one other Officer.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman McRandal, seconded by Councillor Moore, that the recommendation be adopted and furthermore that Councillor Ashe be nominated to attend along with the incoming Mayor (or Deputy Mayor).

(Alderman Cummings left the Chamber at this stage – 7.41pm)

Reports for Delegated Approval

5. RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF MOTION – DEFINITION OF A VICTIM (Appendix II)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from Acting Director of Corporate Services detailing that at its meeting in November 2025, the following Notice of Motion was agreed:

“That this Council is deeply alarmed that the definition of victim in the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 does not distinguish between those who perpetrated wrongdoing during the Troubles and the innocent victims they harmed, injured, killed or bereaved; believes that innocent victims should not have to interact with terrorists and their supporters when accessing victim support services; asserts that there is no moral equivalence between victim-makers and innocent victims; welcomes the fact that the victims pension legislation makes a clear distinction between perpetrator and victim; condemns the Alliance Party’s decision to intentionally blur this line by removing the word “innocent” from the description of a victim in a recent Assembly motion addressing the legacy of the past; and resolves to write to the Justice Minister requesting that she personally apologise for suggesting that victim makers could also be considered victims.”

Key Issues

On 12 January 2026 a letter from the Chief Executive was sent to Mrs Naomi Long MLA, Minister of Justice (Appendix 1). Later that day, a response was received (Appendix 2).

In her response, the Minister outlined that the matters contained within the letter were of a party-political nature and that it would not be appropriate for her to respond in her Ministerial capacity. She offered to respond within her capacity as Leader of the

Alliance Party. However, in doing so, this would not be in line with the resolution agreed by Council, which sought a Ministerial response.

RECOMMENDED that Council consider how to respond to this correspondence.

Alderman McIlveen suggested that the Council should write back to the Minister as she appeared, in his opinion, to be very much 'dancing on the head of a pin' as both Leader of the Alliance Party and Justice Minister. As such he believed the Council should pursue a response to its original letter.

Alderman McIlveen proposed, seconded by Councillor Gilmour, that the Council pursue the letter to the Justice Minister as previously decided by Council.

Commenting as seconder Councillor Gilmour recalled when the Notice of Motion had originally been brought the matter had been debated at length and she believed the hurt felt by victims was being further compounded by the Minister's response. She reminded Members that they were all bound by the Councillor Code of Conduct, as was the Justice Minister who would be bound by her own Code of Conduct requirements. As such she agreed that it was important for the Council to get a proper response given the hurt that been caused by the comments made by the Justice Minister.

At this stage Alderman McRandal rose to reiterate that he believed this was a politically motivated Motion that falsely attacked the Alliance Party. He believed that it would be inappropriate for the Justice Minister to make a response in the context of what was being asked of her and the fact that it was politically motivated. Members were advised that the piece of legislation referred to, The Victims and Survivors (NI) Order, did not fall under the remit of the Justice Minister. At this stage Alderman McRandal read out a statement detailing the Alliance Party's position on the definition of a victim, which was that there was no moral equivalence between those who deliberately caused harm during the Troubles and those who suffered because of their actions. Unlike others, the Alliance Party had been consistent that those who set out to kill or injure should be held fully accountable for their actions. The Party could stand tall on the fact that it had never endorsed the activity of paramilitary or other proscribed groups, nor had it sought advice on Government policy from their umbrella organisations, unlike others. Since its foundation in 1970, the Alliance Party had stood unequivocally for the rule of law. Alderman McRandal stated that if the Council was determined to obtain an answer from the Justice Minister on this matter it should accept the invitation from her to respond in her capacity as Leader of the Alliance Party.

Alderman Smith agreed that it was a strange response from the Justice Minister adding that the point had already been made that you could not 'swap hats', particularly as the Ministerial Code would apply regardless. He reiterated his belief that it was a bizarre response and that the Minister should have simply just answered the question put to her.

As there was dissent in the Chamber a vote was taken by a show of hands.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Councillor Gilmour, with 10 voting For and 3 voting Against, that the Council pursue the letter to the Justice Minister as previously decided by Council.

Reports for Noting

6. UPDATED CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY POLICY (Appendix III)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from Acting Director of Corporate Services detailing that the Council's Sustainability and Climate Change Policy had recently undergone its scheduled review, resulting in a refreshed and streamlined document, alongside an updated Environmental Policy Statement.

The Policy had been updated to reflect current legislative, including the Climate Change Act (NI) 2022, and clarified the Council's compliance obligations across sustainable development, biodiversity, climate change duties and the requirements of its externally accredited ISO14001 Environmental Management System. Those changes were highlighted in yellow on the attached Appendix.

Minor changes had also been made to improve the structure and readability of the policy, as well as to emphasise alignment with priorities and outcomes of the Council's Corporate Plan and the Roadmap to Sustainability.

The Environmental Policy Statement (Appendix) was required to meet ISO 14001 Environmental Management System (EMS) requirements and must be signed by the Chief Executive and displayed across buildings within scope of the EMS.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

Alderman McRandal proposed, seconded by Councillor McCracken, that the recommendation be adopted.

The proposer, Alderman McRandal, welcomed the report and thanked officers for the work that had been carried out to date.

Commenting as seconder, Councillor McCracken stated that the current weather demonstrated how important this was with almost forty days of constant rain so far in 2026. Winters were set to become wetter and warmer and as such thought needed to be given as to how to mitigate against Climate Change. Councillor McCracken welcomed the report that had been circulated before them.

At this stage Alderman Graham suggested there was a balance to be struck and agreed that Northern Ireland had been subjected to persistently wet weather for a while. That was due to a stubborn area of high pressure above Scandinavia and he urged caution against simply shifting the carbon problem to other parts of the world. Alderman Graham suggested that preparation was key citing the Dutch who had successfully navigated living under water levels.

Alderman Smith indicated that he was content to support the recommendation despite his concerns around the realities of actually being able to meet the ambitious targets that had been set. An example of this was on Page 9 of the report, which detailed a target of a 48% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030, unachievable in his view particularly as the Council had yet to start looking at its fleet of vehicles.

Alderman McIlveen referred to a Notice of Motion he had brought forward some ten years ago around the migration of the Council's fleet of vehicles and agreed that progress had been extremely slow. As such he was of the view that the Council would never be in a position to achieve its Climate Change targets by 2050. In light of that he would be keen for the Minister to look at this again as otherwise councils would be set up to fail in achieving those targets.

Welcoming the report Councillor Moore commented that climate change was everyone's responsibility. Going back to Alderman Graham's comments she advised that those countries who considered themselves impact negligible were 2% while those combined were 36%. As such she believed that it was not insignificant and everyone had a part to play to address Climate Change.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman McRandal, seconded by Councillor McCracken, that the recommendation be adopted.

7. NOTICE OF MOTION

(At this stage the Chairman welcomed Councillors Ashe and Hennessy who were both attending via Zoom and invited them to put forward their Motion – 7.54pm)

7.a) Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Ashe and Councillor Hennessy

Councillor Ashe proposed, seconded by Councillor Hennessy, that this Council returns a report researching paternity leave provision for Council employees including but not limited to: benchmarking of paternity leave provision against appropriate organisations; options to improve paternity leave policy for council employees; projected costings of these options; and anything else officers deem prudent.

The proposer Councillor Ashe stated that what was being asked for was a report on the options that were available, the associated costings and any comparisons with other organisations that could be taken into consideration. As a new mum she was only too well aware of the importance of time for mum and dad with a new baby to bond in those first few days, which were often very busy and at times difficult perhaps due to a complicated labour. She believed that it was the Council's duty to adequately support its staff on these occasions and she acknowledged the good work already ongoing at Stormont through the Good Jobs Bill, which included Paternity Leave of up to two weeks. The report to come back should include what other councils and other organisations such as the Civil Service were doing in respect of this matter and she believed that to be a reasonable request to review the current Council Policy. Continuing Councillor Ashe referred to recent findings, which suggested that one in five dads had no paternity rights while those in lower paid positions were not financially able to take advantage of paternity rights. In summing up she asked

Members for their support, which would ultimately support Council staff who ensured Council services were maintained.

Commenting as seconder, Councillor Hennessy indicated that he was very happy to support the motion, which asked officers to collate the information available to them in the public domain around paternity leave. This would help the Council compare how its arrangements for this aligned with other organisations and consider going forward what options were available and their associated costings. He believed the report would assist with better decision making and help the Council as a public sector employer. As such Councillor Hennessy asked for Members to support the Motion.

Alderman McIlveen stated that he had no objection to the report but asked if paternity leave was a 'Green Book' issue. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development confirmed that was the case. Continuing Alderman McIlveen sought clarification around the Council's current policy on paternity leave and stated that he would reserve his view on the Motion at this stage until the report was brought back to the Committee.

The proposer indicated that she had nothing further to add at this stage.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Ashe, seconded by Councillor Hennessy, that this Council returns a report researching paternity leave provision for Council employees including but not limited to: benchmarking of paternity leave provision against appropriate organisations; options to improve paternity leave policy for council employees; projected costings of these options; and anything else officers deem prudent.

(Councillors Ashe and Hennessy both left the meeting at this stage – 8.00pm)

8. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

There were no items of any other notified business.

NOTED.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Councillor Gilmour, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the public/press be excluded during discussion of the undernoted items of confidential business.

Reports for Approval

9. BALLYHASKIN PUBLIC RIGHT OF WAY (FILE PROW 63)
(Appendix IV)

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

Exemption: A claim to legal professional privilege

The report outlines the issues, and legal advice received, in relation to the asserted public right of way and makes a recommendation to resolve the issues.

10. LAND AT GREEN ROAD, CONLIG – PROPOSED ABANDONMENT (Appendix V)

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

3. Exemption: relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person

Council was asked by Dfl if they would wish to acquire any or all of an area of land at Green Road, Conlig, which the Department proposed to abandon.

The recommendation was that the Department be advised that Council had no interest in acquiring any part of the subject land.

11. LEASE OF BATTERY BUILDING, SEACLIFF ROAD – ROYAL ULSTER YACHT CLUB (Appendix VI)

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

3. Exemption: relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person

Council was asked to consider the lease of a property at Seacliff Road, Bangor, by the existing tenant.

The recommendation was that Council grant a Lease of the property subject to a 5-year break clause.

12. REQUEST FOR NIE SUBSTATION LEASE RENEWAL – SOUTH STREET, NEWTOWNARDS (Appendix VII)

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

Council was asked to consider a request from NIE to renewal the Substation Lease at South Street, Newtownards

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The recommendation was that Council accede to the request, subject to the terms and conditions outlined.

13. PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY POLICY REVIEW (Appendix VIII)

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

Schedule 5 – A claim to legal professional privilege

Council was asked to approve the draft Public Rights of Way policy. It was recommended that Council approves and adopts the draft policy.

Reports for Noting

14. ABSENCE UPDATE (Appendix IX)

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

4. Exemption: consultations or negotiations

Council was asked to note an update on the overall absence positions for quarter 3 2025.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor McCracken, seconded by Alderman McRandal, that the Committee notes this report and its appendices and

- (1) Welcomes the development of a report on options for Council outlining ways of addressing long term sickness, which remains high.**

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Alderman Graham, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that the public/press be re-admitted to the meeting.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 8.51pm.

3. **MARY PETERS TRUST**

[File Ref: CW32]

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that the Council had received correspondence from the Mary Peters Trust (Appendix 1) in December 2025 seeking support from the Council to maintain a level of funding to ensure the number and value of grant awards provided by the Trust continued to grow.

Members may have been aware that the Council had previously, on an annual basis, helped to support the Mary Peters Trust in the form of a contribution. The Mary Peters Trust carried out excellent work in supporting upcoming local athletes from a wide range of sports through the distribution of financial support that allowed the athletes to train and compete at the highest levels.

Since its establishment more than 50 years ago, the Trust had made a difference to the lives of thousands of young athletes from across Northern Ireland, selecting the best athletes, supporting them financially and providing access to a team of experts, who helped support their pathway to success and aid them in achieving their sporting ambitions.

Throughout 2025/26 the Mary Peters Trust had provided financial support totalling £9,400 between 16 local athletes from 12 different sports across the Ards and North Down Borough, as detailed below:

- Archery
- Disability Football
- Football
- Golf
- Tennis
- Triathlon
- Yachting
- Athletics
- Cricket
- Netball
- Swimming
- Weightlifting

This support had proven hugely beneficial to the Borough's athletes particularly as it contributed towards some of the training and travelling costs of their sporting competitions.

It was proposed that the Council continued to support the work of the Trust through the award of a £5,000 contribution which could be met from the 2026/27 Sports Development budget.

RECOMMENDED that the Council approves the award of £5,000 to the Mary Peters Trust from the 2026/27 Sports Development budget.

Proposed by Councillor Boyle, seconded by Councillor Hollywood, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Boyle praised the Trust's outstanding work and its president, noting that £9,400 had allowed many to benefit, including ten Olympians. He highlighted that Mary had been a guest speaker at the Council's Sports Awards and that he had met her again at Rhys McClenaghan's homecoming. He believed that the Council was deeply indebted to the Trust, given the significant impact of its funding, remarking that while the Council contributed £5,000, the Trust returned £9,400 in support to local athletes.

Councillor Hollywood acknowledged the Trust's long-standing commitment of more than fifty years in nurturing Northern Ireland athletes, enabling them to compete at elite levels and bringing a positive feel-good factor to the district.

Councillor S Irvine also expressed his support, recounting the experience of a Special Olympian who had been introduced to Mary Peters at Rhys' homecoming. He noted that the athlete's mother had sought assistance, and by the following day, a four-figure sum had been awarded.

Councillor Douglas referred to a letter from the Trust which mentioned a list of sportspersons but stated that she had been unable to identify any individual names from the documentation. The Head of Leisure confirmed that names had been removed from the appendices for GDPR reasons.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Boyle, seconded by Councillor Hollywood, that the recommendation be adopted.

4. DECENT HOMES STANDARD – CONSULTATION RESPONSE

[File Ref: EHP021]

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that The Department for Communities (DfC) was consulting on the introduction of a statutory Decent Homes Standard intended to improve the condition, safety, and energy performance of homes in the social housing sector (See Appendix 2).

Social housing played an important role within Ards and North Down, providing homes for approximately 17,700 residents living in 8,890 social housing households, which equated to 10.8% of the Borough's population. This sector therefore represented a significant proportion of local housing provision and was an essential source of accommodation for many households with higher levels of need.

While the Council was not responsible for providing or managing social housing, it had statutory duties to assess and address housing conditions that may be prejudicial to health. Given these responsibilities, it was recommended that the Council supported measures to enhance housing standards across all tenures and stressed the

importance of ensuring that any new provisions extended equally to the private rented sector, where many vulnerable households resided.

A draft response had been prepared and is attached at Appendix 1.

Key messages in the draft response include:

- Broad support for the revised DHS, including the introduction of Pillar E, recognising its value for safety, sustainability and wellbeing.
- Need for clearer definitions and measurable criteria, particularly around mandatory vs desirable requirements, and to avoid overlap between pillars.
- Strong emphasis on ventilation, damp/mould prevention and thermal comfort, including ensuring upgrades do not inadvertently increase condensation risks.
- Recognition of practical challenges, such as older stock, EPC uncertainty, cost, grid capacity, workforce and tenant access.
- Support for robust repair timeframes and damp/mould response standards, provided they are proportionate and supported with clear guidance.
- Noting parity issues with the private rented sector, highlighting that similar standards would benefit PRS tenants and promote consistency across tenures.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the draft consultation response, attached as Appendix 1.

Proposed by Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Councillor Moore, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor W. Irvine thanked officers for the report and reflected on the benefits of helping residents keep their homes warm. He noted that additional funding would be needed for improvements such as new windows, and he observed that newer homes were generally built to a higher specification. He asked whether officers had any further comment on this point. The Head of Environmental Health and Regulation advised that the scheme would only be successful if sufficient funding was available and the funding was one of the areas officer had included in the response. He acknowledged that the proposed thermal comfort levels were ambitious but stated that such ambition was necessary in the current climate. He hoped the scheme could eventually be expanded to the private rented sector, where the Council had greater enforcement responsibility.

Councillor McKee thanked officers for their work and highlighted the importance of attention to detail that officers had included, such as storage for bicycles and mobility scooters. He referred to Awaab's Law in England and suggested that similar protections should apply locally.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Councillor Moore, that the recommendation be adopted.

5. PUBLICATION OF THE SINGLE CONSTRUCTION REGULATOR PROSPECTUS – CONSULTATION RESPONSE

[File Ref: CW99]

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities which explained that, following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower, which resulted in the loss of 72 lives, the United Kingdom Government established the Grenfell Tower Inquiry to investigate the circumstances leading to the incident. The Inquiry's Phase 2 report had set out a series of recommendations, including the need for fundamental reform of the regulatory framework governing construction and building safety. One of the key recommendations was the establishment of a single construction regulator to provide clearer oversight and accountability.

The published Prospectus (attached as Appendix 2) outlined the Government's proposed approach to regulatory reform and the creation of this new regulatory body. It also provided an opportunity for stakeholders to reflect on the future roles of central government, the regulator, and the construction industry in ensuring improved safety outcomes for residents and building users.

The proposals had significant implications for local authorities, particularly in areas such as building control, enforcement responsibilities, and the competence of the local government workforce. While the Prospectus acknowledged the continuing importance of local authority functions, it also set out proposals to clarify the division of responsibilities between national and local regulators. The consultation process provided an important opportunity to ensure that statutory functions were maintained, that responsibilities are not duplicated, and that the role of local authorities was properly recognised within the new regulatory landscape.

A draft consultation response (Appendix 1) had been prepared by the Environmental Health & Regulatory Services team to reflect the Council's position on the proposals set out within the Prospectus. This draft response addressed the potential impact on local authority functions, highlighting areas where further clarity was required, and underscored the need to safeguard statutory responsibilities within any new regulatory framework. The draft was provided at Appendix 1 for Members' consideration.

The closing date for responses was to be 20 March 2026.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the draft consultation response.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Alderman McRandal, that the recommendation be adopted.

[Councillor Boyle left the meeting at 19:11 due to a Declaration of Interest in the following item.]

6. NOTICE TO QUIT PERIODS – CONSULTATION RESPONSE

[File Ref: EHPD23]

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities which reminded Members that Environmental Health and Regulatory Services was responsible for enforcing private tenancy legislation in Northern Ireland, including the Private Tenancies (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 and the Private Tenancies Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, which regulated matters such as rents, tenancy deposits, property standards, tenant information and eviction procedures.

The statutory notice periods required for landlords and tenants to lawfully terminate a private tenancy in Northern Ireland were originally set in the Housing (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, introducing the following graduated notice periods:

Length of Tenancy	Minimum Notice to Quit Period
Up to 5 years	4 weeks
Between 5 years and 10 years	8 weeks
Longer than 10 years	12 weeks

Following a 2017 review of Northern Ireland’s Private Rental Sector (PRS), Department for Communities (DfC) committed to increasing the minimum notice period that landlords must give to tenants to eight weeks. This reflected feedback from tenants and stakeholders that four weeks’ notice was insufficient to secure alternative accommodation. These changes came into effect after the conclusion of Coronavirus Regulations in May 2022.

The notice to quit requirements for landlords at the time of writing ere set out in the table below;

Length of Tenancy	Minimum Notice to Quit Period
1 year or less	4 weeks
1-10 years	8 weeks
10 years or more	12 weeks

DfC had launched a 12-week public consultation commencing on 5 January 2026. It was proposed that Council would submit a response, a copy of which had been attached as Appendix 1. The consultation was available at the following link: <https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/dfc/equality-impact-assessment-n-notice-to-quit-period/>

The draft Private Tenancies (Notice to Quit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025 proposed the following:

Introduction of longer Notice to Quit periods for “Standard Cases”

The draft Regulations proposed that the Notice to Quit requirements were increased for standard cases as set out below;

Length of Tenancy	Minimum Notice to Quit Period
1 year or less	8 weeks

1-3 years	4 months
3-8 years	6 months
8 years or more	7 months

Introduction of shorter notice periods for “special cases”

The “special case” circumstances which would allow a Landlord to issue a shorter notice to quit periods were:

1. The tenant is in substantial arrears of rent.
2. The tenant, or a member of the tenant’s household, has engaged in serious Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) in, or in the locality of, the dwelling-house.
3. The tenant, or a member of the tenant’s household, is convicted of a relevant criminal offence.
4. Possession of the property is sought for occupation by either the landlord, or landlord’s immediate family.

The “special case” associated notice periods had been set out below:

Notice to Quit Circumstance	Special Case Notice Period
Substantial arrears of rent	1 month
Engaged in Serious Anti-Social Behaviour	2 weeks
Convicted of a Relevant Criminal Offence	2 weeks
Possession for occupation by the landlord or landlords’ immediate family	3 months

Tenants who received a special case Notice to Quit, but did not agree that the special case circumstance was correct, could challenge the Notice to Quit in Civil Court. It would then be up to the landlord to prove the validity of the particular circumstance which was being relied upon.

The draft consultation response had been prepared in collaboration with Environmental Health teams in all councils in Northern Ireland, and highlighted the following main points:

- Council considered that the special case notice period for possession due to occupation by the landlord or their family should be removed, with the notice period in such cases reverting to the standard length, determined by the duration of the tenancy.
- In cases of rent arrears, the Council believed landlords should be required to provide evidence that they had attempted to engage the tenant in a repayment plan.
- The Council would welcome clarification from DfC that there was no obligation to prove a “nuisance” to demonstrate antisocial behaviour and that evidence of repeated annoyance or disturbance would suffice and the Guidance document should have the word “ Nuisance” replaced with “Disturbance” to

reflect this, as “Nuisance” could be misinterpreted to include “Statutory Nuisance” which would involve the input of the Environmental Health & Regulatory Services.

- Greater clarity on data sharing and information protocols was needed for instances where evidence was requested from Environmental Health regarding antisocial behaviour.
- The Council would also welcome guidance on how a landlord can provide evidence of a relevant tenant conviction in the High Court.

Summary

The Department for Communities had consulted on draft regulations to give effect to extended notice to quit periods within the private rented sector, alongside supporting guidance. The proposed regulations were required to implement provisions contained within the Private Tenancies Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 and to clarify the circumstances in which shorter notice periods may apply.

The consultation sought to balance increased security of tenure for tenants and incorporated appropriate safeguards for vulnerable tenants, whilst recognising that landlords may have to respond in a shorter time period, to the actions of their tenant in order to protect their property and the property and occupants of neighbours by defining “special case” circumstances. Environmental Health and Regulatory Services had reviewed the proposals and in collaboration with other councils, prepared a draft response that broadly supported the intent of the regulations while highlighting practical and enforcement considerations.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the draft consultation response, attached as Appendix 1.

Proposed by Councillor Hollywood, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Hollywood thanked officers for the report, advising that he dealt daily with a wide range of housing issues, describing the situation as dire. He welcomed the focus on tenant security but advised that further action was required, particularly in relation to legislation from Stormont on rent increases which could push vulnerable people into poverty. He referred to a recent Spectator article highlighting pensioners experiencing financial difficulties as an example of the wider impact.

Councillor W Irvine observed that receiving a notice to quit created major upheaval for tenants, many of whom had no alternative accommodation available. He welcomed measures that increased the time that tenants had to make suitable alternative arrangements. He added that some tenants were reluctant to raise concerns about their landlord for fear of reprisal and emphasised the importance of tightening the circumstances in which landlords.-based.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Hollywood, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

[Councillor Boyle returned to the meeting at 19:14.]

7. GOOD RELATIONS ADDITIONAL FUNDING 2025-2026

[File Ref: GREL433]

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that the Council was aware the Executive Office offered ANDBC Good Relations an additional £30,000 in August 2025. Funding was approved for use to support racial and social cohesion. Further funding of £12,700 had since been offered to Council to be spent by the end of March 2026.

Members would have been aware that the Shared Education programme in the Good Relations plan, originally included a cross-community schools trip to for young people from two schools to France and Belgium. The reduction in recent budgets from The Executive Office had resulted in the trip being removed from the programme.

The continued aim of the programme was to develop increased knowledge and understanding of key anniversaries and develop an appreciation of their social, political and cultural significance for NI and the UK and Ireland then and now. This incorporated knowledge and awareness of the national and European context of this period which could help to change participants' perspectives of shared history.

The amended cross community programme continued to deliver to young people to educate them on the joined effort of all community backgrounds who took part in World War One and to communicate the message of how local people fought and died during this period. The removal of the trip had made it more difficult to build lasting friendships between the young people over a much shorter timeframe.

The amended programme was offered to all primary schools in the Borough and 8 schools were accepted to take part. The schools were as follows:

- Bangor Central Integrated Primary School and Loughries integrated Primary School
- Millisle Primary School and Kircubbin Integrated Primary School
- Comber Primary School and Ballyvester Primary School
- Castle Gardens Primary School and St. Finian's Primary School

Activities were delivered in the Borough and made use of its historic and cultural past. Trips included for the young people ere to Clandeboye Estate and the Somme Centre, Newtownards. Further joint sessions were due to be held in each of the schools participating to assist with building cross community friendships. The programme would bring history alive for the participants.

It was suggested that the additional funding be used to increase the budget of the Children and Young People programme to enable additional sessions to be offered to the eight schools listed above. The funding would go towards transport costs which had increased dramatically but as necessary to enable the children to meet over the duration of the programme.

RECOMMENDED that Council accepts the additional £12,700 funding from the Executive Office for use under Children and Young People theme in the Good Relations Action Plan 2025/2026.

Proposed by Alderman Cummings, seconded by Councillor Kerr, that the recommendation be adopted.

Alderman Cummings noted that the project represented a significant development and recalled that, in 2016, former Councillor Janice McArthur had played an important role in the Key Stage 3 work for the Somme Museum. He explained the importance of presenting the historical narrative as one that had affected every part of society and expressed confidence that schools would benefit greatly from the opportunity.

Councillor Kerr welcomed the funding and remarked on the importance of remembering key historical events.

Councillor Boyle referred to page 2 of the report, which mentioned an amended programme being offered to all primary schools in the Borough. He asked how this had been determined, who had selected the schools involved, and how many had expressed interest. The Head of Community and Culture explained that the offer had been made through the Department of Education and that the schools listed were already participating in the shared programme; the additional funding simply enhanced work already identified.

Councillor Boyle queried whether it was therefore accurate to state that the programme applied to all schools in the Borough. The Head of Community and Culture confirmed that it applied only to those schools already engaged with the Department of Education.

Councillor Ashe stated that she was pleased to see that Comber Primary School was on the list of Schools that would benefit.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Cummings, seconded by Councillor Kerr, that the recommendation be adopted.

8. PROPOSAL FOR DISPERSAL FUNDING 2025/2026

[File Ref:]

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that, in December 2021, Ards and North Down Borough Council had become aware that a number of asylum seekers were to be housed in a hotel in Bangor.

Following their arrival, the Home Office awarded funding to Councils, administered via The Executive Office (TEO). Funding was to help with integration, assist with language barriers and resettlement into safe areas.

Funding was managed by the Council's Good Relations Team and officers joined the local Refugee and Asylum Forum which had been established. The Forum included members from local churches, community networks and groups and statutory agencies including representation from PSNI, Health, Education and Mears Housing, who were directly responsible for managing the hotel accommodation.

Further funding of £27,040 was ringfenced, subject to receipt of a completed proposal from Council. This had been allocated using a baseline funding amount of £15,000 per Council area plus £12,040, based on the percentage of people who had sought asylum in the Council area.

It was proposed that the Council utilised this funding to continue supporting the Refugee and Asylum Forum, which played a central role in assisting asylum seekers, refugees, minority ethnic communities and other newcomers to integrate and access essential services in the Borough (further details had been included in Appendix 1).

The funding would enable the continuation of key support activities including ESOL classes, visa support, orientation programmes, pastoral support and engagement for asylum seekers together with information sessions in relation to the laws and cultures of Northern Ireland.

As the closing date for applications was 16th January 2026 a draft proposal had been submitted indicating that Council approval was still required prior to any Letter of Offer being accepted.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the proposal for Dispersal funding.

Proposed by Councillor McKee, seconded by Councillor Moore, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor McKee welcomed the additional funding for the organisations that carried out valuable work in supporting newcomers to Northern Ireland. He noted that while the nature of this work would evolve in the future, it was important that the support already being provided could continue, and he was pleased that further funding would supplement these efforts.

Councillor Moore echoed these sentiments, acknowledging the challenges faced by the Borough and noted the importance of receiving additional funding to manage these pressures effectively and to support newcomers. She queried what statutory responsibilities the Council held in relation to people claiming asylum. The Head of Community and Culture advised that the Council did not have a specific statutory responsibility but confirmed that funding had been provided by TEO. She noted that the need for support was clear, both for those residing in the local hotel and for individuals living in accommodation across the Borough.

Councillor Moore observed that women living in the hotel had support needs within the Borough, and this funding enabled the Council to provide funding which would meet those needs. She suggested that without it, the Council would have to rely on voluntary organisations or potentially draw from its own budgets. The Head of Community and Culture explained that, under the Good Relations Action Plan, the

Council was required to undertake work with all communities, and that this funding was additional to the resources already provided through the plan.

Councillor Cochrane voiced his concerns, shared by his party, regarding the impact of immigration on the Borough. He noted that the funding had come from the UK Government rather than local ratepayers.

Councillor Boyle welcomed the report and thanked officers, commenting that the funding would allow the continuation of work already being undertaken.

Councillor W Irvine agreed with Councillor Cochrane's remarks, particularly in relation to national government policy. He asked for an update on the Marine Court Hotel, noting that there had been reports before Christmas 2025 indicating a date for its closure in relation to housing asylum seekers. The Head of Community and Culture advised that, following a meeting with the Home Office the previous week, it had been confirmed that the hotel would cease to be used by the end of February 2026. Councillor W Irvine expressed disappointment at the lack of engagement from the Home Office and reiterated his opposition.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor McKee, seconded by Councillor Moore, that the recommendation be adopted.

9. COMMUNITY CENTRES AND HALLS PRICING REVIEW 2026-2027

[File Ref: CW70]

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities which explained that Ards and North Down Borough Council owned and managed 21 Community Centres and Halls located throughout the Borough. These Centres and Halls facilitated a vast range of activities for customers, charities, Health Trusts, and Council departments. These activities are crucial in providing customers and residents of the Borough with opportunities to improve and maintain their health and wellbeing and could be directly aligned to several Council aims and objectives. For example, the Centres and Halls provided facilities that all users could "Improve wellbeing through social inclusion and reduced inequalities", one of three Council priorities illustrated in the Corporate Plan 2024 - 2028.

Usage at the Centres and Halls had continued to increase, evidenced by positive 2025/26 KPI figures. For example, the Total Hours Booked for Q1 and Q2 was 16,886, significantly higher than target and significantly greater than the same period 2024/25 which was 14,697. The footfall figure across all Centres and Halls over the same period was 96,328, compared to 79,177 in 2024/25.

The 2024/25 financial year performance was summarised below –

- Total income was £373,387 (£126,787 above income target).
- Actual net expenditure was £761,444 (£116,256 below budget).

The 2025/26 financial year was summarised below-

- Income target = £266,300 (an increase of £18,700 from 2024/25).
- Year to Date (YTD) Actual Income =£280,789) annual target already exceeded as of December 2025)
- Net expenditure budget (excluding utility and maintenance costs) = £842,400.

Charges 2026 – 2027

Council had agreed an inflationary rise of 3.8% to charging policies. However, it was proposed to increase costs for 2026/ 20207 by 50p per hour per small room booking and £1.00 per hour for larger rooms bookings. This was an average increase of 6.37% and a rounded number was required due to limitations imposed by the electronic charging system used.

The increase of 50p hour would mean small rooms costing £7.50 per hour at the time of writing would increase to £8.00 per hour and those costing £14.00 per hour would increase to £15.00 per hour.

The increased costs were included in the budget panel meetings and used by the Head of Finance as part of the rate setting process.

The potential options on income for 2026/27 budget were summarised below -

- Income target 2026/27 with 3.8% increase = £276,419
(increase of £10,119 from 2025/26 budget)
- Income target 2026/27 with 6.37% (average) = £283,263
(increase of £16,963 from 2025/26 budget)

RECOMMENDED Council approves an increase of 50p per hour for small booking rooms and £1.00 per hour for larger room hire which equates to approximately 6.37% for 2026/27 financial year.

[Alderman Brooks left the meeting at 19:22, returning at 19:24.]

Proposed by Alderman McRandal, seconded by Councillor Boyle, that the recommendation be adopted.

Alderman McRandal acknowledged that proposing increases was never a welcome choice, but he stressed that the service in question was vital to many residents. At a meeting he was present at the previous evening, the Council had approved a 4.5% rates increase and he suggested that, without this proposed rise, an even higher rate increase would have been required. Given the significant cost pressures facing the Council, he considered the proposal to be the responsible course of action.

Councillor Boyle remarked that the increase felt significant in percentage terms, though he noted that it could generate £18,000 to £19,000 for other essential purposes and suggested that, in the wider context, an organisation renting a large room for £14 was unlikely to cancel if the cost rose to £15. Councillor Boyle explained that ratepayers were intelligent and well aware that costs were rising in all

aspects of life. He reflected it would be great if Council did not have to increase charges but it is realistic that it does.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman McRandal, seconded by Councillor Boyle, that the recommendation be adopted.

10. ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS – INVITE TO SHARED ISLAND EVENT

[File Ref: PCSP1]

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that NILGA and the Association for Irish Local Government (AILG) had been successful in a bid to the Shared Island Civic Society Fund to hold a cross-border event on developing the leadership and influence of councillors in relation to Ending Violence Against Women & Girls (EVAWG). The event was due to be held on 24-25 March 2026 in the Slieve Russell Hotel, Co. Cavan.

NILGA had been working with the Executive Office to develop the leadership role of councillors in EVAWG and would like to bring councillors with experience of tackling this issue together to discuss challenges and opportunities with their counterparts in AILG.

Given council's role in supporting EVAWG action locally, NIGLA had offered free spaces for two members at the event. Overnight accommodation could be booked directly with the hotel at a cost of €130pp.

The outline agenda was as follows:

Tuesday 25 March

- 3.30 Registration & networking
- 4.00 Welcome
- 4.10 The Strategic Context
- 4.40 Violence against female politicians – the impact
- 5.15 Allyship for councillors workshop
- 6.45 Feedback & close
- 8.00 Dinner

Wednesday 25 March

- 9.30 Registration & networking
- 10.00 Opening remarks & reflections
- 10.10 Local EVAWG initiatives
- 10.40 The role of the media & responsible reporting
- 11.30 Scenarios & Solutions workshop
- 12.40 Feedback from roundtables
- 13.00 Next steps & lunch

RECOMMENDED that Council nominates two Members with experience of tackling Ending Violence Against Women and Girls to attend the event on 24-26 March 2026 in the Slieve Russell Hotel, Cavan.

Proposed by Councillor Moore, seconded by Councillor Douglas, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Moore advised that she had no nominations to put forward at this time. Councillor Douglas asked whether nominations could be made at the next Council meeting. The Chair, Councillor Ashe confirmed that nominations could be made at Council and suggested that members note the item. With all in agreement, Councillor Moore as proposer welcomed the report and the opportunity presented, noting that the issue addressed some of the most intractable challenges of the current generation. She highlighted that the Mayor had selected Women's Aid as one of her charities for the year, reflecting her party's concern for the matter. She considered it entirely appropriate to work on an all island basis to address such a difficult issue.-island basis to address such a difficult issue.

As seconder, Councillor Douglas agreed with her colleague's remarks.

Councillor Boyle described the report and proposal as excellent but queried which elected members had the relevant experience being sought. He noted that eight members already served as NILGA delegates; himself, Alderman Adair, Alderman McDowell, Councillors Hollywood, Cochrane, McCollum, Smart and McKee and suggested that this group might be a starting point. The Director of Active and Healthy Communities clarified that nominees did not need to be NILGA delegates and that the decision rested with members. Councillor Boyle reiterated that the existing NILGA delegates might nonetheless provide a useful basis for consideration.

Councillor Ashe reminded Members that nominations would be brought to the next Council meeting and that the matter be noted in the meantime.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Moore, seconded by Councillor Douglas, that the report be noted and nominations made at the next Council meeting.

REPORTS FOR NOTING

11. PORTAFERRY TOWN FC HIGH STREET PITCH

[File Ref: LEI29]

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities which advised that Members may have been aware of a deputation by Portaferry Town Football Club (PTFC) to the Environment Committee on the 8 October 2025. It was proposed and agreed that officers brought back a report with options to explore the current situation at PTFC and outline options for the future.

As a result of the Organisational Redesign within the Council, this item was being progressed by Leisure through the Active and Healthy Communities Committee, rather than through the Environment Committee.

The 3G pitch located on High Street Portaferry was situated on land leased to PTFC by the Council at the time of writing. The existing lease term was 21 years and was due to expire in August 2026. As the end of the existing lease term approached, considerations needed to be given regarding the future of the pitch including any potential maintenance and/or future lease arrangements of the pitch.

The pitch was an established community asset supporting local football, training activity, and wider community sport. The surface in place at the time of writing was beyond the average lifecycle of a 3G pitch and PTFC had raised concerns regarding its condition and suitability for continued use.

To enable an informed decision regarding the future of the pitch, a technical assessment completed by a qualified contractor specialising in artificial sports surfaces was needed, at an approximate cost of £1,000. The scope of the assessment should seek to:

- Establish what maintenance work has been completed by PTFC on the pitch surface
- Assess the current condition of the surface including the fibre wear, infill levels and compaction
- Assess the shock pad of the pitch, including performance testing (ball rolling and shock absorption for example), to measure compliance with relevant standards
- Inspect the sub-base, drainage, and any other potential structural issues

These findings would assist in determining:

- If the surface can be maintained or rejuvenated
- If partial repairs are feasible; or
- If a full replacement of the surface (and/or) shock pad is required
- Costings for the various options

The possibility of a temporary extension to the existing lease arrangements was being explored to potentially enable the time required for the assessment and next steps to be considered by the Council.

Members may have been aware that this pitch was not part of the Artificial Pitch Replacement Schedule or leisure or capital budget. Officers would however engage with the club and relevant funding partners to explore if any potential funding may be available towards the pitch.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report.

Proposed by Councillor Boyle, seconded by Councillor S Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Boyle thanked officers, adding that the matter had originated at the Environment Committee, where an excellent presentation had been delivered. He expressed his appreciation to the officer for the report and highlighted that the facility in question had been in operation for 18 years; three years beyond its intended lifespan and was now showing clear signs of wear. He explained that the club had originally invested fully in the facility themselves and that it had since become a heavily used and popular resource. He stated that the Committee had requested an options report to provide several possibilities that could determine how best to

progress the matter. He asked Members to support the proposal at this stage, emphasising the need for the forthcoming report and the options it would provide.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Boyle, seconded by Councillor S Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

12. ACTIVE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES DIRECTORATE BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT – DECEMBER 2025

[File Ref: FIN23]

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities which explained that the Active and Healthy Community’s Budgetary Control Report covered the 9-month period 1 April 2025 to 31st December 2025. The net cost of the Directorate was showing an underspend of £ 598k (11.3%)– box A on page 3.

Explanation of Variance

The Active and Healthy Communities’ budget performance was further analysed on page 3 into 3 key areas:

Report	Type	Variance	Page
Report 2	Payroll Expenditure	£385k favourable	3
Report 3	Goods & Services Expenditure	£4k adverse	3
Report 4	Income	£217k favourable	3

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

Type	Variance £'000	Comment
Payroll	(385)	Mainly due to vacant posts during the first 9 months. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental Health & Regulatory Services (£233k) Community Development (£57k) Leisure (£103k)
Goods & Services		
Environmental Health & Regulatory Service	80	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainly due to the Council’s share of the Animal Welfare Service (£43k) and CCTV over spend (£15k)
Leisure	(58)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Range of underspends and delays to leisure projects.

Type	Variance £'000	Comment
Income		
Leisure	(181)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing & Leisure Complex – (£154k) • Comber Leisure Centre – (£19)

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REPORT 1 BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT					
Period 9 - December 2025					
	Year to Date Actual	Year to Date Budget	Variance	Annual Budget	Variance
	£	£	£	£	%
Active & Healthy Communities					
3100 Active Health & Communities HQ	182,690	168,400	14,290	222,800	8.5
3200 Environmental Health & Regulatory Ser	2,604,349	2,780,100	(175,751)	3,761,700	(6.3)
3300 Community Development	1,863,582	1,958,400	(94,818)	2,718,800	(4.8)
3400 Leisure	44,600	386,200	(341,600)	925,400	(88.5)
Total	4,695,221	5,293,100	A (597,879)	7,628,700	(11.3)
REPORT 2 PAYROLL REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Active & Healthy Communities - Payroll					
3100 Active Health & Communities HQ	143,932	135,300	8,632	180,600	6.4
3200 Environmental Health & Regulatory Ser	2,851,013	3,084,500	(233,487)	4,111,900	(7.6)
3300 Community Development	1,706,851	1,764,000	(57,149)	2,310,400	(3.2)
3400 Leisure	2,787,305	2,890,200	(102,895)	3,891,200	(3.6)
Total	7,489,101	7,874,000	(384,899)	10,494,100	(4.9)
REPORT 3 GOODS & SERVICES REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Active & Healthy Communities - Goods and Services					
3100 Active Health & Communities HQ	38,757	33,100	5,657	42,200	17.1
3200 Environmental Health & Regulatory Ser	348,244	268,300	79,944	509,800	29.8
3300 Community Development	1,027,194	1,051,400	(24,206)	1,776,100	(2.3)
3400 Leisure	393,468	451,300	(57,832)	993,100	(12.8)
Total	1,807,664	1,804,100	3,564	3,321,200	0.2
REPORT 4 INCOME REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Community & Wellbeing - Income					
3100 Active Health & Communities HQ	-	-	-	-	
3200 Environmental Health & Regulatory Ser	(594,908)	(572,700)	(22,208)	(860,000)	(3.9)
3300 Community Development	(870,463)	(857,000)	(13,463)	(1,367,700)	(1.6)
3400 Leisure	(3,136,173)	(2,955,300)	(180,873)	(3,958,900)	(6.1)
Totals	(4,601,544)	(4,385,000)	(216,544)	(6,186,600)	(4.9)

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

Proposed Councillor Moore, seconded by Alderman McRandal, that an alternative proposal be considered.

“That the committee acknowledges this unique opportunity for this year alone, and that additional funding be awarded to the Blair Mayne Bursary Fund, to enable more

young people to benefit from this brilliant programme. This would mean that two young people per category receive bursary funding of £1k- a total of £8k awarded across four categories. It would not create any additional administration burden and the process has already been approved.”

Councillor Moore stated that the proposal spoke for itself and noted that Councillor S Irvine, who also sat on the same committee, would hopefully be in agreement. She described the request as a relatively small amount of money to address the identified slippage and emphasised that the programme was ready to proceed and was an excellent initiative. She explained that the panel had already reviewed the applications and that the proposal related only to the current year and would not need to be revisited unless a further opportunity arose.

Alderman McRandal referred to the underspend outlined in the report and asked the Director for clarification on how the funds would be spent if reallocated, and what parameters would apply. The Director of Active and Healthy Communities advised that she understood that the bursary was currently open but that it was not administered within her directorate, meaning the funding would need to be transferred. She confirmed that the money would be issued within the current financial year and that awards would be made within the next six weeks. Alderman McRandal sought further clarification on whether the Blair Mayne bursary fell under this directorate. The Director of Active and Healthy Communities explained that the Bursary sat within another Directorate of the Council and that the funding would have to be transferred to Corporate Services.

Councillor Moore indicated that, in light of this clarification, she would withdraw the proposal and adopt the original recommendation, as did Alderman McRandal.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Moore, seconded by Alderman McRandal, that the recommendation be adopted.

13. BI-MONTHLY REPORT FOR PORTAFERRY SPORTS CENTRE

[File Ref: CW74]

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that, at the most recent update to this Committee in November 2025, members were informed of issues that Council was facing in relation to service delivery at PSC due to a broken-down boiler. These issues had since been resolved with the installation of the new boiler in the early part of January 2026.

Members would have been aware of the ongoing issues with the Sports Hall floor in Portaferry Sports Centre. The most recent update to Council in November 2025 was at a standstill and to date, the status of the hall remained in a partly usable state. However, following on from the successful engagement with the department in relation to the boiler, dialogue had been ongoing between various Council departments, the Education Authority, and the Department of Education towards reaching an agreement on the hall floor.

Council officers and representatives from the Department of Education met on the 16 January and held a positive meeting during which the next steps were agreed.

1. To understand the extent of the issue and therefore inform the remedial works that are required destructive explorative work is required.
2. Council are awaiting written confirmation to formalise the verbal agreement by the Department of Education that the expense for the explorative works and any remedial capital works required should this be evidenced by the subsequent Consultant's report will be covered by the Department.
3. Colleagues from Assets and Properties will attempt to co-ordinate an onsite meeting with the appointed Contractor, Consultant, Structural Engineer, Leisure officer, and Department of Education representative during the Easter holidays.
4. The Principal of the School has confirmed that the school is content for the explorative work to be completed during the Easter holiday period (2nd April – 12th April inclusive) if it is agreed between the Department and the Council.

It should be noted that the entire Sports Hall would be unusable once the destructive explorative works began. This would lead to disruption to Leisure, and the School users of the Sports Hall. Officers would consider potential steps to mitigate these negative impacts as much as possible for Leisure users, for example by potentially facilitating fitness classes elsewhere. Communication would be ongoing between the Council, Department of Education, the School, and any other stakeholders impacted by this process.

5. The management agreement between the Department and the Council for PSC was also discussed and officers will seek to progress this in the spring of this year.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

Proposed by Councillor Boyle, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Boyle thanked the Director, officers and the local school for their efforts and for their patience during what had been a difficult period. He explained that the facility had been without heating or water for almost five months and remarked that, although the Education Authority and the Department of Education had eventually addressed the issue, the delay had been unacceptable. He suggested that, had the facility been located in Bangor or Newtownards, the turnaround would likely have been a matter of days rather than months, stressing that the Leisure Centre should never have been left in such a position, with both staff and users significantly affected.

Councillor Boyle recalled a meeting with stakeholders in November 2024 and referred to the four points in the report relating to the condition of the floor. He welcomed the fact that a meeting had finally taken place, albeit four years after the

issue had first arisen. He was concerned that the Council was still awaiting a formal report from the Department of Education and noted that written confirmation was required to formalise any agreement. He questioned whether the school holiday period would be suitable for the necessary works and suggested that, if not, the next available window would be the summer months, which would cause major disruption to a facility heavily used at that time of year. He suggested that the Council develop a contingency plan should the preferred timetable prove unworkable.

Councillor Boyle added that any repair work would require full closure of the hall, with no clear indication of how long this would take. He queried whether the trustees, as key stakeholders, were being fully involved as they had provided valuable insight when he met them the previous year. He welcomed the restoration of heating and hot water and was hopeful that access to the hall could soon be restored. He advised the committee that there was a need to maintain pressure on the relevant departments and to keep the public informed, noting that although issues such as cracked floors were not the Council's responsibility, officers had nonetheless worked hard to ensure progress.

The Director of Active and Healthy Communities reported that, at the meeting with the Department of Education, officers had confirmed that the Department of Education would fund the exploratory works and, if required, any subsequent capital works. She advised that although they still awaited written confirmation, the verbal agreement allowed the project to proceed. If arrangements for exploratory works could not be finalised for the Easter period, discussions would take place with the school to identify alternative timings. The exploratory works might be destructive in nature, meaning the floor could be out of use at Easter, and that it may be more appropriate to schedule the works at the end of June. She added that the school may also need the hall for exam purposes and confirmed that the Department had agreed to engage with the trustees and that all interested parties and stakeholders should be involved.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Boyle, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

14. SMARTPHONE FREE CHILDHOOD

[File Ref: CDV63]

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that , at the Council meeting held in September 2025 it was agreed that:

“Officers bring back a report based on the matters raised in the deputation by Rosalind McClean, Smartphone Free Childhood NI in terms of how this Council can support Smartphone Free Childhood for the safety and wellbeing of all our children”.

Introduction

The debate around whether children should grow up with or without smartphones had intensified over the past decade. As digital devices became nearly universal, parents, educators, and policymakers had questioned how early exposure affects

children's development, wellbeing, and social skills. A smartphone-free childhood did not mean rejecting technology entirely, rather, it emphasised delaying personal smartphone ownership to protect healthy development during the most formative years.

Developmental Considerations

Cognitive Growth

- Young children learned best through hands-on exploration, imaginative play, and real-world interaction.
- Excessive screen time could displace activities that build executive function, attention span, and problem-solving skills.
- Studies consistently showed that early and frequent smartphone use correlated with reduced sustained attention and lower quality sleep, both essential for learning.

Emotional and Social Development

- Childhood was a time when empathy, emotional regulation, and social confidence take shape.
- Face-to-face interaction taught children to read body language, tone, and social cues; skills that could be weakened by digital communication.
- Smartphone-free environments encouraged deeper friendships, more physical play, and fewer social comparisons.

Risks of Early Smartphone Use

Exposure to Inappropriate Content

Even with filters, children could encounter harmful material, misinformation, or advertising designed to manipulate attention.

Mental Health Concerns

- Early access to social media increased risks of anxiety, loneliness, and body-image issues.
- Constant notifications and infinite scrolling could create addictive patterns that were difficult for even adults to manage.

Cyberbullying and Online Safety

Children often lacked the maturity to navigate online conflict, privacy risks, or peer pressure amplified through digital platforms

Benefits of a Smartphone-Free Childhood

Stronger Family Relationships

Without the distraction of devices, families tended to have more meaningful conversations, shared activities, and consistent routines.

Healthier Habits

- More outdoor play
- Better sleep
- Improved focus in school

- Reduced sedentary behaviour.

Creativity and Independence

Children who are not reliant on smartphones often developed stronger problem-solving skills, imagination, and resilience. They learned to entertain themselves without constant digital stimulation.

Educational Implications

Schools that limited or ban smartphones often report:

- Higher academic engagement
- Fewer behavioural issues
- More social interaction during breaks
- Reduced classroom distractions.

Some countries had implemented nationwide school bans, reflecting growing recognition of the educational benefits of limiting devices. A change in how schools dealt with smartphones as not within the remit of local government in Northern Ireland, however some councillors had roles on Board of Governors of local schools and would be able to promote the campaign via that avenue.

Strategies for Supporting a Smartphone-Free Childhood

- Delay personal smartphone ownership until late childhood or early adolescence.
- Use shared family devices for supervised learning or entertainment.
- Create tech-free zones at home, such as bedrooms and dining areas.
- Model healthy digital habits as adults.
- Encourage offline hobbies including sports, reading, art, music, outdoor exploration.

Councils Play Strategy 2021 – 2032

Council had a Play Strategy which was a strategic framework to guide decision making relating to play provision within the Borough and enable the development of a costed Capital Investment Plan for delivery over the next 5 years.

The Play Strategy also considered provision beyond the sole factor of play value and the ability to deliver on wider Council strategic goals such as the delivery of:

- community development programmes using outdoor play spaces as a tool for community, capacity building, neighbourhood renewal, urban and rural regeneration and the promotion of good relations
- outdoor related tourism and recreation development initiatives
- outdoor related community health and wellbeing initiatives
- outdoor related regeneration initiatives
- special projects and the potential to attract children and young people targeted events etc to the area

The Play Strategy:

- ensures rate payers and visitors can avail of and contribute to a wide range of high quality, inclusive, affordable and accessible play spaces and services
- maximises the available resources and potential of the current play provision within the Council area
- maximises opportunities to deliver on wider local, regional and national strategies and implementation of the new Community Plan for the Borough; The Big Plan for Ards and North Down.

Conclusion

A smartphone free childhood was not about rejecting technology but about protecting the developmental space children need to grow into healthy, confident, and socially capable individuals. By delaying smartphone access, families could foster deeper connections, stronger cognitive skills, and a more grounded sense of self in a world increasingly shaped by digital influence. -free childhood

It was recommended that Council supports the Smartphone Free Childhood NI campaign with the following actions which were within the remit of Council:

- Signposting parents and grandparents to Smartphone Free Childhood and the concept of delaying smartphones via Council social media,
- Encouraging sharing of the social media campaign,
- Providing and distributing posters / leaflets in public areas including community hubs and community centres, leisure centres and sports facilities,
- Sharing the campaign via Council parenting education programmes and family initiatives – parent and toddler groups, summer schemes and play clubs.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report.

Proposed by Councillor McClean, seconded by Councillor Cochrane, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor McClean thanked officers for the report, noting that the issue was a technological rather than ideological one and had garnered support across parties. He emphasised that it affected every parent and welcomed the actions proposed. He observed that the report contained two recommendations; one relating to actions within the Council's remit and one to be noted, and sought clarification that the commitments outlined were indeed those the Council was being asked to undertake.

The Head of Community and Culture confirmed that the four actions listed in the report were the recommendations for approval. Councillor McClean sought further clarity, asking whether the Council would liaise with Smartphone Free groups in Northern Ireland, who could provide posters and leaflets at factory cost and assist with promotional materials. The Head of Community and Culture confirmed that it was the group's campaign and that the Council's role would be to support and promote it, taking direction from them. Councillor McClean asked whether this would proceed shortly after ratification at the next Council meeting. The Head of Community and Culture advised that the intention was to begin by the end of March, following ratification. Councillor McClean gave thanks for the clarification.

Councillor Cochrane also offered his thanks and acknowledged the contribution of Mr Givan. He noted that while the overall scheme fell within the remit of the education sector, the Council could still play a meaningful role. He highlighted the importance of leisure, play, arts and cultural activities in encouraging children away from excessive use of smart devices. He raised concerns about issues such as artificial intelligence and deepfakes, which he felt were undermining childhoods, and supported the use of appropriately placed posters and leaflets in and around Council facilities to reinforce the campaign's message.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor McClean, seconded by Councillor Cochrane, that the recommendation be adopted.

15. PEACEPLUS CAPITAL PROJECTS – UPDATE

[File Ref: PEACV-I]

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Acting Head of Community Services detailing that Members would have been aware that the PEACEPLUS Partnership co designed a PEACEPLUS Plan for the Borough under the following three themes:

- Theme 1 - Local Community Regeneration and Transformation
- Theme 2 - Thriving and Peaceful Communities
- Theme 3 - Building Respect for Cultural Identities

Theme 1

The 3 Capital Projects to be delivered were:

- Portaferry Castle Park
- Donaghadee Pump Track
- Bangor Cycle Park

Portaferry Castle Park - £186,507

The Project endeavoured to breathe new life into the site of the former shop / toilet block.

The project for the old toilet block would be executed in two phases, with Phase 1 concentrating on technical design and securing planning consent, followed by Phase 2, which involved construction works.

The initial application for funding included:

- Shared Community Meeting Spaces
- Biodiversity Area
- Art Installations
- Amenity Block Refurbishment
- Motorhome/ Touring Pitches
- Culture, Peace, and Heritage Programmes

Following the confirmation of the budget available, a concept design had been prepared and a cross departmental working group was considering the costings to determine what could be delivered within the PEACEPLUS budget to meet the funding requirements and allow for animation of the site.

Donaghadee Pump Track - £219,351

Plans had been prepared to transform an area of the Commons into shared pump track with a focus on the needs of older young people with the aim of addressing anti-social behaviour and the creation of a greater sense of community ownership of this shared space for all of the community.

The animation activities would include local competitions/demonstrations, a programme of activity whereby expert facilitators would deliver group lessons, a cross-community primary school engagement programme, through selected schools from various communities to participate in a shared educational programme and an opening event inviting the public to attend and participate in taster sessions, watch live demonstrations, and engage in complimentary activities that promote peace and inclusion.

A certificate of lawful use had been applied for to the Councils Planning department but no response has yet been received. It was anticipated that work would be able to start in April 2026.

Certificates of Lawfulness for Proposed Use or Development ("CLOPUDs") were processes which assessed the precise works against the relevant planning legislation and enabled the Planning Service to issue Certificates confirming that the proposed works would fall within the Council's permitted development rights.

Bangor Cycle Park - £1,149,347

Bangor Cycle Park's objective was to create pathways for increased levels of cross community interaction via five separate cycling facilities (pump-track, BMX racing track, Inclusive-Cycling-Area, Accessible Learn-To-Ride area, and cross-country (XC) trails). Each would appeal to a different community demographic, with all users coming together in the sixth element: a community café/workshop.

The concept of this scheme was to transform an underused space into a place that provided cycling opportunities for everyone, regardless of age or ability.

Animation activities included: cycling activity days, engaging local schools from all communities; Level 2 coaching programmes on the learn to ride area; BMX coaching programmes on the BMX track; Intro to cycling coaching programmes on the XC trail; Women's intro to cycling coaching programme; cycling programmes for those with disabilities; bike maintenance workshops and cross-border BMX races.

Staff from the Councils Estates section had been in regular contact with the Planning Service team to determine which elements of the project would require Planning Permission and which could be considered Permitted Development.

As the design progressed in detail over recent months, officers continued consultation with Planning Service to clarify and ensure which elements of the project would require Planning Permission and which could be considered Permitted

Development. The Planning Service advised that due to the amount of imported material required for the BMX Track and jump park, that it would require an application, along with the application for the change of use for the spectator stand. Officers commissioned the relevant expert reports to support the application and, given the level of detail provided, were confident it should allow the planning service to streamline the application process. Most statutory consultees had already responded positively, with the remaining in dialogue with officers to address any concerns raised.

In order to provide certainty, Planning had recommended that the Council submit applications for Certificates of Lawfulness for Proposed Use or Development (“CLOPUDs”) (which assessed the precise works against the relevant planning legislation and enable Planning Service to issue Certificates confirming that the proposed works would fall within the Council’s PD rights).

Applications for Certificate of Lawfulness (CLOPUDs) were submitted on 21 November 2025 and were in the latter stages of being processed. The applications ere for the Mountain Bike Trail, the Learn to Ride track and the Pump Track.

Further discussions were required to determine a way forward in relation to site management and running of the Café and workshops. Discussions would be held with SERCO in the first instance, as the operator of the site at the time of writing.

Due to the participant numbers and hours required by the funder - SEUPB, the PEACEPLUS team had worked closely with the Councils Procurement team to develop a Pre Market Engagement tender (PME). The tender would assist in the development of a tender(s) in relation to the animation of the Sportsplex programme.

Monthly meetings of the cross departmental working group were ongoing. The group was being supported by the Councils Transformation team.

Themes 2 and 3

Twenty tenders had been advertised in relation to themes two and three of the Plan. Tenders were advertised on EtendersNI website, Council social media and in the Belfast Telegraph. Following closure, the tenders were evaluated by relevant officers with support from the Council’s Procurement section.

Eighteen of the 20 tenders advertised had been successfully awarded and detailed in the table below. The remaining two tenders had been readvertised.

Theme 2 TPC	Tender	Successful Applicant	Available award	Awarded
TPC1a	Women’s Resilience, Inclusion & Empowerment	Kilcooley Women’s Centre	£100,339	£100,332
TPC1b	Community Resilience,	ND YMCA	£100,339	£100,219

	Inclusion & Empowerment			
TPC2	Engagement and Leadership through Sports & Arts	Healthy Kidz CIC	£160,384	£157,612
TPC3	Education Shared Trips	Eventwise NI	£125,775	£123,375
TPC4a	Tour, Talk, Taste and Living History	Eventwise NI	£92,823	£92,300
TPC4b	Bringing Life to our Historical Heritage	The Nerve Centre	£112,585	£112,550
TPC4c	Cross Community Musical Traditions Programme	Blu Zebra	£106,997	£106,920
TPC5a	Urban Sports Programme	No tenders received	£152,369	
TPC5b	Disability Sports Programme	NI Active Youth	£47,790	£43,260
TPC6	Education Programme for older and younger people	Kilcooley Women's Centre	£111,816	£111,732
TPC7	Your Place, Reimaging Our Space, Allotments/Men's Sheds	Council Parks Department	£172,575	£172,575

Theme 3 CCD	Tender	Successful Applicants	Available award	Award
CCD1	Church, Faith & Belief Initiative	Link Family Centre	£67,042	£58,812.87
CCD2a	Genealogy - Who do you think you are?	Gifted Trust	£62,707	£62,500
CCD2b	Exploring the Role of Women through the years in Peace Building	Kilcooley Women's Centre	£47,063	£47,062.13

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CCD2c	Ulster Scots & Irish Language	Kilcooley Women's Centre	£117,624	£117,452
CCD2d	History Tours & Stories of the Borough	Gifted Trust	£77,738	£77,202
CCD3a	Cultural Drama Production	Terra Nova	£165,564	£165,563.50
CCD3b	Cultural Celebrations/Mini Mela	ND YMCA	£87,320	£87,313
CCD4a	Welcome Place	ND YMCA	£113,651	£113,189.30
CCD4b	Chit, Chat AND Connect	No tenders received	£49,048	
TOTAL			£2,071,549	£1,677,394

Further updates were to follow in due course via the PEACEPLUS Partnership minutes.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report.

Proposed by Councillor Boyle, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

[Councillor Hollywood left the meeting at 19:52, returning at 19:55.]

Councillor Boyle welcomed the report and thanked officers for their work. He noted that 18 of the 20 required actions had been completed and referred to the two elements that had not yet been utilised. He asked when these had been readvertised and for how long. The Head of Community and Culture explained that the funding had been advertised and had closed earlier in the week. Applications were processed through Procurement before being passed to her team. Councillor Boyle asked about the likely timeline for decisions. The Head of Community and Culture stated that scoring would take place the following week, after which successful applicants would be notified. Updates would then be provided to the Committee through the PEACEPLUS Partnership.-advertised and for how long.

Councillor W Irvine was pleased to see the progress made and sought clarification regarding the cycle park at the Sportsplex, noting some confusion about which elements required planning permission. He asked how discussions with the Planning Department were progressing and what impact this might have on the programme. The Head of Community and Culture explained that officers had initially believed only a small element relating to the café required permission. However, following further discussions with the Head of Planning and Building Control and the Assets

and Property team, it had been agreed that a Certificate of Lawfulness application should be submitted under the rules for a proposed development. She confirmed that the process was ongoing.

Alderman Brooks thanked officers and, reflecting on his involvement as a former Chair of the PEACE Committee, expressed mixed feelings. He welcomed funding for Donaghadee, which he advised had historically received little investment, and supported the concept of a track for older young people. However, he noted that during the consultation process, the majority of attendees had expressed a preference for improved sports facilities rather than a bike track. Many local representatives had wished to explore the possibility of a multi-use pitch, which would have been widely supported as a compromise. He further recalled that, when the committee formally asked about the potential for a MUGA pitch, the then Director of Community and Wellbeing had stated that Donaghadee was imminently due to receive £9.5 million for sports facilities. This was three years ago and neither he nor other members were aware of any such investment materialising.

Alderman Brooks felt that the committee had been misled, and that many residents had disengaged from the process as a result. He was concerned about the chosen location for the pump track, noting that the Commons was valued green space and that alternative sites had been available. He remained unhappy with how the decision had been reached.

Alderman McRandal observed that the report read positively but reminded members that over a year had passed since the capital project selections were made. He noted that all facilities and associated animation projects must be completed by 2027 and asked whether any construction had begun. The Head of Community and Culture confirmed that works had yet to commence. Alderman McRandal asked how the Council could be confident of meeting the deadline and what the consequences would be if it did not. The Head of Community and Culture advised that the completion date had been extended to August 2028, as stated in the offer letter, and that projects must be finished by then to draw down funding. She explained that planning and preparatory work was ongoing but acknowledged that progress was slow at this early stage of the process.

Alderman McRandal raised concerns about due diligence in budgeting, noting that the report listed project budgets but did not comment on whether they were likely to be achieved or exceeded. The Head of Community and Culture stated that the Council was required to remain within the allocated budgets. While some contingency planning had been undertaken, no additional funding would be available. Alderman McRandal confirmed that no overspends were anticipated, and the Head of Community and Culture reiterated that the Council had committed from the outset to remain within budget.

Councillor Cochrane commented that while the pump track had been a case of, "something better than nothing," a MUGA pitch had been requested in Donaghadee for many years. He questioned how effectively the Council had engaged with local groups, noting that consultation feedback had favoured a MUGA pitch and that Hunts Park could have been considered as a location. He also referred to a recent incident of potential environmental crime in the Donaghadee area and was

concerned that the pump track would result in the loss of valuable green space. He echoed Alderman Brooks' concerns about the Council's responsiveness to community views and noted that sports clubs in Donaghadee had yet to see meaningful investment.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Boyle, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

16. RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF MOTION 599 – GRANT FUNDING REVIEW

[File Ref: CD23]

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that, in January 2024, the Council agreed to the following Notice of Motion:

“That this Council recognises the invaluable work undertaken by community/voluntary groups and organisations in this Borough in identifying and tackling the needs of communities and residents. The Council, therefore, commits to undertaking a root and branch review of community development funding, arts and heritage, sports development and all other funding streams to ensure that it provides the most efficient, effective and responsive service to our community, thus maximising impact, accessibility and equitable allocation of resources. The review should examine the following 4 categories:

Accessibility

- *Simplify application forms, review all funding applications to ensure that they are simple, clear and don't unnecessarily over burden applicants with information required.*
- *Digitisation of community grants, tenders and reporting to allow those that wish the option for simple and more efficient submissions.*
- *Building capacity in the community, creating a scheme to help the community to write and deliver more successful applications and bring in more external funding to this Borough.*

Communication Enhancement

- *Single grants list or 'open grants' page on council website with uniform advertisement of grants so that everyone receives the same information on available funding with a clear grants timetable, with scoring criteria clearly outlined including ranking and amount available across borough etc.*
- *A single point of contact to direct community and voluntary groups to support and assistance across different Council departments.*
- *Showcase & celebrate the great and valuable activities that the dedicated volunteers are delivering on this section of website.*

Equity

Make funding available proportional to size of communities/activities being delivered and the type of needs being addressed, community groups represent different sizes of population and area (areas of deprivation etc) and are doing different work ('essential needs' and 'non-essential') yet often funding is allocated 'per group' rather than area/numbers targeted or type of work being delivered.

- *Funding available to reflect the continued rise in costs., e.g., ensure funding available for community events is adequate to actually host events & activities. Funding is offered dependent upon the terms and conditions set by the funder, which may not be Council.*
- *Up front funding is uniform, that groups get the same up front funding percentage (e.g., 80%) across all Council funding to help with delivery.*
- *Equality of opportunity, ensuring that groups are not pigeonholed into a certain category of funding pots and can apply for all they are eligible for.*
- *Removal of 'first come first serve' funding to ensure level playing field.*

Efficiency

- *Creation of reserve lists of funding to ensure Council can allocate underspend and slippage quickly, easily and equitably to ensure no funds are returned to Departments.*
- *'Trusted Supplier Scheme' to allow emergency and time limited funding to be provided quicker.*
- *Logistical planning, ensuring that all grants are delivered in a timely manner to ensure impact on the ground."*

Following the notice of motion, a Grants Management Working Group, an internal working group consisting of relevant heads of service, service unit managers and officers that had responsibility for managing grant schemes, was established to support a detailed internal review and evaluation of grants that are offered and administered across Council.

The Grants Policy was updated and agreed by Council in September 2024. At that time, the Policy was deemed to be a Corporate Policy and therefore further updates on Notice of Motion and the work of the Grants Management Working Group was referred to the Councils Corporate Committee for reporting.

Elected Member Community Development Grants Working Group

The elected member working group was continuing to consider options in relation to how best to make use of the limited funding Council had available for community development grant schemes. A workshop was due to be held on 26th March 2026 and all members would be invited to attend to discuss all options fully, prior to any recommendations being brought to a future meeting of the Active and Healthy Committee.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

Proposed by Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Alderman Cummings, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor W Irvine spoke of how important the scheme was for many groups across the Borough and asked about the next steps, including whether workshop guidance would be provided and if any subsequent reports would return to the Committee. The Head of Community and Culture explained that a workshop would be beneficial in allowing members to work through their views on grant funding, including how much funding was received and how it was allocated each year. She noted that the updated grants policy now sat with the Corporate team and agreed that a workshop would allow for more detailed exploration.

Alderman Cummings supported these comments, adding that it was important to ensure substantial member input before the review was concluded. He highlighted that the Council had a finite grants budget and that it was essential to understand the level of need and how best to distribute funding to achieve maximum impact.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Alderman Cummings, that the recommendation be adopted.

17. RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF MOTION 676 – LOVE BALLYHOLME

[File Ref: CDV64]

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities which explained that, at the Council meeting held in September 2025 it was agreed:

“That this Council recognises the success of Love Ballyholme and thanks all involved for their hard work and commitment; further recognises the importance of community led initiatives to improve community cohesion, while supporting local businesses, and asks officers to bring back a report, which includes a plan and funding opportunities to support the replication of this community led model in the Rathmore area of Bangor”.

Introduction

Love Ballyholme:

- Was a local community organisation run by volunteers in the Ballyholme area of Bangor.
- Its purpose was to strengthen community life by connecting people across the neighbourhood.
- It collaborated with residents, churches, schools, and local businesses to create inclusive events.

Love Ballyholme was known for organising a range of community events, including:

Family and Seasonal Events

- Sandcastle building competitions on Ballyholme Beach,
- Christmas lights switch-on events in Ballyholme village,
- Easter family fun days in the local church grounds.

Community Engagement

- Volunteer evenings where locals could share ideas and get involved in shaping community activities. These were typically held at local cafes.

Purpose and Values

Love Ballyholme focuses on:

- Building community spirit
- Encouraging volunteering
- Supporting local businesses
- Creating safe, fun, family-friendly events
- Strengthening connections between different parts of the community (schools, churches, residents).

Councils Community Development section

The Community Development Team delivered a high-quality range of direct provision clubs to communities within the Ards and North Down Area. The Team assisted in the enablement and empowerment of community organisations and groups in the form of support and guidance with funding, governance, volunteer support, building relationships and connections within the groups and the community networks.

The Community Development Team provided communities with opportunities to connect and engage, to enhance skills base, to participate in training relevant to the needs of the group, to avail of funding opportunities, to create and develop new groups, to enable strong sustainable communities, providing support and much needed services within the heart of the community.

Community Development Strategic Priorities

Outcome 1: Partnership Solutions – Through the development of a collaborative process or through the development of collaborative processes, communities could work with them, and each other, to identify solutions that address local needs.

Outcome 2: Start-up/Sustainable Support - Local groups were sustainable and able to meet their own needs due to an empowering start-up and support process.

Outcome 3: Volunteering - Communities are happy and healthy due to the opportunities available for people to maximise their skills and talents.

Outcome 4: Training and Development - The communities were skilled, engaged and empowered through training and development opportunities.

Outcome 5: Clubs and Community Summer Schemes - Needs were addressed through the delivery of quality programmes with relevant partners in shared spaces.

Outcome 6: Grants - The communities had capacity to avail of Council funds to address locally identified needs.

Funding

Council funding which may apply to a community group included:

- Community Festivals fund - the aim of the Fund was to offer small grants to eligible groups/organisations to support the delivery of neighbourhood tourism initiatives within their community which could attract visitors or add to the

existing tourism offering, thereby increasing dwell time and spend in their city, town or village whilst supporting local volunteers and increasing civic pride and a sense of belonging.

- Ending Violence Against Women and Girls - The EVAWG **Change Fund** would help to mobilise grassroots action, support innovative delivery, and maximise the impact of community-led initiatives that contributed to the **prevention outcomes of the EVAWG Strategic Framework**.
- PCSP Small grant scheme - The PCSP Small Grants Scheme was an opportunity for local community and voluntary groups to develop community-led projects that addressed local safety concerns, including hate crime, cybercrime, road safety, anti-social behaviour, drugs and alcohol issues, and other relevant community safety concerns.
- Community development grants - for help with running costs for a constituted community or voluntary groups.
- Arts Grants - Available to arts, community and special interest groups throughout the Ards and North Down Borough area who wished to enhance existing, and undertake new community arts activities.
- In Bloom grant funding - Applications were invited from groups (eg schools, community associations, village groups etc) for funding to enable the purchase of bedding plants, shrub and tree material for planting within the city, towns and villages. Projects should help to instil local pride, create awareness of the environment and biodiversity, encourages cross community participation and involvement for those of all ages and abilities.
- Neighbourhood Tourism fund - Constituted Community and Voluntary groups could only apply for funding through **one** application, for **one** festival. A festival was defined as a one-off festival, or a series of related events that must take place over a maximum of a 12-week period and have a distinctive theme. A theme was defined as topic or subject that runs through the festival such as maritime, music or a specific commemoration.

This list was not a full list of all Council funding available. Further details were available at <https://www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/grants>

All Council funding required applicants to be part of a constituted group, have suitable insurance in place and a dedicated bank account.

The Community Development team compiled and circulated a weekly e-mail update with all relevant external funding available to a large wide ranging database and could assist and advise with applications for external funding.

Conclusion

Love Ballyholme as a group of local volunteers which worked by making people feel connected, welcome and proud of where they live.

Community Development officers are available to assist a group to start up in the Rathmore area of Bangor and in any area across the whole Borough who wished to develop the community they live in.

However, should council officers try to initiate or force a group to grow then it could be classed as a council initiative which would undermine the whole ethos of the Love Ballyholme model which was a group growing organically from local residents, proud of where they live.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report.

Proposed by Alderman McRandal, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

Alderman McRandal noted that the item had come about due to Councillor McBurney's Notice of Motion who unfortunately was not able to make this evening's meeting and welcomed the report.

Councillor W Irvine also welcomed the report, commenting that any opportunity to apply for internal or external grant funding would be beneficial for Love Ballyholme. He looked forward to the officer engagement that would follow.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman McRandal, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

18. RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF MOTION 695 – COMMUNITY CENTRE OPENINGS

[File Ref: CDV65]

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that Council owned and managed 21 Community Centres and Halls located throughout the Borough. These Centres and Halls facilitated a vast range of activities for customers, charities, Health Trusts, and Council directorates.

Christmas 2025

A notice of motion was agreed at Council in December 2025 as follows:

"In light of the recent difficulty of West Winds Community Church in accessing Council facilities to provide their Christmas Day service of worship, we agree that the Borough community facilities will be made available on Christmas Day, only on the strict proviso that the relevant individual staff choose to work on Christmas Day and cannot be mandated to do so. A review of this provision would then be included in the current and ongoing policy review relating to council community facilities".

On Christmas day 2024, the west winds community centre was opened in error, contrary to the policy and without the knowledge of senior Council management. In December 2025, informal engagement with the three Trade Unions on the Council's Joint Forum indicated that Unions would not be supportive of any staff being asked to work on Christmas Day. There was a further request for the issue to be added to the agenda of the March Joint Forum meeting for further discussion. On Christmas Day 2025, it was not possible to source the relevant employees, as outlined, who were willing to work.

2026/2027

Council designated 12 Bank and Public closure days per year. In order to ensure the consistent running of Council services, alternative dates were agreed by the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT), when required. The following dates had been agreed by CLT for 2026/27.

Bank / Public Holidays 2026-2027 – Leisure & Community Centres*

Easter	Sunday 5 April 2026 Monday 6 April 2026 <i>*Tuesday 7 April 2026 (Community Centres taking Tuesday 7 April instead of Sunday 5 April 2026)</i>
May Bank Holidays	Monday 4 May 2026 Monday 25 May 2026
July Holiday	Sunday 12 July 2026 Monday 13 July 2026 <i>*Tuesday 14 July 2026 (Community Centres taking Tuesday 14 instead of Sunday 12 July 2026)</i>
August Bank Holiday	Monday 31 August 2026
Christmas Holiday	Thursday 24 December 2026 Friday 25 December 2026 Saturday 26 December 2026
New Year’s Holiday	Friday 1 January 2027
St. Patrick’s Holiday	Wednesday 17 March 2027

Members would have been aware that a review of community halls and centres was ongoing and that part of this involved assessing the current operating model for all 21 facilities, including the hours and days of use.

In assessing the operating model, S3 consultants, who were carrying out the full review, would consider current usage, including hours and days of use and all comments received from stakeholders during the engagement process on when they would wish to have each of the centres available to book, including public and bank holidays. A positive update on the work undertaken to date was discussed with Elected Members at a Workshop on Thursday 22 January 2026. The final report would be brought to the Active and Healthy Communities Committee.

Legacy bookings on public / bank holidays in 2026

As a legacy arrangement, prior to 2015 and every year since then, an annual booking had been made for the Queens Hall, Newtownards that included Easter Monday and Tuesday.

Similarly, the Marquis Hall and Hamilton Hub had been booked on 12 July prior to the 2015 and annually since the merger, for use for Orange Lodge breakfast events. Members would have been aware that parades would be held on 13 July 2026 instead of 12 July in 2026.

Staff had been willing to work on these dates to accommodate the bookings.

Outside of these arrangements, no further bookings would be accepted for public or bank holidays when Community Centres and Halls were closed until the outcome of the review was reported to Council through this Committee.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report.

Proposed by Councillor S Irvine, seconded by Alderman Cummings, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor S Irvine was happy to note the report and would wait until the May for the consultation before further discussions.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor S Irvine, seconded by Alderman Cummings, that the recommendation be adopted.

19. RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF MOTION 636 – ARDS BLAIR MAYNE WELLBEING AND LEISURE COMPLEX CELEBRATION

[File Ref: LS/LA20]

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that In March 2024, Council agreed in response to Notice of Motion 636:

“That officers bring back a detailed report surrounding options to celebrate the huge success of the Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex. Options would include a Civic Reception to celebrate 6 years of the huge success of the facility in 2025”.

A report was subsequently provided by officers in April 2025 that detailed the following 3 potential options for a celebration event.

1. An event in January 2026 to mark seven years since the facilities were open with an invited dignitary who would be booked for the event.
2. An event scheduled to coincide with a visit by Royalty/ Dignitary at some time in 2025 or 2026.
3. An event in January 2029 to mark ten years since the facilities were open.

The officer’s recommendation was as follows: *“It is recommended that Council approve the development of Option 1 above and commit a budget of approx. £30,000 from leisure / C&W underspends throughout the 2025/26 year towards the*

event to be delivered in 2026 to mark seven years of success at the ABMWLC facility". At Committee the item FELL.

This report sought to propose an alternative response to the NoM that would celebrate the huge success of the facility without requiring a significant budget spend. However, it should be noted that the Civic Reception element of the NoM would therefore not be feasible.

Recent Success of ABMWLC

Members may have been aware that the success, profile, and staff of ABMWLC had been celebrated and recognised through recent media coverage.

For example, the recent Freedom of the Borough Celebration event for Rhys McClenaghan MBE at ABMWLC attracted hundreds of visitors and simultaneously highlighted the positive impact ABMWLC and Origin Gymnastics had on the sport from a recreational and elite level.

ABMWLC and the staff had facilitated several large scale sporting and leisure. Some of the sporting events in 2025/26 included:

- Age Friendly Roadshow
- Help for Heroes Event
- Ards and North Down Job Fair
- NI Schools netball competitions
- NI Schools Trampoline competitions
- Pickleball Competitions
- Swimming Galas

Members may also have recalled that ABMWLC and its staff had supported the Borough's residents during emergency responses, for example, during the Covid-19 pandemic when ABMWLC was used as a distribution centre for care packages to those most in need and more recently, ABMWLC was a relief centre during the World War 2 unexcavated bomb evacuation.

ABMWLC had also recently been recognised in the 2025 Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) Performance Awards. The national recognition was awarded upon APSE receiving verified data for the 2024–25 financial year evaluating excellence in service quality, community engagement, customer satisfaction, and value for money. ABMWLC was a named Finalist of the Awards selected from over 300 participating UK Councils. Of the recognition, the Mayor of Ards and North Down, Cllr Gillian McCollum, said: *"Being named a finalist at the APSE Awards is a fantastic achievement and a reflection of the dedication, professionalism and passion of our staff."* Two staff from the centre travelled to England to attend the awards ceremony.

Upcoming Events

Events were due to take place in the next number of months such as the Launch of the Borough's first Leisure Strategy to be held in ABMWLC and the upcoming Sports Awards would showcase the huge success and significant social value of ABMWLC.

The Strategy Launch would include a tour of the facility for the several attendees from various leisure organisations.

Chief Executive Roadshow

The Annual Chief Executive Roadshow event provided an opportunity for CLT to engage with staff from each Directorate and many of the Services within them. This year's Roadshow events were due to be held in March and one of these events was already planned to be held in ABMWLC to update leisure staff on corporate matters, and to celebrate the success of Council achievements as well as ABMWLC achievements.

The event did not require a closure of the facility and therefore ensured continuity of service to customers. However, consideration would be given to the scheduling of the event to enable as many staff to attend as possible. Officers would work collaboratively with colleagues in Corporate Communications and CLT to ensure the event suitably highlighted the success of the facility and recognised the achievements of the staff.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the report.

Proposed by Councillor Boyle, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Boyle welcomed the report and gave thanks to the officers. He noted the strong performance of the Blair Mayne Leisure Centre and emphasised that the Council should acknowledge and celebrate its achievements, including recent awards and high ratings. He thanked the officer for the detailed report and asked Members to support it.

Councillor W Irvine agreed, stating that he was happy to note the report. He described Ards Blair Mayne as a fantastic facility and recognised both its successes and the work currently being undertaken.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Boyle, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

20. NOTICES OF MOTION

20.1. NOTICE OF MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR DOUGLAS AND ALDERMAN CUMMINGS

“That this council is deeply concerned regarding the length of time that people battling with Motor Neurone Disease must wait to receive help through the Northern Ireland Housing Executive Disabled Facilities Grant.

To write to the Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Minister for Communities to ask what the current length of time is for MND sufferers to have home adaptations completed and to ask them to implement a scheme to fast track these vital and much needed home adaptations.”

Proposed by Councillor Douglas, seconded by Alderman Cummings, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

Councillor Douglas introduced the Notice of Motion, explaining that Motor Neurone Disease was a rapidly progressing condition affecting essential bodily functions and, at present, had no known cure. One third of those diagnosed perished within a year and half within two years, although some lived with the condition for much longer. As symptoms worsened significantly over time, she explained that people living with MND deserved safe and suitable homes and wished to remain with their loved ones for as long as possible. Timely and affordable home adaptations were vital to enabling individuals to live safely, independently and with dignity. While the Disabled Facilities Grant supported people with a range of conditions, new research indicated that it was largely unfit for those with rapidly progressing illnesses. Councillor Douglas noted that the average waiting time for MND applicants was 357 days and asked that the Council to write to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, its Chief Executive and the Minister for Communities to request clear timeframes and the introduction of a fast-track process for people with MND or similar conditions.

In seconding the Notice of Motion, Alderman Cummings paid tribute to Councillor Douglas, noting the personal significance of the issue for her. He commended the Notice of Motion, stressing that time was a core principle in the delivery of effective healthcare. Early intervention, he said, was essential to the long-term management of MND, and this principle should underpin the Council's response. He again commended his colleague and urged Members to support the motion.

Councillor Hollywood thanked his colleagues for their Notice of Motion and agreed.

Councillor W Irvine also gave thanks and recalled visiting a friend with MND where he had witnessed the heartbreaking deterioration caused by the condition. He stressed that the central issue was the length of time taken to process applications, noting that people simply could not wait as long as they did at the time of writing.

Alderman McRandal confirmed his support, acknowledging how close the issue was to Councillor Douglas and commended her for bringing it forward.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Douglas, seconded by Alderman Cummings, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

20.2. NOTICE OF MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR BRADY AND COUNCILLOR KENDALL

"This Council pledges to write to Stormont to request the introduction of femicide as a specific hate crime which therefore carries an appropriate sentence, as well as specific deradicalisation support while in prison in order to prevent reoffending. Femicide is defined as the intentional killing of a woman due to factors such as hatred, discrimination or subjugation.

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It also includes acts motivated by control, possession or domination over a woman, or in relation to her refusal to establish or maintain an emotional relationship, or as an act of limitation of her individual freedom.

This Council recognises that the motivation for this crime is rooted in a desire for the control and subjugation of women, driven by patriarchal attitudes in society.

That perpetrators can be partners but as our communities are changing, we are also seeing a growing trend of ‘honour based’ killings of women by family members.

That while femicide lies at the extreme end of the spectrum of violence against women, other acts motivated by control, possession, or dominance—such as domestic abuse, coercive control, and harassment—create the conditions in which femicide occurs. These acts serve as warning signs that, when left unaddressed, can escalate to fatal violence.

And that by establishing femicide as a distinct criminal offence, we send a clear message that gender-based violence will not be tolerated and that the lives of women have inherent value deserving of specific legal protection.”

[Councillor Kendall joined the meeting by zoom to second and speak on the Notice of Motion]

Proposed by Councillor Brady , seconded by Councillor Kendall, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

Councillor Brady read the Notice of Motion to the Committee and introduced its reasoning by referring to the 2020, “*Raise Your Voice*,” project and explaining that the intention was to build on that work to define femicide, which he described as the most extreme outcome of misogyny. He was concerned that the current approach was inadequate and warned that the situation would worsen if the root causes were not addressed. Citing a Belfast Telegraph report on adolescent males consuming extreme online content, he noted similar trends in Italy, which had recently introduced legislation comparable to what he was proposing.

He argued that Northern Ireland should take a lead in defining femicide to identify the underlying issues, acknowledging that while this alone would not solve the problem, it would be an essential first step. He referred to the murder of Sarah Montgomery in the Borough the previous year, advising that treating such killings as isolated incidents failed to recognise the wider pattern of genderbased violence. He highlighted that Northern Ireland had recorded the secondhighest femicide rate in 2017, with 28 women killed since 2020, and that the rate in 2021 was three times that of England and Wales, matched only by Romania. Councillor Brady explained that these crimes were driven by genderbased motivations and that failing to name them as such prevented effective action. He warned that harmful online influences, including figures such as Andrew Tate, were exacerbating the problem. Despite calls six years earlier, the Department of Justice had not reached a decision on defining femicide. Councillor Brady cited research which showed that 98% of women had experienced some form of violence or abuse, that 20% of all crime was domestic related, and that PSNI responded to domestic incidents every 16–17 minutes. He argued that other countries, including Italy, Croatia and Belgium, had already worked on some form of femicide legislation and that Northern Ireland must not fall behind.-based violence. He highlighted that Northern Ireland had recorded the second-highest femicide rate in 2017, with 28 women killed since 2020, and that the

rate in 2021 was three times that of England and Wales, matched only by Romania. -based motivations and that failing to name them as such prevented effective action. He warned that harmful online influences, including figures such as Andrew Tate, were exacerbating the problem. -related, and that PSNI responded to domestic incidents every 16–17 minutes. He argued that other countries, including Italy, Croatia and Belgium, had already

Councillor Kendall, as seconder, stated that Northern Ireland faced a crisis of violence against women and girls that was both devastating and deeply entrenched. She reiterated that 28 women and girls had been violently killed since 2020, the highest rate across the UK and Ireland. She also referred to the murder of Sarah Montgomery, describing it as part of a wider pattern that had not been confronted with sufficient seriousness. Councillor Kendall explained that 30,000 domestic related incidents and 18,000 domestic abuse crimes had been reported to the PSNI in March 2025, describing the figures as appalling. She argued that without legal recognition of femicide, the underlying misogyny driving these crimes could not be properly identified or addressed. She noted that countries such as Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Spain, Italy and France had already recognised femicide in law, and she stressed that when women were killed because they were women, it should be named as such. -related incidents and 18,000 domestic abuse crimes had been reported to the PSNI in March 2025, describing the figures as appalling. She argued that without legal recognition of femicide, the underlying misogyny driving these crimes could not be properly identified or addressed. She noted that countries such as Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Spain, Italy and France had already recognised femicide in law, and she stressed that when women were killed because they were women, it should be named as such.

Councillor Moore advised of the Alliance Party's strong support for action to end violence against women and girls, describing the current levels as intolerable. She noted that Women's Aid was one of the Mayor's chosen charities, reflecting the importance of the issue to her party. However, there were limitations in creating a separate offence of femicide, particularly the difficulty of proving gender based hatred in court. She explained that this was why no such legal definition existed in UK law and why Stormont had instead sought to introduce aggravating factors to existing offences. While gender had not yet been included, there was scope for future additions and further consultation was planned. Additionally, the Department of Justice was already working to strengthen protections for women and girls, and any new approach should complement, rather than jeopardise, ongoing work. Nevertheless, Councillor Moore expressed support for the sentiment behind the motion and hoped a constructive way forward could be found. -based hatred in court. She explained that this was why no such legal definition existed in UK law and why Stormont had instead sought to introduce aggravating factors to existing offences.

Councillor Brady thanked Members for their contributions and in, summing up, acknowledged that there were challenges in proving gender based motivation but maintained that pursuing a legal definition was worthwhile. He argued that, at the very least, it would help educate young men and that if other European countries could legislate for femicide, Northern Ireland could do the same. -based motivation but maintained that pursuing a legal definition was worthwhile. He argued that, at the

very least, it would help educate young men and that if other European countries could legislate for femicide, Northern Ireland could do the same.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Brady, seconded by Councillor Kendall, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

[As Councillor Ashe was to speak on the next item, she stepped down from the Chair at 20:26 and Councillor W Irvine took her place as Vice Chair.]

20.3. NOTICE OF MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR ASHE AND COUNCILLOR MOORE

“That Council notes the success of the inclusion of effigies and emblems to the penalties for ‘in-programme’ bonfires; that Council tasks officers to engage with groups to add flags to the list of penalties for ‘in-programme’ bonfires; and that officers return a report updating Members on these actions by the June committee meeting.”

Proposed by Councillor Ashe, seconded by Councillor Moore, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

Councillor Ashe read the Notice of Motion to the Committee before thanking officers for their excellent work, including their efforts in relation to effigies, emblems and environmental issues, noting that this was no small task and that they deserved further credit. She referred to correspondence she had sent to officers and highlighted the extensive engagement they undertook with community groups over many weeks and months, particularly around the addition of flags that could incur penalties. She stressed the importance of establishing a clear timeline through the Notice of Motion and ensuring that officers had the full support of members in these discussions. Its aim was not to merely be aspirational in seeking to remove flags from bonfires, noting that the issue had been discussed extensively in recent months.

Councillor Ashe spoke of an irony in that residents celebrated achievements under certain flags, yet those same flags were burned on bonfires. She noted that while ratepayers were expected to contribute to Council finances, those funds were then used to support in-programme bonfires where such burning occurred, without penalties being applied. Many residents found the burning of flags abhorrent, and she regularly received emails from constituents expressing their dismay, regardless of whether they identified with the nationality represented. She argued that, as elected representatives committed to an inclusive Northern Ireland that respected a shared history, the Council could and should do better in relation to in-programme bonfires. She urged Members to support the motion as a means of inspiring the kind of Borough they wished to build.-programme bonfires where such burning occurred, without penalties being applied. -programme bonfires. She urged Members to support the motion as a means of inspiring the kind of

Councillor Moore also thanked officers for their work, adding that it was often difficult and thankless. She acknowledged that officers frequently found themselves in

challenging situations and commended the strong relationships they had built with community groups, which had enabled the progress achieved to date. Effigies and emblems were addressed within the Cultural Expression Agreement, but flags were not, and they continued to appear on bonfires, including at the Castle Gardens bonfire in her own DEA. The issue was fundamentally about ensuring that the Council's actions reflected its values and about responding to residents who felt deeply uncomfortable seeing flags burned on bonfires.

Councillor Moore referenced the Londonderry bonfire, which had displayed Union flags, and reiterated her appreciation for the officers who had worked long and hard to reach the current position. She noted that the Council could exercise the one power it had; namely, withholding funding when terms were breached and argued that flags should be explicitly excluded from bonfires. While the Council could not compel groups to comply, it could refuse to collude with practices that undermined good relations.

Councillor Moore advised that some bonfires outside the Council scheme were better run than those within it, citing Castle Gardens as an example of one that generated frequent complaints. She encouraged those with influence to promote responsibility and a positive vision for cultural expression, highlighting Kilcooley as an example of a well-managed bonfire which was located appropriately, free from flags and emblems, with strict controls on materials and proper facilities provided that demonstrated the standards the Council wished to promote. She urged Members to support the motion.

Councillor Boyle reflected that, compared with 21 years earlier, significant progress had been made. He acknowledged the hard work of officers and his own involvement over the years but cautioned against complacency, noting that further progress was still required. He stated that he supported all cultural events, provided they did not insult others and questioned why anyone would burn a flag, describing it as disrespectful to both others and to the symbol itself. He argued that cultural expression should not be about provoking or upsetting those from different backgrounds. There was an importance of continued dialogue and Good Relations officers worked tirelessly to do so. Any change often required patience and persistence. He shared an example from the Peninsula where he had persuaded a group to remove Union flags from a bonfire, telling them that "if they go low, you go high," noting that the flags had never returned. He confirmed his support for the motion, stating that tradition alone did not justify harmful practices.

Councillor Douglas stated that she would not support the Notice of Motion. She acknowledged the significant progress made in the management of bonfires across the Borough and attributed much of this to the approach adopted by Mr Murdock, who had successfully reduced the number of flags and paramilitary murals. She highlighted the success of the Newtownards bonfire, which had been achieved through political involvement and constructive officer engagement. She contrasted this with the former North Down Council, where political intervention had been perceived as dictatorial and had led to poor outcomes. The current Notice of Motion risked repeating past mistakes and was unnecessary, appearing more aligned with electioneering than practical improvement.

Councillor Douglas stressed that the existing process worked because Good Relations officers were trusted and because groups felt they retained a degree of autonomy. She warned that political interference could cause groups to disengage, as had happened in 2015 when voluntary groups withdrew and paramilitary influence increased, resulting in months of flags and murals dominating the area. Relationships were strong and progress was being made, but the Motion was not the way forward. She added that there was longstanding suspicion of the Alliance Party within loyalist communities, and that political involvement risked undermining the trust officers had built. She concluded, stating that Councillors should step back and allow the Good Relations team to continue their work, describing political intervention as unwanted and counterproductive.

Councillor S Irvine appreciated the intent behind the Notice of Motion but was surprised it had been brought forward, noting that these conversations had been ongoing for years. He expressed concern that it placed an unnecessary burden on officers who already worked extremely hard in challenging circumstances. He advised that progress achieved to date had not happened by accident but through trust and careful engagement. Councillor S Irvine asked the proposers whether they had sat in rooms with communities and had these conversations directly, as he had. He referred to his own experience during the Newtownards effigy and poster removals, where dialogue and mutual respect had delivered results. He noted significant progress, including tidier bonfire sites, the removal of tyres, the introduction of beacons, and the removal of seven murals in Newtownards, with numbers reduced from previous years. He warned that formalising the request in this way risked undoing progress, as communities often felt overwhelmed when too many demands were placed on them at once. Moving too quickly without relationship building, he said, would undermine the trust that had been carefully developed. He noted that work was already happening steadily and strategically and cautioned that Motions such as this could be perceived as politically driven. He believed a time might come when the burning of foreign flags was no longer an issue, but that this would only be achieved through continued engagement and partnership. For these reasons, Councillor S Irvine could not support the Notice of Motion and requested a recorded vote.

Alderman Cummings advised that the concerns lay not with the principle of the Motion but with the methodology and manner in which it would be implemented. He acknowledged the significant progress made by the Good Relations team, including the work of Mr Murdock, whose success had been built on conversations and bridge-building. He noted that even the Council's own flags review had been difficult and had not reached a conclusion. Alderman Cummings also referenced the PSNI, who held primary responsibility for law and order and who themselves advocated a collaborative approach to flags and emblems issues. He stressed that the law already supported the Council in this area and his concern was that the Notice of Motion placed obligations on officers that did not currently exist and risked shifting their work away from outreach and good relations. He did not believe it was the Council's role to take the lead in this way, arguing instead that the police should do so in partnership with others.

Alderman McRandal, having listened to the debate, was pleased that it had remained civil. He argued that nothing in the Notice of Motion threatened cultural

expression. Northern Ireland, he said, was a place where people identified as nationalist, unionist or neither, and all identities were valid. He questioned the purpose of burning flags on bonfires, stating that its only intention could be to insult. He referred to Councillor Ashe’s comments about irony and reminded members that this was Good Relations funding. He asked what was, “good relations,” about burning a flag. Alderman McRandal recalled a workshop where members had agreed that the burning of flags was unacceptable and asked how unionist Councillors would feel if the Union Jack was burned. He said the Council set high standards in all other areas and should do so here as well.

Alderman Brooks said he had not intended to speak but felt compelled to do so. In his DEA, he had engaged with community groups about bonfires and likened the approach to dealing with a child; one could encourage and reward, or scold and punish. He believed that quiet, one-to-one engagement achieved results. He could not support the Notice of Motion because it would be perceived as compelling groups not to burn flags, and he believed that compulsion would provoke a backlash and potentially create bigger problems for the Borough.

Councillor W Irvine said the Council did its best to ensure that nothing offensive appeared at managed sites. However, tying officers down with rigid requirements could be counterproductive. He stressed that good work was ongoing and that open dialogue was essential to continued progress.

Councillor Ashe, in closing, responded by addressing comments about politicisation. She said the Notice of Motion did not come from an Alliance Party manifesto but from residents across her DEA who contacted her regularly. She noted that some of the funding for bonfires came from ratepayers and questioned whether it was fair that Irish nationals or others whose identity was represented by the flags being burned were contributing financially to events that offended them. She said the Council did not offer rebates to those affected and argued that it was reasonable to question whether public money should support practices that caused offence. She added that the Notice of Motion was intended to support officers, giving them a stronger mandate in conversations with groups by demonstrating that members were behind them.

The Notice of Motion was put to the meeting and declared FELL with 4 voting FOR, 8 AGAINST, 2 ABSTENTIONS and 2 ABSENT.

FOR (4) Aldermen McRandal	AGAINST (8) Aldermen Brooks Cummings	ABSTAINED (2) Aldermen	ABSENT (2) Aldermen
Councillors Ashe Boyle Moore	Councillor Cochrane Douglas S Irvine W Irvine Kerr	Councillors Hollywood McKee	Councillor Chambers McBurney

McClellan

[Councillor W Irvine relinquished his seat to the Chair, Councillor Ashe at 20:55.]

21. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

The Chairman advised that there were no items of Any Other Notified Business.

NOTED.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Councillor Moore, seconded by Councillor Kerr, that the public/press be excluded during the discussion of the undernoted items of confidential business.

[Councillors Hollywood and Moore left the meeting due to Declarations of Interest in the following item of discussion.]

REPORTS FOR APPROVAL DELEGATED TO COMMITTEE

22. TENDER FOR ADVICE SERVICES

[File Ref: CDV61]

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION – SCHEDULE 6

Exemption: 3 - relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that Members would have been aware that Council awarded the contract for provision of frontline advice services to Community Advice Ards and North Down (CAAND) in April 2021 for a yearly contract sum. (Funding was provided by the Department of Communities). The contract was for a period of 3 years, with the option of a two-year extension, 12 months at a time. To facilitate the delivery of the advice services, a service level agreement was currently in place between CAAND and Ards and North Down Borough Council.

Following the evaluation, the tender received from Community Advice Ards and North Down was deemed to meet Council requirements and recommended for award for an initial 12-month period with an option to extend for a further 4 x 12-month period. The agreement would be reviewed and brought back to Council for consideration once the new policy and funding framework for independent Advice and Debt Services has been implemented by DfC.

RECOMMENDED that Council awards the Contract for Advice Services to CAAND for a period of 12-month with an option to extend for a further 4 x 12-month periods, subject to review and by written agreement of both parties.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Alderman McRandal, that the recommendation be adopted.

23. PUBLIC SPACES CCTV MONITORING CONTRACT – EXTENSION OPTION

[File Ref: 90606]

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION – SCHEDULE 6

Exemption: 3 - relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities which explained that the current contract period for the Provision of Public Spaces CCTV Monitoring Contract was due to end on 31 March 2026 with the option to extend the contract by 12-months, up to 3 times.

RECOMMENDED that Council agrees to extend the contract with Sword Security, now Bidvest Noonan, for a further 12 months.

Proposed by Alderman Cummings, seconded by Councillor S Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Cummings, seconded by Councillor S Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

REPORTS FOR APPROVAL

24. BANGOR AND NEWTOWNARDS MARKET PROVISION

[File Ref: 90404]

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION – SCHEDULE 6

Exemption: 3 - relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that Council's current market provision was operating via a hybrid model.

RECOMMENDED that Council agrees:

1. to proceed with a pre-market engagement exercise for Bangor and Newtownards Markets as detailed in this report, and
2. for Officers to consult with the market traders and Ards and North Down Business Forum.

Proposed by Councillor Moore, seconded by Councillor Kerr, that the recommendation be adopted.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Moore, seconded by Councillor Kerr, that the recommendation be adopted.

RE-ADMITANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Councillor McClean, seconded by Councillor Douglas, that the public/press be re-admitted to the meeting.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 21:05.

Unclassified

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

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	25 February 2026
Responsible Director	Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	
Date of Report	10 February 2026
File Reference	
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Deputation Request - National Association of Councillors
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Deputation Request

A deputation request, dated 5 February 2026, has been received from Hazel Legge of National Association of Councillors Northern Ireland Region.

The attached form states that the request is to 'enable a delegation of the NAC-NI Executive Committee, to address and update all elected members of Ards and North Down Borough Council and to outline the work of the NAC – both locally and nationally - along with the progress made and delivery for our 462 Councillors elected to the 11 Councils in Northern Ireland.'

The request is for the deputation to be heard at a full Council meeting.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council considers this request.



Deputation Request Form

A 'deputation request' refers to a person or group of persons asking to appear in person before the Council or a Council Committee in order to address the Council or Committee (as the case may be) on a particular matter.

The procedure governing deputations is contained within section 12 of the Council's Standing Orders, a copy of which is set out below.

If you wish to make a deputation request, please complete this form and return it to Ards and North Down Borough Council via the following email address: member.services@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk, providing us with a contact email or postal address and contact telephone number when doing so (please do not include your personal contact details on this form – see privacy notice below).

Please note that it will be for the Council to decide whether to accede to your request and, if it does, to determine when and where the deputation will be heard. The Council will draw upon the information you provide in this form in order to reach its decision, therefore you are encouraged to clearly outline the topic of your request and the reason why you wish to raise the matter before the Council or a Committee.

Applicant Details

We apply to Ards and North Down Borough Council to make a deputation and should this application be successful, I/we agree to comply with section 12 of the Council's Standing Orders.

Name of person(s) making the deputation request:	Hazel Legge
Date of request:	5 February 2026
If making the deputation on behalf of an organisation or a group of individuals, name of the organisation / individuals:	National Association of Councillors Northern Ireland Region
Name of Committee (if known) to which you wish to make your deputation:	Full Council

Please summarise below (continuing onto an additional page if required) the subject matter of your deputation request and the reason why you wish to raise the matter before the Council or a Committee.

To enable a delegation of the NAC-NI Executive Committee, to address and update all elected members of Ards and North Down Borough Council and to outline the work of the NAC – both locally and nationally - along with the progress made and delivery for our 462 Councillors elected to the 11 Councils in Northern Ireland.

Extract from Ards and North Down Borough Council's Standing Orders, Version 12, January 2025

12. Deputations

(1) Deputations, from any source, shall only be admitted to address the Council provided the Chief Executive has received seven working days notice of the intended deputation and a statement of its objective, and subject to the agreement of the Council.

(2) In the case of an emergency, deputations, from any source, shall only be admitted to address the Council provided the Chief Executive has received one working day's notice of the intended deputation and a statement of its objective, and subject to the agreement of the Mayor.

(3) The deputation shall be confined to the presentation of a statement, or copy of resolutions, and shall not make more than two short addresses by any two members of the deputation. The totality of the address shall not exceed 10 minutes followed by a maximum 15 minutes question and answer session.

(4) Deputations should not be repetitive and, where possible, issues of a similar or linked nature should be contained in one deputation. Where a deputation has made a presentation to the Council, the Council will decline to accept another deputation on the same issue from the same individual or group for a period of six months.

(5) No further discussion or proposals beyond questions shall take place at a Council or Committee meeting until after the deputation has withdrawn (members of the deputation will remain subject to Standing Order 8). Any subsequent proposal made should be limited to a request for officers to bring back a report on the matters raised by the deputation.

Privacy notice – how we will use information about you

Ards and North Down Borough Council is a Data Processor under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) for the personal data it gathers when receiving and administering deputation requests.

You are providing your personal data to the Council whose lawful basis for processing it falls within the following three categories:

- a) **Consent** - you consent to the information being processed for the specific purpose of the Council considering your deputation request;
- b) **Public task** - the processing is necessary in order for the Council to consider your request in line with its Standing Orders which were established under the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014; and
- c) **Legitimate interests** - the processing is necessary for your legitimate interests (or the legitimate interests of a third party) in order that Council may consider your deputation request.

The personal data you provide when making a deputation request may be shared internally within the Council with staff who are involved in decision making and administration in respect of Council and Committee meetings. This includes both the data contained within this form and any other data, such as an email address or other contact details, we may gather when you send the form to us.

The information you provide on this form only will be provided as a report to Council and potentially thereafter as a report to a Committee (depending on whether Council accedes to your request). Any such report will not usually be heard 'in confidence' and therefore the report will also be published on the Council website prior to the meeting. Members of the press and public may attend the Council (and Committee) meeting at which the report is discussed. An audio recording and written minute will be made of the meeting and both will be published on the website.

Your personal data will not be shared or disclosed to any other organisation without your consent, unless the law permits or places an obligation on the Council to do so.

Personal data is held and stored by the Council in a safe and secure manner and in compliance with Data Protection legislation and in line with the Council's Records Retention and Disposal Schedule.

If you have any queries regarding the processing of your personal data, please contact:

Data Protection Officer
Ards and North Down Borough Council
City Hall, The Castle
Bangor
BT20 4BT
Email: dataprotection@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk
Tel: 0300 013 3333

Unclassified

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ITEM 11**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	25 February 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Environmental Services
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Parks and Cemeteries
Date of Report	23 January 2026
File Reference	88005
Legislation	Local Government Act NI 2014 Youth and Recreational services NI Order
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below: N/A
Subject	Request for Delegated Authority to Environment Committee - Approval of Ward Park Full Business Case.
Attachments	

At the Environment Committee on 4 January 2026 under the scheme of delegation, Council agreed to award the contract for the Ward Park Environmental Improvement Project to the most economically advantageous tenderer. However, due to a process anomaly the Full Business Case (FBC) which is an internal governance matter is yet to be approved by Council to allow contract documents to be signed.

In order to expedite this process as efficiently as possible and allow the contractor to commence work, officers are requesting that Council delegate authority to the Environment Committee on 4 March 2026, to consider and potentially approve the FBC. This will allow contract discussions to be finalised, and the contract sealed at the Council meeting on 25 March 2026.

Not Applicable

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RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council Grants delegated authority to the Environment Committee on 4 March 2026 for consideration of the Full Business Case pertaining to Ward Park Environmental Improvement Project.

Unclassified

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ITEM 14**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	25 February 2026
Responsible Director	Acting Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	
Date of Report	10 February 2026
File Reference	
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Notice of Motion Status Report
Attachments	Notice of Motion tracker

Please find attached a Status Report in respect of Notices of Motion.

This is a standing item on the Council agenda each month and its aim is to keep Members updated on the outcome of Motions. It should be noted that as each Motion is dealt with it will be removed from the report.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council notes the report.

	Responsible Committee	Date Received	Submitted by	Notice (Original and any amendment)	Council & Committee Meetings (Date & Item)	Status (Most recent status update at the top followed by detail of what has been accomplished to date)	Responsible Officer	Final Outcome
11	Active & Healthy Communities	31.05.15	Councillor Muir & Alderman Keery	Rory McIlroy Recognition	Council June 2015 Corporate Services Committee October 2015	Officers discussing options with McIlroy Organisation. Proposal currently being drafted related to supporting young people in sport for their consideration and then will be reported to Council. The Chief Executive has now met with the Rory McIlroy Foundation and a proposal will be presented to them in due course.	Adele Faulkner (Director of Active & Healthy Communities)	
330	Environment	21.01.19	Councillor Brooks & Councillor Smith	This Council brings back a report on providing a shelter or sheltered area near the slipway in Donaghadee which would provide cover for the growing numbers of open water swimmers that use the area on a daily basis.	Council January 2019 Environment Committee 06.02.19 Item 16.3	Report to be brought to April 2026 EC	Peter Caldwell (Head of Estates)	
370	Active & Healthy Communities	13.09.19	Councillor Cathcart & Alderman Gibson	That this Council acknowledges that Council byelaws are in need of review. Many of our Council byelaws are now outdated and do not cover new housing developments and playparks in the Borough. The Council therefore will carry out a comprehensive review of Council byelaws to create a modern system to assist the Council in meeting the outcomes identified within the Community Plan	Council - September 2019 Referred to Environment Committee - October 2019 Environment Committee 02.09.20 Item 12 Council - April 2025 Item 14	Report to be brought back on the possible strengthening of no alcohol consumption byelaws on Council land and at the Borough's beaches and parks. Report to also explore options on possible restrictions of open fires and the use of disposable BBQs at beaches and parks. Review of the byelaws to commence and be undertaken in three stages. Phase 1 - Scope, Phase 2 - Council Review and Phase 3 - Recommendation and Decision Financial provision 2026/27. Update to May A&HC Committee.	Gareth Kinnear Head of Environmental Health & Regulatory Services	
514	Environment	19.05.22	Councillor Cummings & Councillor Johnson	Business case for redesign of the parallel sports pitches and facilities at Park Way, Comber	Council June 2022 Community & Wellbeing Committee September 2022 and deferred to October 2022	Update report to be brought to EC April 2026 NOM assigned to EC 01.10.2025 following transformation Council agreed Comber 3G pitch is ranked 21st in project prioritisation. Stakeholder engagement to commence at the appropriate time. Leasing application has been received from Comber Rec.	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)	

519	Active & Healthy Communities	20.06.22	Councillor Kendall, Councillor McRandat & Councillor McClean	Engagement with relevant community stakeholders to ascertain community need and desires in respect of the Queen's Leisure Complex	Council June 2022 Community & Wellbeing Committee September 2022 and deferred to October 2022	Report to November 2024 C&W Committee. Community Engagement took place on 24th September 2024; meeting with councillors in January 2025, further engagement has been requested and clarity is still awaited on the details of that request. Report to June C&W Committee if that clarity is obtained in advance. Meeting to be held on 27 November 2025 with the Mayor, Members and Officers had to be postponed until the new year. Update paper went to P&P Committee on 8 January 2026. Report to March A&HC Committee.	Anton Cozzo Head of Leisure & Nikki Dorrian (Interim Head of Community and Culture)
522	Corporate Services	05.07.22	Alderman Irvine and Alderman Keery Amendment received from Councillor Cathcart	That this Council changes the name of Queen's Parade to Queen's Platinum Jubilee Parade in honour and recognition of the 70th anniversary of the Queen's accession to the throne. *** Amendment - That this Council, in recognition of Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee and her conferment of City Status upon Bangor, agrees to name an appropriate place or building within Bangor in her honour and that future Council Bangor entrance signs make reference to Bangor being a Platinum Jubilee City.	Council July 2022 Environment Committee September 2022 Corporate Services January 2024	April 2023 - Letter requesting permission to use the Royal Name sent to the Cabinet Office and awaiting response January 2024 - Report brought to Corporate Committee Amendment Agreed and advice sought from Cabinet Office December 2024 - Advice still outstanding January 2026 - Advice now received, update report to be presented to Corporate Committee	Alison Curtis (Head of Corporate Governance)
564	Environment	08.02.23	Alderman Irvine and Alderman Keery	That this Council tasks officers to begin discussions with the Education Authority with regards to the Future of Bloomfield playing fields, Bangor. This is to include the lease and the exploring of the possibility of bringing the facility up to intermediate level for football. A report to be brought back to Council following said discussions.	Council February 2023 Community & Wellbeing Committee March 2023	Update report to be brought to a future Committee Officers still awaiting response from EA at January 2026 NOM assigned to EC 01.10.2025 following transformation Officers awaiting response from EA in order for report to be brought back to future Environment Committee. EA has responded to say they '...would be in contact when they are ready to progress...' several chasers have been sent. 26.02.25 Email received from Virginia Lowe of the EA confirming there is no further update at this time. Compliance section continues to chase.	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)

567	Corporate Services	14.02.23	Councillor Adair & Councillor Edmund	This Council rename the square at Portavogie War Memorial Queen Elizabeth Square in memory of our late Sovereign Queen Elizabeth II.	Council February 2023 Corporate Services Committee March 2023	<p>A response has been received from the Cabinet Office and a report went back to Committee</p> <p>30/5/24 - follow up letter sent to Cabinet Office for update.</p> <p>Letters sent to the Cabinet Office requesting use of the Royal Name</p> <p>July 2024 - Advice now received - Report presented at September CSC. Agreed that combined EQIA more appropriate . A further report to be brought to CSC when EQIA ready to go.</p> <p>January 2026 - Advice now recieved on other requests, update report to be presented to Corporate Committee</p>	Alison Curtis (Head of Corporate Governance)	
586	Corporate Services	16.10.23	Councillor Cathcart & Councillor Martin	That this Council, further to recent positive discussions with landowners, agrees to reexamine the April 2014 decision of North Down Borough Council to accept a gift of open space at Ambleside, Bangor, which was never completed and tasks Council Officers to bring back a report looking at (i) acquiring the land and (ii) options around future uses for the land.	Council October 2023 Corporate Services Committee November 2023 Corporate Services Committee September 2024	<p>Dec 2026 : The sellers' solicitors have confirmed that they were not willing to undertake first registration. Officers sought further legal advice and CLT agreed to refer the matter to Arthur Moir – the former Registrar of the Land Registry would be asked to provide advice on the various issues in the title and provide an indication of the likelihood of achieving Good Leasehold title. This will allow the Council to make a better informed decision on the purchase. This project is continuing to incur costs to the Council.</p> <p>January 2026 update : The former registrar of the Land Registry has just provided a report to Council's solicitor on the likelihood of Council achieving Good Title on the land at Ambleside and this looks positive. We are waiting for the Council's solicitor to provide advice on the Council's next steps and this will be in the next few weeks.</p>	Alison Curtis (Head of Corporate Governance)	

595	Environment	16.11.23	Councillor McCracken & Councillor Blaney	<p>This Council recognises the importance of Bangor’s early Christian heritage in the story of our city, and its role in local tourism strategies. This Council requests that officers bring back a report which evaluates how the physical link between two main sites, Bangor Abbey and the North Down Museum, could be improved, to include the renovation and potential remodelling of Bell’s Walk, with consideration for improved wayfinding and lighting. The motion also requests that officers consider how Bangor Castle Gardens and The Walled Garden could be better incorporated into the walking route, and how the overall attraction could be packaged to create a more complete tourism and placemaking experience.</p>	Council 29.11.2023	<p>Update report to be brought to March 2026 EC</p> <p>NOM assigned to EC 01.10.2025 following transformation</p> <p>Initial report to December 2024 C&W Committee</p> <p>Second report to June 2025 C&W Committee.</p>	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)	
599	Active & Healthy Communities	21.11.23	Councillor Cathcart & Councillor Gilmour	<p>“That this Council recognises the invaluable work undertaken by community/voluntary groups and organisations in this Borough in identifying and tackling the needs of communities and residents. The Council therefore, commits to undertaking a root and branch review of community development funding, arts and heritage, sports development and all other funding streams to ensure that it provides the most efficient, effective and responsive service to our community, thus maximising impact, accessibility and equitable allocation of resources. The review should examine the following 4 categories: (see further wording on agenda)</p>	<p>Council 20.12.23</p> <p>Community & Wellbeing Committee January 2024 and April 2024 and June 2024 and September 2024.</p> <p>Corporate Committee September 2024</p>	<p>Project ongoing for 24 months with reports brought to C&W Committee as necessary. First working group was on 10th May 2024. Grants transformation project already underway. Regular Updates will be brought. Next report to June 2026 A&HC Committee</p>	Nikki Dorrian (Interim Head of Community and Culture)	

616	Environment	19.03.24	Councillor McCollum & Councillor Irwin	<p>That this Council recognises the significant opportunities which the redevelopment of Donaghadee Harbour could bring to the local economy in terms of leisure sailing and tourism and thus instructs officers to work with local groups to scope potential operational facilities which could enhance the offering in the Harbour and further brings back a feasibility report on the various options, including costings and possible funding streams.</p> <p>Further, that this Council recognises the issues associated with high winds and coastal change and reviews the original 2020 Harbour Study conducted by RPS including the necessity for an offshore breakwater and agrees to bring back a report in time to be presented to Council in September 2024, outlining the budget required to undertake this work, any key considerations, next steps and identify which stakeholders would need to be involved.</p>	<p>Council 27.03.24 Item 18.3 Environment Committee 10.04.24 Item 14 Environment Committee 04.09.24 Item 14 Environment Committee 06.11.24 Item 3 Environment Committee 11.06.25 Item 3</p>	<p>Update report to be brought to March 2026 EC</p> <p>Agreed that the Council writes to the Department for Infrastructure Rivers Agency, sharing the findings of the study undertaken by AECOM, and asking that enhanced coastal defence schemes be progressed for the inner and outer parades in Donaghadee. Further agreed that Council officers make meaningful engagement with local stakeholders and incorporate their responses in an update report to be brought back to Council within 6 months.</p> <p>Agreed that the Council proceeds with the 'Phase 1' further investigation work regarding potential Donaghadee sea defence enhancements.</p> <p>Agreed that Council proceeds as proposed in section 4 of the report, with the outcome of engagement outlined being reported back to Environment Committee in 2025. Environment Committee April 2024 - Agreed to bring back a report.</p>	Peter Caldwell (Head of Estates)	
619	Environment	29.05.24	Councillor Cochrane and Councillor Thompson	<p>That this Council notes with concern the temporary closure of Groomsport Tennis Courts due to issues around the safety of the playing surface.</p> <p>Further to this Council tasks officers to bring back a report on Tennis Court maintenance throughout the Borough and will commit to ensuring all our Tennis Court facilities are properly maintained and are fully accessible to all. Council will also promote the use of Tennis facilities in the Borough as we approach the spring/summer season.</p>	<p>Council 29.05.24 Item 20.1</p> <p>Community & Wellbeing 15.01.25 Item 5</p> <p>Environment Committee 07.01.26 Item 8</p>	<p>Agreed at EC 07.01.26: That the Development of the Greyabbey MUGA Project be delivered as a joint Village Renewal and Parks Project with progress report coming to the Council.</p> <p>Agreed at C&W 15.01.25: That the Council agree the recommendation of the Committee but further tasks officers to explore the feasibility of incorporating a MUGA as part of the redevelopment of Greyabbey Tennis Courts including engagement with current users, sports clubs and community groups to ensure use for all sports and maximum investment and sport participation for the community of Greyabbey.</p> <p>Assigned to January 2025 C&W Agenda. Moved to EC due to restructure.</p>	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)	

624	Corporate Services	20.05.24	Councillor Kendall, Alderman McRandal and Alderman Graham	This Council notes that, subsequent to submission of a Notice of Motion in 2017, Council agreed to provide funding to assist in the building of a new war memorial in Conlig village; and to liaise with, and assist, the Conlig War Memorial Project Group in their efforts to build a monument to the seventeen men who are known to have lost their lives in World War I.	Council - May 2024 Corporate Services Committee June	January 2026: This matter is progressing in line with the actions agreed by both The Council and Conlig Community Regeneration Group. The NIHE has agreed to the sale of the land and it is with LPS for a valuation.	Alison Curtis (Head of Corporate Governance) & Peter Caldwell (Head of Estates)	
629	Environment	19.08.24	Councillors Gilmour, Hollywood, McClean and McKee	That this council notes that significant investment was previously made to deliver a play park, MUGA and amateur league sized football pitch on the Clandeboye road. Notes with regret there have been ongoing issues with the pitch. Instructs officers to reinstate the goalposts and mark out the pitch so that it can be played on by the local community. Furthermore, following consultation with the local community, that a report is brought back regarding the longer term maintenance and enhancement of the site, to ensure any necessary provisions can be considered during the rate setting process to ensure that the football pitch is fit for purpose and can be used as previously agreed."	Council 28 August 2024 (Item 25.3) September C&W Committee Environment Committee 3 December 2025 (Item 6)	Update report to be brought to April 2026 EC Update report at EC December: ALTERNATIVE RECOMENDATION AGREED. That the Item be deferred to allow officers to set up a meeting as soon as possible between Council officers, CVCA and interested environment committee & Bangor West DEA elected reps. NOM assigned to EC 01.10.2025 following transformation Report to January 2025 C&W Committee. Funding approved for 25/26 to progress first stage. Report to June C&W Committee with progress report as communicated to DEA members and local community in April and May 2025 on next steps and plans for enhancement of the site. Update to October 2025 C&WC.	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)	
631	Corporate Services	7.8.24	Alderman McIlveen, Councillor Boyle, Alderman McDowell, Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, Councillor Smart, Councillor	That this Council bestows the Freedom of the Borough upon Rhys McClenaghan - European, Commonwealth, World and Olympic Gold Medallist - in recognition of his outstanding achievements in sport.	Council September 2024 (Item 13.1)	Meeting with Rhys McClenaghan took place in January 2025. January 2026: Progressing - Events on 23 and 25th January 2026 .	Alison Curtis (Head of Corporate Governance)	

632	Environment	21.08.24	Councillor Irwin and Alderman McRandal	That this Council tasks officers with producing a report outlining how pedestrian access to Household Recycling Centres in the Borough could be facilitated. This report should include consideration of health and safety requirements, the HRC booking system and the ability to provide pedestrian access in other council areas in Northern Ireland.	Council September 2024 (Item 13.2) Environment Committee 2 October 2024 (Item 11.1) Environment Committee 7 May 2025 (Item 3) Environment Committee 3 December 2025 (Item 4)	Report to be brought to April 2026 EC Agreed not to continue with the pedestrian access arrangements in their current form. Furthermore, officers to investigate other means of safely providing pedestrian access to HRC sites alongside vehicular access and report the outcome of this to a future meeting. Agreed at EC 7 May 2025 to proceed with a three-month trial at Hollywood and Donaghadee HRCs Agreed at April 2025 Environment Committee to proceed with Option 3 for a pilot scheme in Hollywood and Donaghadee HRCs in order to obtain a proper evidence basis for demand; and that consideration of pedestrian access is included in the work around the future of the HRC estate as outlined in Option 1. Further report to follow. Agreed at Environment Committee 2 October 2024	Keith Patterson (Head of Waste and Cleansing)	
636	Active & Healthy Communities	16.10.24	Councillors Boyle & Wray	That officers bring back a detailed report surrounding options to celebrate the huge success of the Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex. Options would include a Civic Reception to celebrate 6 years of the huge success of the facility in 2025	Council October 2024 Item 23.3 - Community & Wellbeing Committee November 2024	Report to April C&WC. To be referred back to a future C&WC as per April Council decision. Report to March 2026 A&HCC.	Anton Cozzo Head of Leisure	
638	Place & Prosperity	22.10.2024	Councillors Harbinson & McCracken	That this Council should: 1. Prepare a visual map for all public sector land in Bangor City Centre and Ards Town Centre and colour code holdings that are potentially connected with future developments (even if not yet fully agreed), including Bangor Waterfront, Queen's Parade, Newtownards Citizen's Hub and the Council's Car Park Strategy. This includes public land belonging to the Council and NI Executive Departments. 2. To further identify public sector land that is currently unproductive and outside the scope of wider strategies, which could be made available for future private sector development. This includes land that is either vacant, contains empty or derelict buildings, or contains buildings that are under-utilised or dated to the point that redevelopment is required. The map should also include land that is facilitating meanwhile use. 3. Prepare a summary report to highlight how unproductive public sector land could be re-purposed and how such a process could be progressed within the bounds of current planning considerations and Council/Executive disposal policies.	Place & Prosperity Committee November 2024 (Item 14.2) Council October 2024 (Item 23.5)	Strategic Development, Lands, and the GIS officer met 16.10.25 to discuss how to get the information from GIS. Update to be provided to Elected Members by 17.10.25 Update report to P&P in the first quarter of 2026 Agreed at 7 Nov 2024 P&P and ratified by 27 Nov Council 2024 - initial report to be brought back to future P&P Committee	Director of Place and Prosperity	

640		05.11.2024	Councillor Cochrane and Alderman Adair	<p>That this Council condemns the failure by the UK Government to prioritise farming families and the rural economy as part of the Autumn Budget; notes with deep concern the decisions to introduce new thresholds for Inheritance Tax and Agricultural Property Relief, which will jeopardise succession planning on farms and discourage investment in many farm businesses.</p> <p>Further to this, Council calls on the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to bring forward proposals to mitigate the impact of these damaging policies on local farms, as well as avoid significant increases in food prices; further commits to engage with the Chancellor at the earliest opportunity and demonstrate his absolute support for farmers affected by this budget and further calls on the Minister to work with the Minister of Finance to deliver an early and firm commitment to farming families that current levels of financial support will not only be maintained but increased in the next financial year.</p>	Council meeting 27.11.2024 - Heard and agreed.	Letter sent to Minister on 9 December and response received 13 January. Report to go to January Council.		
655	Environment	18.02.2025	Alderman Cummings and Councillor Douglas	That this Council brings back a report outlining the design, cost and positioning of an additional plaque on the War Memorial in Comber, to accommodate a list of historically researched names, currently being collated as per War Memorial Trust guidelines, of the fallen in the Great War 1914-1918, which were previously not included	Council 26.02.2025 Environment Committee 5 March 2025	Update report to be brought to EC April 2026 Agreed to adopt Notice of Motion at Environment Committee 05.03.2025. Agreed to refer to Environment Committee at Council 26.02.25	Peter Caldwell (Head of Estates)	

657	Environment	18.02.2025	Alderman Adair & Councillor Edmund	That Council task officers to bring forward a report on options and potential funding opportunities to enhance and improve Council Football Pitches at Islandview Road Greyabbey to ensure future intermediate football standards by the local sporting clubs and community of Greyabbey.	Council 26.02.2025 - Community & Wellbeing Committee March 2025	Update report to be brought to EC April 2026 NOM assigned to EC 01.10.2025 following transformation Agreed that Council task officers to bring forward a report on options and potential funding opportunities to enhance and improve Council Football Pitches at Islandview Road Greyabbey to ensure future intermediate football standards by the local sporting clubs and community of Greyabbey	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)
658	Environment	03.03.2025	Councillor McClean & Councillor Cathcart	That Council notes the tired and inconsistent presentation of Christmas lights and illuminations in Bangor City Centre, particularly during the Christmas period, and considers potential festive lighting improvements for Christmas 2025. Further, that Council tasks officers to bring back a report presenting options that draw on successful practice and displays elsewhere, including the use of festoon lighting over Main Street. The report should look at the feasibility of the future expansion of these concepts to the remainder of the Borough, if proven successful in Bangor.	Council 26.03.2025 Environment Committee 02.04.2025 Environment Committee 11.06.25 Council 25.06.25	Update report to be brought to EC May 2026 Agreed the proposals in the update report in relation to Christmas Lighting in Bangor, utilising DfC funding wherever possible, with any shortfall coming from existing Christmas Lighting maintenance budgets. Agreed to adopt Notice of Motion - Environment Committee 02.04.2025. Report to future EC.	Peter Caldwell (Head of Estates)
665	Environment	15.04.2025	Councillor Morgan and Councillor Ashe	We are all aware that dog ownership has increased significantly over the past years. There is fenced of area on "Muckers" in Comber, which is currently being used by NIW which when they have finished their work might lend itself to creating a dog park. This Council should bring back a report that explores the options for creating a dog park in Comber.	Council 30.04.25	Update report to be brought to EC March 2026 NOM assigned to EC 01.10.2025 following transformation Assigned to June 2025 C&W Agenda	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)

667	Corporate Services	23.04.2025	Councillor S Irvine and Alderman McIlveen	That this Council notes with deep respect the tragic loss of four Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) soldiers - John Bradley (25) , John Birch (28), Stephen Smart (23), and Michael Adams (23) - who were murdered in a 1,000 lb IRA landmine attack on April 9, 1990, on the Ballydugan Road near Downpatrick. Recognises the pain and sacrifice felt by their families, comrades, and the wider community, and acknowledges the bravery of these young men who served their country during a difficult period in our history. Proposes that a permanent memorial be added to the cenotaph in Newtownards in honour of these four UDR soldiers, ensuring their memory is preserved within the heart of their home town for future generations. Requests that this Council engage with the families of the fallen, veteran organisations, and local stakeholders to develop appropriate wording and design for the memorial addition, and to ensure the tribute is carried out with the dignity and sensitivity it deserves.	Council 28.05.25 and Corporate Committee June 2025	December update : Consultation with key stakeholders took place end November and report will be presented to January 2026 Committee. January 2026 update : Approach approved as per Corporate Services Committee Report in Jan 2026. Remove from tracker in February.	Alison Curtis (Head of Corporate Governance)	
668	Active & Healthy Communities	23.04.25	Councillor Wray and Councillor Hollywood	Council amends funding eligibility criteria to allow for voluntary dance groups to avail of grants within either the arts or sport funding streams. Council acknowledges the opportunities performance arts bring in terms of community wellbeing, education, tourism, and our local economy. Officers will provide a report on how Council can further grow performance art across Ards and North Down	Council 28.05.25 and Community and Wellbeing Committee 18.06.25	Report to March 2026 A&HC Committee.	Anton Cozzo Head of Leisure	
670	Environment	07.05.25	Councillor Morgan and Councillor Irwin	This Council is pleased with the recycling rates for waste that have been achieved in the Borough, however there are currently limited facilities to recycle litter. This sends out a poor message to our residents and visitors. This Council asks that officers bring back a report that explores how, and when recycling litter bins could be introduced to the Borough. Indication of costs should be included.	Council 28.05.25 and Environment Committee 11.06.25	Report to be brought to EC March 2026 Agreed to adopt NOM at June 2025 Committee Assigned to June 2025 EC Agenda	Keith Patterson (Head of Waste and Cleansing)	

671	Active & Healthy Communities	20.05.25	Councillor Kendall and Councillor McKee	<p>Responsible Dog Walking in Public Spaces. This Council, as a 'Dog Friendly Borough' recognises the increasing use of public parks and footpaths by professional and recreational dog walkers, and the need to balance animal welfare, public safety, and the enjoyment of public spaces for all of our Borough's residents. This Council notes that: Multiple dogs under the control of a single individual may pose challenges to effective management and public safety. Excessive numbers of dogs being walked simultaneously can lead to increased risk of dog fights, interference with other park users, fouling, and uncontrolled behaviour; There has been an increasing number of professional dog walkers, offering services within the Borough and there is a lack of licencing, registration or other requirements which may lead to inadequate insurance, training and experience, adding further potential risks to people and pets; and - Many local authorities across the UK, including our neighbour Belfast City Council, have introduced limits on the number of dogs that may be walked at one time. The Council therefore resolves to: Produce a report outlining the costs and steps required to introduce a local restriction under the relevant provisions of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environments Act (Northern Ireland) 2011: Limiting the number of dogs that any one person may be in charge of to a maximum of four at any given time in public spaces. Mandating that professional dog walkers must have dogs on leads at all times to ensure dog control and accountability for dog behaviours. Include in the report, the provision and cost of a complementary public education campaign, to inform residents, recreational and professional dog walkers about the new limit, about what it means to have a dog under your control in public spaces (whether on or off lead), and what promoting responsible dog control and safety in shared spaces should be. To write to the DAERA Minister to ask him to introduce, and provide funding support to Councils to enforce, mandatory registration of professional dog walkers to help to ensure suitable animal welfare standards, the provision of suitable training, experience, insurance, and public safety.</p>	Council 25.06.25 Environment Committee - September Item 20.1	Agreed to adopt NOM at September EC Assigned to September 2025 EC Agenda. Moved to A&HC due to restructure. Update to March 2026 A&HC Committee. Letter sent to Andrew Muir 12.02.26 by CE.	Gareth Kinnear Head of Environmental Health & Regulatory Services	
672	Place & Prosperity	20.05.25	Councillor McCracken and Councillor Harbinson	<p>Amendment to Notice of Motion 672 submitted by Councillor McCracken and Councillor Harbinson</p> <p>"This Council welcomes the update on Marine Gardens provided by Bangor Marine on 13 August 2025 and agrees that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Council officers should work alongside Bangor Marine to support public communication around this project. This includes inviting Bangor Marine to the next meeting of the Bangor CAG to update stakeholders, supporting the proposed public consultation hub led by Bangor Marine, and by holding regular meetings with Bangor Marine to ensure accurate and complementary messaging on respective websites, newsletters and social media. 2. Council should also work with Bangor Marine to support a commercial marketing plan with the aim of attracting investment for the further phases of Queen's Parade along with complementary investment that will support the ambitions of the wider City Deal. An initial outline should be brought to Committee in Q1 2026 with a view to approve draft marketing collateral that can be used at future property investment conferences in the UK and abroad." 	P&P 4.9.25 Council 25.06.25	1. BM to be invited to next CAG (soon to be relaunched as LAG, likely Jan/Feb 2026 whilst the C/TAG to LAG process is formalised 2. Re: commercial marketing plan, update report to P&P in first quarter of 2026. Agreed to adopt NOM at Sept 2025 P&P - ratified at Sept 2025 Council	Director of Place and Prosperity	

673	Environment	21.05.25	Alderman Graham and Councillor Cochrane	That this Council notes the popularity of public spaces such as beaches during the summer months. Further to this Council will task officers to bring back a report to explore options for the extension of public toilet opening hours during the summer months to 9pm near beaches and other busy areas. Council Officers will further bring back a report on expanding baby changing facilities within our Borough at public toilets.	Council 25.06.25 Environment Committee - September Item 20.2 Environment Committee 03.12.2025 Item 3	Update report to be brought to future EC Report brought to December 2025 EC: ALTERNATIVE RECOMENDATION AGREED to note the report and bring back a report on costs and options on extending the summer opening hours to cover April and September as well as May to August, to redevelop and relaunch a community scheme to increase provisions for the public during the summer months and review its impacts in order to bring a report back to Council after a period of review. Agreed to adopt NOM at September EC Assigned to September 2025 EC Agenda	Keith Patterson (Head of Waste and Cleansing)	
676	Active & Healthy Communities	16.06.25	Councillor McBurney and Councillor McCollum	That this Council recognises the success of Love Ballyholme and thanks all involved for their hard work and commitment; further recognises the importance of community led initiatives to improve community cohesion, while supporting local businesses, and asks officers to bring back a report, which includes a plan and funding opportunities to support the replication of this community led model in the Rathmore area of Bangor.	Council 30.07.25 - Community & Wellbeing Committee	Assigned to September 2025 C&W Agenda. Report to February 2026 A&HC Committee. Remove after call in.	Nikki Dorrian (Interim Head of Community and Culture)	
677	Environment	24.06.25	Alderman Smith and Councillor Smart	That this Council produces a report to scope the potential of introducing a public hire bicycle scheme similar to Belfast Bikes for use across the new Greenway network. That the report outlines the benefits, risks, costs, potential partnerships and any funding opportunities including those provided through DfI Active Travel to inform a Council decision on progressing such a scheme.	Council 30.07.25 - Community & Wellbeing Committee	Update report to be brought to EC April 2026 NOM assigned to EC 01.10.2025 following transformation Assigned to September 2025 C&W Agenda	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)	
678	Corporate Services	21.07.25	Alderman Brooks and Councillor Chambers	That this Council notes the role played by Donaghadee Cricket Club in promoting sport, health, and community engagement in Donaghadee, particularly for our youth. Council further requests that officers prepare a report to look at how sports clubs like Donaghadee could be better supported by Council, particular through the lease charges levied against the clubs acknowledging the great community work these organisations do as well as the role they play in maintaining the facilities	Council 30.07.25 - Community & Wellbeing Committee	January 2026 update: The Lands team are looking at options and a report will be brought back to committee.	Alison Curtis (Head of Corporate Governance)	
680	Active & Healthy Communities	05.09.25	Councillor Cochrane and Councillor Edmund	That this Council recognises the importance of every child having the opportunity to learn to swim - a vital life skill that supports physical health, mental wellbeing, and water safety. Swimming is not only one of the most effective forms of exercise, but also a key activity for building confidence and resilience in young people. Further to this Council agrees to- 1. An Audit of current indoor swimming lesson provision and also open water safety awareness programmes across the Borough against local demand; and 2. The development of a strategy to ensure that no child is denied access to swimming lessons or safety awareness programmes due to cost or capacity.	Council 24.09.25 - October Active and Healthy Communities Committee	Leisure Officers to progress.	Anton Cozzo Head of Leisure	

681	Corporate Services	09.09.25	Alderman McIlveen and Councillor Cathcart	That this Council expresses its deep disappointment at the correspondence sent to each councillor in Northern Ireland by NAC NI dated 2 September 2025 recommending that councillors take "industrial" action and considers the balloting of members to take any form of strike action is inappropriate, ill-judged and unlawful. Notes that the eleven Councils in Northern Ireland pay a corporate rate to fund the NAC NI in Northern Ireland and that individual councillors are by default members of NAC NI rather than by choice. Is further of the view that if the NAC NI wishes to act like a union then it should be governed by the same laws as any other union and that membership should be voluntary and a matter for individual councillors rather than funded by the ratepayer. As such, this Council agrees to withdraw its corporate funding from the NAC NI, writes to inform the NAC NI of this decision and calls on the executive members of the NAC NI to resign their positions given the gross over-reach of this correspondence and how it has brought the role of hard-working councillors into disrepute.	Council 24.09.25 - October Corporate Services Committee	Added to the agenda for CS 14/10, 14/11 letter sent to NAC NI by CEX. NAC NI have confirmed that this will be discussed at the meeting of their Executive Committee in December and that they will respond after this.		
682	Corporate Services	17.09.25	Alderman Graham and Councillor Gilmour	Council recognising the importance of Holywood as a Garrison town, seeks in conjunction with the Craigavad and Helen's Bay Branch of the Royal British Legion, to bring a military event to Holywood.	Council 24.09.25. Corporate Services Committee	December update : Meeting to take place in Jan 2026 to work up proposal. Once there is a proposal a report will be presented to Committee. January 2026 update : Meeting has taken place, draft plan proposed, facilitator to confirm with relevant parties . Further meeting to confirm arrangements in March and report will be brought back then.	Alison Curtis (Head of Corporate Governance)	
684	Environment	10.10.25	Councillor Hennessy and Alderman Brooks	That this Council brings back a report, with associated costs, detailing the possible road safety and lighting improvements that could be made between Donaghadee harbour and Donaghadee Community Centre.	Council 29.10.25 Environment Committee	Report to be brought to May 2026 EC Agreed to adopt NOM at November EC 2025 - ratified at November 2025 Council Assigned to November 2025 EC Agenda	Peter Caldwell (Head of Estates)	
685	Active & Healthy Communities	14.10.25	Councillor Kendall and Councillor S Irvine	This Council recognises the link between domestic abuse and non-accidental harm to companion animals and the emotional trauma this causes victims and survivors, acknowledging that companion animals are often used as tools of coercion and control in abusive relationships and that their welfare is intrinsically linked to the safety and wellbeing of victims. The introduction and implementation of Ruby's Law, as proposed in other parts of the UK, seeks to provide legal protection for pets in households where domestic abuse occurs, ensuring that they are considered in protective orders and safeguarding measures. Therefore, this councils resolves to: 1. Write to the Ministers for Justice, Communities, Finance, DAERA, and Health, calling for: 1. The introduction of Ruby's Law in Northern Ireland; and 2. Them to work in partnership to deliver a cross-departmental collaboration with Causeway Coast Dog Rescue charity, and other animal welfare and domestic abuse organisations as required, to ensure the development of robust and enforceable provisions, taking a multidisciplinary approach to identify key stakeholders and government agencies to support victims and survivors of domestic abuse and coercive relationships and the protection of their pets. 2. Promote public awareness of the connection between domestic abuse, coercive control and animal abuse, in collaboration with statutory agencies and animal welfare organisations. 3. Encourage engagement and collaboration within all Councils and other key stakeholders to support the implementation of Ruby's Law in the community to protect animals and people.	Council 29.10.25 AHC	Report to March 2026 A&HC Committee.	Gareth Kinnear (Interim Head of Environmental Health)	

686	Corporate Services	15.10.25	Councillor Cochrane and Councillor Gilmour	That this Council is deeply alarmed that the definition of victim in the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 does not distinguish between those who perpetrated wrongdoing during the Troubles and the innocent victims they harmed, injured, killed or bereaved; believes that innocent victims should not have to interact with terrorists and their supporters when accessing victim support services; asserts that there is no moral equivalence between victim-makers and innocent victims; welcomes the fact that the victims pension legislation makes a clear distinction between perpetrator and victim; condemns the Alliance Party's decision to intentionally blur this line by removing the word "innocent" from the description of a victim in a recent Assembly motion addressing the legacy of the past; and resolves to write to the Justice Minister requesting that she personally apologise for suggesting that victim makers could also be considered victims.	Council 29.10.25 Corporate Services Committee	On the draft agenda for CS 11/11. Reply received from Justice Minister and report to go to CS Feb 2026		
687	Active & Healthy Communities	16.10.25	Councillor McCollum and Councillor Wray	That this Council recognises the valuable work undertaken by the Community Safety team in tackling anti-social behaviour throughout the Borough. That this Council also acknowledges the significant and increasing pressures on those officers to meet the growing and complex demands of their workload. Furthermore, that Council notes the recent review of the criminal legislative framework to help tackle Anti-Social Behaviour and the greater powers which may devolve to Council, and tasks officers to prepare a report which outlines the needs of the Borough in relation to community safety and the resources currently available, details a range of measures appropriate to address those needs, including recruitment of additional officers, and identifies requisite funding requirements and opportunities.	Council 29.10.25. AHC	Deferred to December A&HC Committee. Report to March A&HC Committee.	Nikki Dorrian (Interim Head of Community and Culture)	
688	Corporate Services	16.10.25	Alderman Graham and Alderman McIlveen	That Council in liaison with Belfast City Airport arranges a visit to the Airport for members and officers.	Council 29.10.25 Corporate Services Committee	On the draft agenda for CS 11/11. CEX office to issue an invite in January. Deputation request issued to BCA via their representative at Brown O'Connor.		
689	Environment	21.10.25	Alderman Adair and Councillor Edmund	That Council task officers to bring forward a report on the possibly of permitting wooden memorials at our cemeteries as part of regulations going forward.	Council 29.10.25 Environment Committee	Report to be brought to May 2026 EC Agreed to adopt NOM at November EC - ratified at November 2025 Council Assigned to November 2025 EC Agenda	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)	
690	Corporate Services	31.10.25	Councillor W Irvine and Councillor S Irvine	That this Council pledges to oppose the introduction of any Digital ID system that would be mandatory or linked to essential services. We resolve to write to the Prime Minister urging the Government to abandon any Digital ID initiative and calling for a full public consultation to take place on the subject prior to any future proposals being brought forward.	Council November 26.11.25 Corporate Services Committee	28.1.2026 Letter sent to Prime Minister from CEX.		

691	Environment	11.11.25	Alderman Smith and Councillor Chambers	<p>This Council notes the Ulster Farmers' Union's unprecedented motion of no confidence in the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), which reflects deep and widespread frustration within the farming community.</p> <p>This Council recognises the unrelenting pressures faced by family farmers across Northern Ireland, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The unresolved and escalating crisis surrounding Bovine Tuberculosis (bTB); •Uncertainty regarding future Inheritance Tax arrangements for farm succession; •Continued planning paralysis affecting essential agricultural development; and •Increasing policy and regulatory pressures, with little meaningful assurance, progress, or action from DAERA to address these challenges. <p>This Council further acknowledges that family farmers are the backbone of Northern Ireland's agri-food sector, sustaining rural communities, underpinning the regional economy, and serving as essential custodians of our environment and biodiversity.</p> <p>This Council therefore calls on the Minister for DAERA to move beyond an "open door" approach and to actively engage, listen, and deliver tangible action in partnership with the Ulster Farmers' Union. Family farmers must be treated as key stakeholders in shaping policy that secures the future of the agri-food industry, protects our environment, and sustains rural livelihoods.</p>	Council November 26.11.25 Environment Committee 7 January 2026 (Item 9.1)	To be removed from the tracker following February 2026 Council	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)	
692	Active & Healthy Communities	12.11.25	Councillor McKee and Councillor Kendall	<p>This Council notes with deep concern the recent deaths of two-family dogs in our Borough, linked to panic caused by fireworks and the many other animals that suffer year on year. We recognise the severe distress fireworks cause to people, pets, livestock, and wildlife, and the growing public concern over unregulated use. We express our sympathies to the affected families and commend local animal welfare groups for their ongoing support.</p> <p>This Council writes to The Department of Justice to request the commission of an urgent review of Northern Ireland's fireworks legislation, to include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.The potential introduction of stricter controls on the sale and importation of fireworks, limiting use to licensed, organised displays only. 2.Enhancing PSNI and Council enforcement powers to tackle illegal and antisocial firework use and increasing the regulatory powers of the Department of Justice as the primary authority responsible for oversight and enforcement of fireworks legislation in Northern Ireland. 3.Establishing Northern Ireland-wide time restrictions to reduce unexpected noise and protect animals. <p>Further that Council works with AND PCSP to explore how we can effectively tackle the antisocial behaviour associated with fireworks.</p>	Council November 26.11.25 Active and Healthy Communities Committee	Officers to progress. Letter to go to DoJ when Call in expires after Jan 2026 Council.	Gareth Kinnear Head of Environmental Health & Regulatory Services & Nikki Dorrian (Interim Head of Community)	

693	Corporate Services	26.11.25	Alderman McRandal and Alderman McAlpine	<p>That this Council notes with concern the signs of erosion which have arisen on Station Road, Craigavon in recent years and that this Council recognises that Station Road, Craigavon is an integral section of the North Down coastal path and the Ulster Way.</p> <p>That this Council reassesses whether it has responsibility for maintaining the road and for strengthening the sea wall and sea defences along the North Down coastal path section of Station Road, in view of: the fact that Council was prepared to assume responsibility for the road and sea defences under the failed Greenway project; the fact that this is a right of way as asserted by Council.</p> <p>That a report is brought back to the relevant Committee, to include assessment of who owns or is responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the sea wall and sea defences along Station Road.</p>	Council December 2025 Environment Committee 7 January 2026 Item 9.2	<p>Report to be brought to a future meeting of the Corporate Services Committee to include legal advice regarding responsibility for the sea defence wall.</p> <p>NOM reassigned to Corporate Services Committee 11.02.2026 Agreed to adopt NOM at January 2026 Environment Committee</p>	Peter Caldwell (Head of Estates) Alison Curtis (Head of Administration)	
694	Corporate Services	27.11.25	Councillor Ashe and Councillor McBurney	<p>That this Council returns a report researching paternity leave provision for council employees including, but not limited to: benchmarking of paternity leave provision against appropriate organisations; options to improve paternity leave policy for council employees; projected costings of these options; and anything else officers deem prudent.</p>	Council December 2025 and Corporate Services Committee January 2026	Corporate Committee decision 13 January 2026 decision to defer. ON CS February 2026 agenda		
695	Active & Healthy Communities	01.12.25	Councillor Smart and Alderman McIveen	<p>In light of the recent difficulty of West Winds Community Church in accessing council facilities to provide their Christmas Day service of worship, we agree that the Borough community facilities will be made available on Christmas Day, only on the strict proviso that the relevant individual staff choose to work on Christmas Day and cannot be mandated to do so.</p> <p>A review of this provision would then be included in the current and ongoing policy review relating to council community facilities.</p>	Heard and Agreed at Council meeting December 17 2025	Report to February 2026 A&HC Committee. Remove after call in.	Nikki Dorrian (Interim Head of Community and Culture)	
697	Active & Healthy Communities	08.12.25	Councillor Douglas and Alderman Cummings	<p>That this council is deeply concerned regarding the length of time that people battling with Motor Neurone Disease must wait to receive help through the Northern Ireland Housing Executive Disabled Facilities Grant. To write to the Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Minister for Communities to ask what the current length of time is for MND sufferers to have home adaptations completed and to ask them to implement a scheme to fast track these vital and much needed home adaptations.</p>	Council December 2025 and Active and Healthy Communities Committee Jan 2026	Deferred to February A&HC Committee.	Nikki Dorrian (Interim Head of Community and Culture)	

698	Active & Healthy Communities	09.12.25	Councillor Wray and Councillor Chambers	<p>Council acknowledges the vital role that our voluntary community groups play across the borough. Through our grants programmes these groups deliver initiatives such as community events, sporting activities, and festivals promoting tourism.</p> <p>As we rely on these groups to continue this important work across the borough, we must ensure they are supported, and that the management of these grants is easy to navigate.</p> <p>Advance payments are essential for small organisations who don't have large reserve sums of money in their bank accounts. Another complication for groups is being passed across various council departments during the delivery of their initiative.</p> <p>In order to improve this process, Officers will bring back a report considering the implications of making the following changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The advance payments available to groups is extended to 80%. • If a group is successful in a funding application they will be allocated an officer within council who will act as the only point of contact between the group and Council. 	Council December 2025 and Active and Healthy Communities Committee Jan 2026	Report to May A&HC Committee	Nikki Dorrian (Interim Head of Community and Culture)	
699	Corporate Services	09.12.25	Councillor McBurney and Councillor McCollum	<p>That this Council notes with concern the increased cost of living and the impact this has upon families and individuals within the Borough; further notes that the absence of a clear Anti-Poverty Strategy makes it challenging to understand and strengthen our role in alleviating poverty and reducing inequality and therefore tasks Officers with bringing forward proposals to enhance the effectiveness of Council's contribution to poverty alleviation, including but not limited to, funding allocated to volunteer led community groups involved in poverty alleviation work. This work should complement, and not duplicate, any borough-wide Anti-Poverty action planning being undertaken by external partners.</p>	Council December 2025 and Corporate Services Committee Jan 2026	Final ratified minute to go to Community Planning Manager		
700	Environment	10.12.25	Councillor Cochrane and councillor Thompson	<p>That this Council notes the growing popularity of Linear Park in Bangor East as a hub for the local community. Further to this, officers will bring back a report exploring options for providing path markings in both Upper and Lower Linear Park for runners, such as distance indicators eg. 1 km, 2 km, along with appropriate signage to assist those who wish to keep fit in the Park. Officers will also examine options for upgrading the path and accompanying drainage system in Lower Linear Park between the bridge and the Ring Road, in light of persistent flooding and drainage issues.</p>	Council January 2026 and Environment February 2026			
701	Environment	08.01.26	Alderman McIlveen and Alderman Armstrong-Cotter	<p>That this Council notes that the natural stone blinding pathways around Londonderry Park are prone to saturation with water resulting in significant standing water and sludginess which adversely impacts on the use and enjoyment of the park. Council therefore requests that officers prepare a business case with a view to paving or tarmacking the paths in the park to improve the user experience.</p>	Council January 2026 and Environment February 2026			
702	Environment	20.01.26	Councillor Cathcart and Councillor McClean	<p>That this Council recognises its responsibility to ensure that our city, towns and villages are looking the best that they can be, to be welcoming places for visitors and our residents. It is therefore essential that the correct structures and policies are in place to ensure that within the resources made available all expected maintenance is being carried out efficiently and effectively. A proactive maintenance regime was agreed when this Council was created and has worked well in some areas but has not had the desired impact in other areas. Basic maintenance and upkeep of our public realm particularly in our centres and prominent areas can and should be improved. The Council therefore commits to reporting on a review of its current proactive maintenance and cleansing regimes, highlighting options and opportunities for improvement and associated budgetary requirements, so as to allow members to consider potential improvements in outcomes concerning the maintenance of Council property and the public realms.</p>	Council January 2026 and Environment February 2026			

703	Active & Healthy Communities	20.01.26	Councillor Brady and Alderman McAlpine	<p>This Council pledges to write to Stormont to request the introduction of femicide as a specific hate crime which therefore carries an appropriate sentence, as well as specific deradicalisation support while in prison in order to prevent reoffending. Femicide is defined as the intentional killing of a woman due to factors such as hatred, discrimination or subjugation. It also includes acts motivated by control, possession or domination over a woman, or in relation to her refusal to establish or maintain an emotional relationship, or as an act of limitation of her personal freedom. This Council recognises that the motivation for this crime is rooted in a desire for the control and subjugation of women, driven by patriarchal attitudes in society. That perpetrators can be partners but as our communities are changing, we are also seeing a growing trend of 'honour based' killings of women by family members. That while femicide lies at the extreme end of the spectrum of violence against women, other acts motivated by control, possession, or dominance - such as domestic abuse, coercive control, and harassment - create the conditions in which femicide occurs. These acts serve as warning signs that, when left unaddressed, can escalate to fatal violence. And by establishing femicide as a distinct criminal offence, we send a clear message that gender-based violence will not be tolerated and that the lives of women have inherent value deserving of specific legal protection.</p>	Council January 2026 and Active and Healthy Communities February 2026			
704	Active & Healthy Communities	20.01.26	Councillor Ashe and Councillor Moore	<p>That Council notes the success of the inclusion of effigies and emblems to the penalties for 'in-programme' bonfires; that Council tasks officers to engage with groups to add flags to the list of penalties for 'in programme' bonfires; and that officers return a report updating Members on these actions by the June committee meeting.</p>	Council January 2026 and Active and Healthy Communities February 2026			