

Agenda

Agenda

📄 *2026.05.07 PP Agenda.pdf*

Page 1

1. Apologies

2. Declarations of Interest

Reports for Approval

3. NoM 638 – Map of Public Sector Land

Report attached

📄 *3. Notice of Motion 638 - Map of Public Sector Land.pdf*

Page 3

📄 *3.1 Appendix 1 - INTERIM REPORT - Notice of Motion 638.pdf*

Page 6

📄 *3.2 Appendix 2 - Grant Specific Boundary Map.pdf*

Page 22

📄 *3.3 Appendix 3 - Bangor Map of Council Land Data.pdf*

Page 24

📄 *3.4 Appendix 4 - Bangor NIHE Land Data.pdf*

Page 25

📄 *3.5 Appendix 5 - Bangor - ANDBC DFI Car Park Data.pdf*

Page 26

📄 *3.6 Appendix 6 - Newtownards Council Land Data.pdf*

Page 27

📄 *3.7 Appendix 7 - Newtownards NIHE Land Data.pdf*

Page 28

📄 *3.8 Appendix 8 - Newtownards SEHSCT Land Data.pdf*

Page 29

📄 *3.9 Appendix 9 - Newtownards DfC Historical Environment Property.pdf*

Page 30

📄 *3.10 Appendix 10 - Newtownards ANDBC DFI Car Park Data.pdf*

Page 31

Reports for Noting

4. Peace Plus Donaghadee Pump Track

Report attached

📄 *4. Peace Plus Donaghadee Pump Track.pdf*

Page 32

5. Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme

Report attached

- [!\[\]\(95b42f0077faf7439a26242a54e021ec_img.jpg\) 5. Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme.pdf](#) Page 41
- [!\[\]\(e097ab4c08b8186dd0908330bbc2dc28_img.jpg\) 5.1 Appendix 1 Glow Up Grant.pdf](#) Page 43
- [!\[\]\(1e9d865c5de095f8e3304757c49e79d7_img.jpg\) 5.2 Appendix 2 Empty to Energised Pilot Grant.pdf](#) Page 50
- [!\[\]\(735b10d724a5f0ec5005c4eb3eb9c9d1_img.jpg\) 5.3 Appendix 3 Freshen Up Grant.pdf](#) Page 55

6. AND Tourism Events and Festivals Fund 25/26 Update and Grants Awarded 2026/27

Report attached

- [!\[\]\(815df092dd722ee9268ef8e6d0193e3a_img.jpg\) 6. AND Tourism Events and Festivals Fund 25-26 Update and Grants Awarded 26-27.pdf](#) Page 58
- [!\[\]\(c72edb9626cad660f3a9f5fb0f22a68c_img.jpg\) 6.1 Appendix 1 Tourism Events Festivals Fund 25 26 Summary.pdf](#) Page 62
- [!\[\]\(0c564128c6342bd2f601e97f4518828a_img.jpg\) 6.2 Appendix 2 Tourism Events and Festivals Fund Applications 26 27.pdf](#) Page 64

7. Annual Tourism Events Programme 2025/26 Evaluation

Report attached

- [!\[\]\(97faa0168e491544be255cfcab218e9b_img.jpg\) 7. Annual Tourism Events Programme 25-26 Evaluation.pdf](#) Page 66
- [!\[\]\(b2166b76608b8499cffc130bf1b1fe60_img.jpg\) 7.1 Appendix 1 Tourism Events Evaluation Summary 2025.pdf](#) Page 76
- [!\[\]\(b29da0f81af7d31816596405aed0e378_img.jpg\) 7.2 Appendix 2 Dates for Tourism Events 2026.pdf](#) Page 77

8. Growth Events Fund Year 2 Update

Report attached

- [!\[\]\(b6d55d0b173caf9b2505126db01e6158_img.jpg\) 8. Growth Events Fund Year 2 Update.pdf](#) Page 78
- [!\[\]\(12811766810e4126d2bed4d8c0808e60_img.jpg\) 8.1 Appendix 1 Growth Event Fund Year 2 Summary.pdf](#) Page 84

9. Arts and Heritage Panel Minutes - 2 February 2026

Report attached

- [!\[\]\(098e47036f78288d477e334896a43770_img.jpg\) 9. Arts and Heritage Panel Minutes - 2 Feb 2026.dotx.pdf](#) Page 90

10. Notices of Motion referred to Committee by Council

11. Any Other Notified Business

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

28 April 2026

Dear Sir/Madam

You are hereby invited to attend a hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of the Place and Prosperity Committee of the Ards and North Down Borough Council which will be held in the Council Chamber, 2 Church Street, Newtownards, on **Thursday 7 May 2026** commencing at **7.00pm**.

Yours faithfully

Susie McCullough
Chief Executive
Ards and North Down Borough Council

A G E N D A

1. Apologies
2. Declarations of Interest

Reports for Approval

3. Notice of Motion 638 – Map of Public Sector Land (report attached)

Reports for Noting

4. Peace Plus Donaghadee Pump Track (report attached)
5. Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme (report attached)
6. AND Tourism Events and Festivals Fund 25/26 Update and Grants Awarded 2026/27 (report attached)
7. Annual Tourism Events Programme 2025/26 Evaluation (report attached)
8. Growth Events Fund Year 2 Update (report attached)
9. Arts and Heritage Panel Minutes - 2 February 2026 (report attached)
10. Notices of Motion referred to Committee by Council (if any)
11. Any Other Notified Business

MEMBERSHIP OF PLACE AND PROSPERITY COMMITTEE (16 MEMBERS)

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

Unclassified

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

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	07 May 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	N/A
Report title	Notice of Motion 638 – Map of Public Sector Land
Attachments	<p>Appendix 1 - Interim Report - Notice of Motion 638</p> <p>Appendix 2 - Grant specific Boundary Maps</p> <p>Appendix 3 - Bangor Map of Council Land Data</p> <p>Appendix 4 - Bangor NIHE Land Data</p> <p>Appendix 5 - Bangor ANDBC DFI Car Park Data</p> <p>Appendix 6 - Newtownards Council Land Data</p> <p>Appendix 7 - Newtownards NIHE Land Data</p> <p>Appendix 8 - Newtownards SEHSCT Land Data</p> <p>Appendix 9 - Newtownards DFC Historical Environment Property</p> <p>Appendix 10 - Newtownards ANDBC DFI Car Park Data</p>
File Reference (if applicable)	N/A
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	<p>Staffing</p> <p>Narrative: Officer time to complete required research</p>

If multiple:

Screening Requirements	<p><i>The Council will commit to consider the implication of all reports under the categories of Section 75, Rural Needs, Data Protection, Climate and Sustainability:</i></p> <p>Screening of report not required</p>
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	<p>Priority 1: Economic</p> <p>Multiple</p> <p>If multiple:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An engaged Borough with citizens and businesses who have opportunities to influence the delivery of services, plans and investment 3. A thriving and sustainable economy 4. A vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors

Background

This report was prepared by Council Officers in response to Notice of Motion (638). The Notice of Motion requested a review of the extent and potential future use of public sector land within Bangor City Centre and Newtownards Town Centre. The Motion requested visual mapping of public landholdings, identification of under-utilised or unproductive public sector sites, and an assessment of how such land could be repurposed within existing planning and disposal frameworks.

The Interim Report represents Stage One of a two-stage approach, focusing on land owned by the Council and other known public bodies, and distinguishing between sites already committed to strategic regeneration projects and those with potential development or re-use value.

Key Issues

The Interim Report presents the following key issues:

- High levels of vacancy and under-utilisation persist in both Bangor and Newtownards, with around one-fifth of commercial and non-domestic properties vacant, reinforcing the need for targeted regeneration intervention.
- Many strategically significant public sector sites are already committed to major regeneration schemes, including Bangor Waterfront, Queen's Parade and the Newtownards Citizen's Hub, limiting the availability of large, unallocated sites for development.
- The remaining portfolio of public land is largely made up of operational car parks, essential public buildings and open spaces, many of which are constrained by functional requirements, planning considerations or parking sensitivities.

- Planning advice strongly supports a focus on reactivating vacant and derelict buildings ahead of redeveloping surface car parks, given the importance of maintaining adequate parking provision to support town and city centre vitality.
- Where surplus or under-utilised land exists, it is often small, fragmented or constrained, meaning that redevelopment opportunities will require a highly selective and strategic approach.

Next Steps

- Maintain and update the Council's GIS mapping to ensure an accurate and up-to-date evidence base on public sector land data.
- Use the findings of this report to progress to Stage Two, engaging with other public sector bodies to identify any additional land that may be surplus or capable of being brought to market.
- Continue to address vacancy and dereliction through initiatives such as Empty to Energised, supporting the reactivation of existing buildings and increasing town centre footfall.
- Explore partnership, meanwhile use or pilot projects for sites that are not suitable for immediate development or disposal.
- Ensure that any future consideration of redevelopment carefully balances regeneration opportunities with parking, operational and community needs.

Summary

The Interim Report provides an evidence base on the availability and status of public sector land in Bangor and Newtownards. It confirms that while significant regeneration is already underway, opportunities for further development from public land are limited and constrained. The findings support a strategic focus on repurposing vacant and derelict properties, strengthening asset management, and improving collaboration with other public bodies.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council **Agrees** the findings of the report and further agrees to move to Stage Two of the process. A follow up report will then be brought to The Committee once completed.

INTERIM REPORT

Presented to Place and Prosperity Committee

May 2026



**Ards and
North Down**
Borough Council



CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	2
2	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
3	METHODOLOGY	3
4	SECTORAL PROFILE.....	4
	BANGOR.....	4
	NEWTOWNARDS	5
5	STRATEGIC CONTEXT	7
6	INTERNAL CONSULTATION	8
7	MAJOR REGENERATION SCHEMES.....	10
8	MAPPING & ANALYSIS.....	11
	Bangor	11
	Newtownards.....	13
9	CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS	14

1 Introduction

This report has been prepared by Council Officers in response to the Notice of Motion submitted by Councillors Harbinson & McCracken.

The notice of motion requests:

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 repurposed and how such a process could be progressed within the bounds of current planning considerations and Council/Executive disposal policies.

After meeting and correspondence an approach was agreed on how to proceed with the report. Council Officers will be working to deliver a report in Two Stages.

Stage One

An interim report highlighting land owned by the Council that could potentially be brought to market. This would include car parks, buildings not in use (or significantly under-utilised), building in use but older stock or that could potentially be repurposed, etc.

Include in this mapping any vacant land or derelict buildings from other public bodies that we know about, or public land that we know is already surplus to requirements or due to be declared surplus.

Once information is gathered identify land that is earmarked for existing development commitments, land that has the potential for development but is less likely to come to market for other reasons and land that is surplus to requirements, or under-utilised and could be used for potential development if it was brought to market.

Stage Two

Once the stage one report is complete and approved at Committee, it could form the basis for conversations with other public sector bodies to ascertain if they have any land that could be brought to market. This could be one to one with relevant asset managers and/or with a group workshop to explain what we are trying to achieve.

2 Executive Summary

The findings of this report demonstrate how developing underutilised and vacant land in Bangor and Newtownards can support both Northern Ireland and Ards and North Down Borough Council strategic objectives. Reusing centrally located land and buildings directly contributes to the Programme for Government priorities of growing a sustainable and competitive economy by increasing town centre footfall, supporting local businesses and encouraging mixed-use development. At a local level, redevelopment of underutilised land supports the Council's Corporate Plan 2024–2028 and the Big Plan for Ards and North Down by promoting economic growth, environmental resilience and social inclusion. It reinforces the Integrated Strategy for Tourism, Regeneration and Economic Development by improving the vitality, appearance and attractiveness of town centres for residents, visitors and investors. The report however has identified that many key sites are already committed to major regeneration projects. The findings support reactivation of vacant and derelict properties offers a practical and deliverable mechanism for sustaining town and city centre vibrancy and delivering long-term regeneration outcomes.

3 Methodology

The methodology for this report included desk-based research to review the existing evidence base already held within the Council. This involved reviewing the current masterplans for Newtownards and Bangor, and any previous studies, namely the Vacancy and Dereliction studies, planning policy documentation and any other relevant data such as socio-economic datasets to determine the strategic and operational context for the report.

A range of external datasets was examined to support and validate the study's findings, including non-domestic vacancy figures and property classifications from the Department for Communities, valuation and ratepayer information from Land & Property Services, and relevant demographic and economic statistics from NISRA. Transport and accessibility information from the Department for Infrastructure was also reviewed to contextualise movement patterns and access to the town centre.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) were used to prepare visual maps of all public sector land within Bangor City Centre and Newtownards Town Centre. This included identifying land already zoned for development such as Bangor Waterfront, Queen's Parade, the Newtownards Citizen's Hub. The maps also detail Council owned car parks and take note of the Council's Car Park Strategy.

GIS analysis was further employed to identify public sector sites that are currently unproductive, including vacant land, derelict or underutilised buildings, and sites operating under meanwhile use. This spatial assessment provided a clear understanding of the distribution, status and development potential of publicly owned land. All mapped outputs were cross referenced with departmental datasets and relevant planning records to ensure accuracy and to support the subsequent evaluation of how such land could be repurposed or progressed in line with planning policy and disposal frameworks.

Consultation with key Council departments provided additional insight into planning constraints, regeneration priorities and operational considerations. The study included engagement with:

- Planning
- Land
- GIS Officer
- Regeneration
- Car Parks

These discussions ensured that the study reflected both practical realities and the Council’s wider strategic aims.

4 Sectoral Profile

Bangor

The Bangor City Masterplan was produced by URS Scott Wilson in 2011 through a collaborative process led by the Department for Social Development with North Down Borough Council. In 2022/23, The Paul Hogarth Company, with McGarry Consulting, and informed by public engagement exercise undertook a review of the Masterplan. The review sets out an understanding of current projects and initiatives, an overview of conversations with stakeholders and a revised set of priorities and actions for Bangor City Centre to be delivered over the next 8 years.

The Bangor City Centre baseline table was produced using publicly available NISRA data, and supported by evidence from the *Bangor Town Centre Masterplan (September 2023)*. Reflecting the most recent town-centre-specific business and employment evidence as 2026 data sets are not yet available.

Indicator	Baseline Position (2021)	Trend	Relevance
Accommodation & Food Services	Strong and growing employment sector	▲	Key driver of evening economy and visitor spend, strong alignment with waterfront and marina regeneration plans (economy-ni.gov.uk)
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	Moderate but visible presence	▲	Increase in Arts presence with Seacourt Print Workshop relocation to City Centre and existing cultural venues such as The Court House and Boom Studios. Increases in footfall and supports Bangor’s cultural identity
Human Health & Social Work	Moderate employment base	—	Stable employer, important daytime economy contributor (economy-ni.gov.uk)

Professional, Scientific & Technical	Smaller employment share in city centre	— / ▼	Higher-value jobs predominantly located outside core town-centre, potential opportunity for growth in city centre (economy-ni.gov.uk)
Finance & Insurance	Low and declining presence	▼	Reflects national branch-closure trends, unlikely to be a future growth sector in city centre (economy-ni.gov.uk)
Construction	Minimal town-centre presence	—	Indirect via development and regeneration projects – not via employment opportunities (economy-ni.gov.uk)
Manufacturing & Production	Negligible presence	—	Not noted within city centre (economy-ni.gov.uk)
Overall Employment Structure	Service-led economy	▲	Mirrors wider NI trends but with stronger hospitality and leisure weighting due to coastal location and regeneration projects

Vacancy and Dereliction

The 2023 Review of the Bangor Masterplan highlighted the need to tackle vacancy within the city centre. In response Ards and North Down Borough Council (Council) commissioned McGarry Consulting, in partnership with Queen's University Belfast (QUB) to undertake a study into Dereliction & Vacancy within the city centre and how it could be addressed.

This study was commissioned to research commercial dereliction and vacancy, which differs from nondomestic dereliction and vacancy. Non-domestic units include schools, charity shops, religious buildings, among others, which are not designated as commercial.

The study showed that the commercial vacancy rate is approximately 20-21%, based on the Bangor City Centre Vacancy & Dereliction Study (May 2025), which identified a 20.0% vacancy rate from 395 surveyed units, and the Department for Communities' 21.0% non-domestic vacancy rate recorded in October 2024. Both sources closely align, indicating that around one-fifth of Bangor's commercial and non-domestic properties are currently vacant.

Newtownards

The Newtownards Town Centre Masterplan was produced by URS Scott Wilson in 2011 through a collaborative process led by the Department for Social Development with North Down Borough Council. In 2022/23, The Paul Hogarth Company, with McGarry Consulting, and informed by public engagement exercise undertook a review of the Masterplan. The review sets out an understanding of current projects and initiatives, an overview of conversations with stakeholders and a revised set of priorities and actions for Bangor City Centre to be delivered over the next 8 years.

The 2026 position is based on the latest available published datasets (2024-25), including NISRA Business Register and Employment Survey data, Invest NI council-area performance reporting, full datasets for 2026 are not yet available at the time of writing.

The table below is based on publicly available NISRA data, as reported in the *Newtownards Town Centre Masterplan Review* (September 2023). 2021 is used as the confirmed baseline year, reflecting the most recent town-centre-specific business and employment evidence as 2026 data sets are not yet available.

Indicator	Baseline Position (2021)	Trend	Relevance
Total Businesses (all sectors)	270 businesses	▼	Decline from 345–305 (2015–2019 range) reflects national structural change rather than local failure (nisra.gov.uk)
Wholesale & Retail	90 businesses; 513 jobs	—	Dominant town-centre function and largest employer, however under pressure from changing retail patterns (nisra.gov.uk)
Accommodation & Food Services	40 businesses; 473 jobs	▲	Fastest-growing sector (+29.2% jobs since 2013) (nisra.gov.uk)
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	Small but present sector	▲	Not major employer but high placemaking value (nisra.gov.uk)
Human Health & Social Work	Declining employment	▼	Jobs down 47.1% since 2013, indicating retreat of institutional uses from town centre (nisra.gov.uk)
Professional, Scientific & Technical	Reduced job numbers	▼	Jobs down 26.8% since 2013, but sector revenue more than doubled (nisra.gov.uk)
Finance & Insurance	Low employment base	▼	Reflects national branch-closure trends, unlikely to be a future growth sector in city centre (economy-ni.gov.uk)
Overall Employment Structure	Retail- and service-led	—	Newtownards functions well as an independent market town

Vacancy and Dereliction

The 2023 Review of the Newtownards Masterplan highlighted the need to address vacancy within the town centre. In response, Ards and North Down Borough Council (Council) commissioned McGarry Consulting, in partnership with Queen’s University Belfast (QUB),

to undertake a detailed study into dereliction and vacancy within Newtownards town centre and how these challenges could be tackled.

The study focused specifically on commercial dereliction and vacancy, which differs from non-domestic vacancy recorded by the Department for Communities (DfC). Non-domestic units include facilities such as schools, churches, and community buildings, which are not classed as commercial properties.

The Newtownards Vacancy & Dereliction Study (May 2025) identified a commercial vacancy rate of 21.3%, based on a survey of 362 ground-floor commercial units, of which 77 were vacant. This aligns closely with the DfC's 21.1% non-domestic vacancy rate recorded in October 2024. Both sources indicate that around one-fifth of Newtownards' commercial and non-domestic properties are currently vacant, highlighting the need for targeted and sustained intervention to reverse long-term vacancy trends.

5 Strategic Context

In responding to the potential development of underutilised land or sites the current strategic context that ANDBC are working within falls within NI policy as well as ANDBC strategies.

NI Strategies

- The new Programme for Government (PfG), sets out nine priorities including growing a sustainable and competitive economy; providing more affordable and accessible housing and safer communities. Town and city centres can help meet these goals through supporting businesses (who can sell locally and globally); transforming unused space into housing and giving people more reasons to come into the town or city and feel safe while they are there.
- The Regional Development Strategy (RDS), although preceding the PfG, it stressed NI's economic ambitions and how place making, transport connections and housing can contribute to these ambitions. Future town and city centres will be mixed use, more accessible, more navigable, more experiential and more connected with outlying areas.
- NI's new Economic Plan, seeks to provide better jobs, more investment outside of Belfast and give local partners more power in this area. Allied with DfC's Communities Strategy which seeks the common purpose of supporting people, building communities and shaping places, the policies chime with town and city centres being places that more people live, work and visit; with closer community ties.

It is noted that bringing under-utilised and vacant land back into productive use directly supports the PfG priorities of growing a sustainable and competitive economy. Re-use of centrally located sites could support local businesses by increasing footfall and spend and create new employment opportunities. Development of under-utilised land aligns with the RDS emphasis on place-making, maximising existing infrastructure, and reducing reliance on outward expansion. Redevelopment supports the evolution of town and city centres into mixed-use environments where people can live, work and access services locally.

Economic Plan and Communities Strategy

Council Strategies

- Ards and North Down Borough Council's strategies are centred around the Corporate Plan 2024–2028, which aims to foster a sustainable borough; balancing economic, environmental, and social wellbeing. The plan highlights three priorities: economic growth, environmental resilience through carbon reduction, and social inclusion to enhance community wellbeing.
- The Council's Integrated Strategy for Tourism, Regeneration and Economic Development 2018-2030 promotes local economic growth, attracting visitors, and improving urban and rural areas.
- The Big Plan for Ards and North Down 2017–2032 complements these efforts with five key outcomes, including fostering lifelong potential, improving health and wellbeing, and enhancing economic prosperity. These initiatives underline the Council's commitment to revitalising its city, towns and villages.

Development of under utilised land directly contributes to the Corporate Plan goal and therefore the ambitions of the The Big Plan for Ards and North Down (2017-2032). Namely any such developments would support the corporate objective aim of fostering a sustainable borough by balancing economic growth, environmental resilience and social inclusion. Redevelopment supports economic growth by attracting private investment and enabling local businesses to expand.

6 Internal Consultation

Planning Context

Planning decisions for commercial developments in Bangor and Newtownards are taken by Ards and North Down Borough Council (ANDBC) Planning Service, which holds responsibility for most local planning functions under the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. Applications are assessed either under delegated powers by planning officers or, where required, by the Planning Committee.

In both Bangor and Newtownards, commercial planning decisions are plan-led, evidence-based, and focused on achieving sustainable development. Town-centre proposals are assessed within their policy designation and wider regeneration objectives, with emphasis on compliance with statutory plans, regional policy, and material planning considerations, supported by early engagement and transparent decision-making.

The ANDBC approach for consideration of planning applications for Bangor City Centre and Newtownards Town Centre reflects The Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland' - Planning for Sustainable Development (SPPS) "town centres first" principle. By directing commercial uses to appropriate locations and assessing proposals against their impact on town centre vitality, accessibility, and placemaking. Commercial developments in Bangor and Newtownards are therefore assessed not just on land-use acceptability, but on

how they contribute to sustainable development, economic recovery, and community wellbeing objectives explicitly stated in the [Council's Planning Guide](#).

Officers consulted with the Planning Department for Council to consult as to how planning decisions would be made should available vacant sites or land be identified within Bangor City centre or Newtownards Town Centre. Planners made clear that many planning decisions made recently within the town/city centre are made with parking needs in mind. Any reduction in parking spaces would have a significant impact on the centres and the planning decisions that are made. The use of current surface car parks for redevelopment would not be recommended. Planners recommended that a focus should be on current properties that are currently vacant or derelict. A position that reinforces the recommendations from the Masterplan reviews of Bangor and Newtownards in September 2023. The recommendations from the 2025 Vacancy and Dereliction Studies of Bangor and Newtownards provides strategic direction and details interventions that can be taken forward by the Council to support regeneration.

Car Park Strategy

AECOM were commissioned by Ards and North Down Borough Council to develop an off street car parking strategy for the Borough focusing on the main towns of Bangor, Newtownards, Holywood, Comber and Donaghadee in addition to numerous rural villages located throughout the Council area. The purpose of this Strategy is to consider the overall requirement for parking in terms of availability, accessibility and convenience throughout the Borough.

The report identified the car parks listed in Bangor and Newtownards as potential for redevelopment or disposal. However, due to the sensitivities around parking in Bangor any potential disposals or redevelopments are on hold.

Bangor

- Central Avenue – Identified for Disposal / Closure Recommended for closure, described as “surplus to requirements”, with low usage, and noted that it “could be repurposed for other uses.
- Queen’s Parade / The Vennel / Project 21
These car parks were removed as part of the Queen’s Parade Redevelopment Scheme
- Newtownards Road / Church Street – Potential Development Site
The strategy states the site may come forward as a development site, and that if developed, parking should be retained in the local area.

- Marina (Quay Street) – Alternative Use Potential to be considered as part of the wider redevelopment.
- Flagship Centre Multi-storey (Private) – Major Redevelopment Influence. Although not a Council asset, its closure impacts supply.

Newtownards

- Town Centre Redevelopment Zone – Future Development Pressure
Within the central area bounded by Regent Street, Frederick Street, John Street and Kennel Lane, future civic, residential, retail and commercial developments are expected to increase pressure on parking supply, requiring additional or replacement parking as sites are redeveloped.
- Old Leisure Centre Site – Future Park & Ride Redevelopment
The old leisure centre site is planned to be redeveloped as a new Park & Ride facility, representing a change of use for strategic transport purposes.

While the strategy does not recommend disposal of any specific Council-owned Newtownards car park, it makes clear that redevelopment of town centre land must ensure no net loss of essential parking.

7 Major Regeneration Schemes

Major Regeneration Schemes

Large-scale regeneration initiatives are currently driving Bangor's Regeneration. Foremost among these is the Queen's Parade and Marine Gardens redevelopment, a £70 million scheme representing one of the city's most significant regeneration undertakings in recent decades. Construction began in 2025 following sustained strategic planning and multi-agency collaboration. The project integrates new housing, hotel and office provision with enhanced public realm, including landscaped walkways, a play park, pavilions, kiosks and events space. Its central aim is to reconnect Bangor's city centre with its waterfront and reinvigorate the urban environment in a way that stimulates footfall, enhances tourism appeal and strengthens long-term economic sustainability. The project is funded through more than £50 million of private investment from Bangor Marine alongside more than £9.8 million from the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund and over £10 million in DfC investment.

Complementing the Queen's Parade development is the Bangor Waterfront Redevelopment, a major capital programme supported by the Belfast Region City Deal. This scheme focuses on a two-mile stretch of coastline from Skippingstone Beach to Ballyholme and includes significant upgrades to key assets such as Bangor Marina and Pickie Fun Park, alongside the development of an international watersports centre at Ballyholme Yacht Club. The Council's ambition for this programme is to boost tourism, revitalise public spaces and

provide the foundations for further private investment. The Waterfront Redevelopment forms a central pillar in Bangor's overall regeneration narrative, representing an integrated approach to landscape enhancement, destination development and economic diversification.

The redevelopment of Bangor's long-vacant Flagship Centre has progressed into a significantly revised concept, reflecting the evolution of market conditions and the wider regeneration context emerging across the city centre and waterfront. By early 2026, the Northhold Group had moved beyond its earlier proposals for a City Park and Cultural Centre and advanced a more ambitious mixed-use scheme now referred to as "Marina Village." This updated vision positions the site as a dynamic entertainment, leisure and business destination intended to create an all-day, multi-purpose hub at the heart of Bangor. The emerging plans include food and beverage venues, family entertainment facilities, indoor recreation such as gym and padel courts, flexible office and start-up space, and a range of community and cultural uses designed to stimulate activity and economic vibrancy throughout the day and evening. This revised approach is being developed through an active Pre-Application Community Consultation process, allowing residents, businesses and stakeholders to shape the final design before a planning submission is made. The new scheme is deliberately aligned with the ongoing transformation of the nearby waterfront, including the Queen's Parade redevelopment, reinforcing the strategic aim of creating a more integrated and engaging city-centre environment that strengthens Bangor's economic and social appeal.

The Queen's Hall site in Newtownards is being redeveloped as part of a major £14.5 million Citizen's Hub project, led by Ards and North Down Borough Council in partnership with Libraries NI. The scheme will deliver a modern civic building that includes a significantly expanded library, a 400-seat performance space, and upgraded facilities for arts, cultural and community use. To support the transition, civic functions are being temporarily relocated to Newtownards Town Hall, which will also host the Visitor Information Centre, while the former VIC space will be repurposed for community use. The project is a key priority in the Newtownards Masterplan Review (2023) and is intended to act as a major anchor for town centre regeneration, increasing footfall, strengthening cultural activity and supporting local economic growth.

8 Mapping & Analysis

It was agreed that the area for analysis would align with the Empty to Energised Grant Boundary Map as it extends beyond the DfC City and Town Centre boundary. Appendix 1 – Empty to Energised Grant Boundary Map Newtownards and Bangor.

Through the Councils GIS Mapping tool Data sets and Data Sharing agreements are in place with Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Invest NI and the NI South Eastern Social Care Trust. Data from DfC on building or sites for disposal was available publicly.

Bangor

Once the area was identified as the Empty to Energised area boundary map officers used the GIS Mapping System each layer was created with the data that council has access to.

The layers that have been reviewed and maps created are as follows. *It should be noted that due to limitation of the GIS Mapping software producing a combined colour coded map was not possible.*

- Council Land Data – *Appendix 3*
- ANDBC Maintained Land – *Nothing to present*
- NIHE Land Data – *Appendix 4*
- SEHSCT Land Data – *Nothing to present*
- DFC Historical Environment Property - *Nothing to present*
- Invest NI Land – *Nothing to present*
- ANDBC / DFI Car Park Data – *Appendix 5*

Where data existed a Map has been produced and then detailed in the table below using a colour coded system.

Site part of wider redevelopment
Car Park - Removed
Car Park – In use
Car Park – Identified for Disposal (on hold)
Green Space
Identified Social Housing Scheme - Bangor
No sites Identified within Boundary

Name of asset	Address	Owner	Potential Use
Bangor Waterfront	Brompton, Marina, Kingsland, Seacliffe Road, Banks Lane	Council	Future Development - 5 key sites detailed are part of the Bangor Waterfront Regeneration.
Queens Parade	Queen's Parade	Council	Zoned for regeneration
Bangor Marina	Bregenz House Car Park	Council	Future Development - part of the wider Bangor Waterfront Regeneration
Car Park - Eisenhower Pier	Eisenhower Pier	Council	Future Development - part of the wider Bangor Waterfront Regeneration
Car Park, Queens Parade	Queen's Parade	Council	Car Park removed to allow for Queens Parade redevelopment
Car Park, Bangor, Holborn Avenue	Holborn Avenue	Council	Not detailed in Car Parking strategy for disposal
Car Park, Bangor, Clifton Road	Clifton Road	Council	Not detailed in Car Parking strategy for disposal
Car Park - Bangor - Bingham Lane	Bingham Lane	Council	Not detailed in Car Parking strategy for disposal
Car Park - Bangor - Castle Street	Castle Street	Council	Not detailed in Car Parking strategy for disposal

Car Park - Bangor - Clifton Road	Clifton Road	Council	Not detailed in Car Parking strategy for disposal
Car Park - Bangor - Holborn Avenue	Holborn Avenue	Council	Not detailed in Car Parking strategy for disposal
Car Park - Bangor - Mills Road	Mills Road	Council	Not detailed in Car Parking strategy for disposal
Car Park - Bangor - The Vennel	The Vennel	Council	Not detailed in Car Parking strategy for disposal
Car Park - Bangor - Abbey Street West	Abbey Street West	Council	Not detailed in Car Parking strategy for disposal
Bangor - Connor Park	Maintain current arrangement.	Council	Not detailed in Car Parking strategy for disposal
Car Park - Bangor - Newtownards Road / Church Street	Newtownards Road/Church Street	Council	Detailed in Car Park Strategy as potential development site - On Hold
Car Park - Bangor - Central Avenue	Central Avenue	Council	Detailed in Car Park Strategy as potential disposal - On Hold
Green Space	Newtownards Road/Church Street	Council	Open Green Space
Social Housing Scheme - Bangor	Worcester Avenue	NIHE	New Build 49 Units
Social Housing Scheme - Bangor	Bangor Marina Regeneration	NIHE	New Build 32 Units
Social Housing Scheme - Bangor	97 Bloomfield Road	NIHE	New Build 20 Units
No sites Identified within Boundary		Invest NI Land	
No sites Identified within Boundary		SEHSCT Land Data	

Newtownards

The layers that have been reviewed and maps created are as follows:

- Council Land Data – *Appendix 6*
- ANDBC Maintained Land - *Nothing to present*
- NIHE Land Data – *Appendix 7*
- SEHSCT Land Data – *Appendix 8*
- DFC Historical Environment Property – *Appendix 9*
- Invest NI Land - *Nothing to present*
- ANDBC / DFI Car Park Data – *Appendix 10*

Name of asset	Address	Owner	Potential Use
Queens Hall, Newtownards	West Street, Newtownards	Council	Plans for redevelopment
Car Park, N'ards, South/Court St Corner	4 South Street/7 Court Street	Council	Not detailed in Car Parking strategy for disposal
Newtownards - Ann Street	Ann Street, Newtownards	Council	Not detailed in Car Parking strategy for disposal

Newtownards - Kennel Lane	Kennel Lane, Newtownards	Council	Not detailed in Car Parking strategy for disposal
Newtownards - Mill Street	Mill Street, Newtownards	Council	Not detailed in Car Parking strategy for disposal
Newtownards - Mill Street Gas Works (charged section)	Mill Street, Newtownards	Council	Not detailed in Car Parking strategy for disposal
Newtownards - Mill Street Gas Works South		Council	Not detailed in Car Parking strategy for disposal
Newtownards - Old Cross Street East	Old Cross Street East, Newtownards	Council	Not detailed in Car Parking strategy for disposal
Newtownards - Old Cross Street West	Old Cross Street West, Newtownards	Council	Not detailed in Car Parking strategy for disposal
Newtownards - South Street / Court Street	South Street/Court Street, Newtownards	Council	Not detailed in Car Parking strategy for disposal
Newtownards - 4 South Street (7 Court Street)	South Street/Court Street, Newtownards	Council	Not detailed in Car Parking strategy for disposal
Newtownards - West Street	West Street, Newtownards	Council	Not detailed in Car Parking strategy for disposal
Newtownards Upper Court Street	Upper Court Street, Newtownards	Council	Not detailed in Car Parking strategy for disposal
Newtownards - Talbot Street	Talbot Street, Newtownards	Council	Not detailed in Car Parking strategy for disposal
Bangor Road Open Space	Bangor Road	Council	Open Green Space
No sites/proposed development Identified within Boundary		NIHE	
No sites Identified within Boundary		Invest NI Land	
No sites Identified within Boundary		SEHSCT Land Data	

9 Conclusion and Recommended Next Steps

This report provides a comprehensive evidence base to support informed decision-making regarding the future use of public sector land within Bangor City Centre and Newtownards Town Centre. Through desk-based research, and detailed GIS mapping, the study has identified the full extent of public landholdings, clarified their current status, and distinguished between sites already committed to strategic regeneration projects and those that remain under-utilised or unproductive.

The report notes a number of important public sites that are already committed to major regeneration initiatives including Bangor Waterfront, Queen's Parade and the Newtownards Citizen's Hub, leaving few unallocated assets with genuine medium term development potential. Beyond these flagship projects, the remaining portfolio consists largely of operational car parks, essential public buildings and open spaces. Where unproductive or surplus land does exist, it is generally small in scale, fragmented, or constrained by surrounding uses, which limits its standalone redevelopment potential.


The findings of this report reinforce the importance of strategic asset management and the value of cross agency coordination in unlocking future regeneration potential.

Recommended next steps:

- Develop relationships with other Government Departments outside of the current relationships in place to obtain additional data sets.
- Continue to maintain the GIS maps.
- Continue to tackle current vacancy and dereliction in Newtownards and Bangor with initiatives like Empty to Energised to continue to bring back underutilised properties into use and therefore bringing the vacancy percentages down. It should be observed that these schemes increase footfall and business activity in the towns and so it is essential to retain adequate car parking provisions.
- Move to Stage Two of the report and use findings to provide a basis for conversations with other public sector bodies to ascertain if they have any land that could be brought to market. This could be one to one with relevant asset managers and/or with a group workshop to explain objectives.


Empty to Energised - Bangor Boundary Map

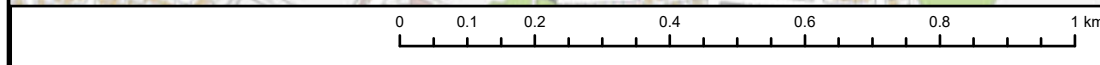



Ards and North Down
 Borough Council

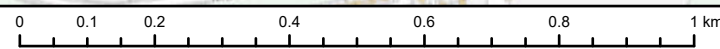
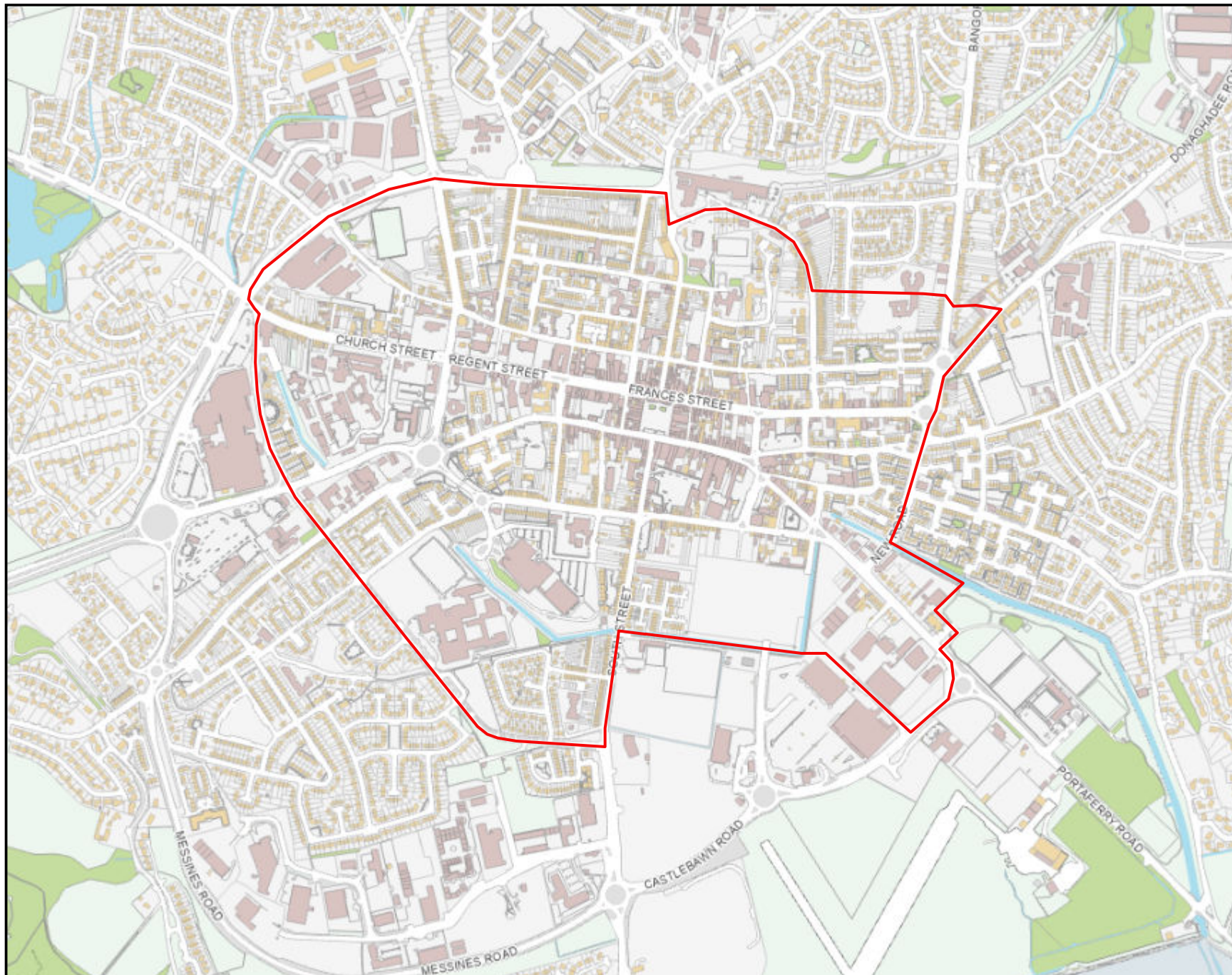
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	Date: 12/11/2025
	Author:




Empty to Energised - Newtownards Boundary Map



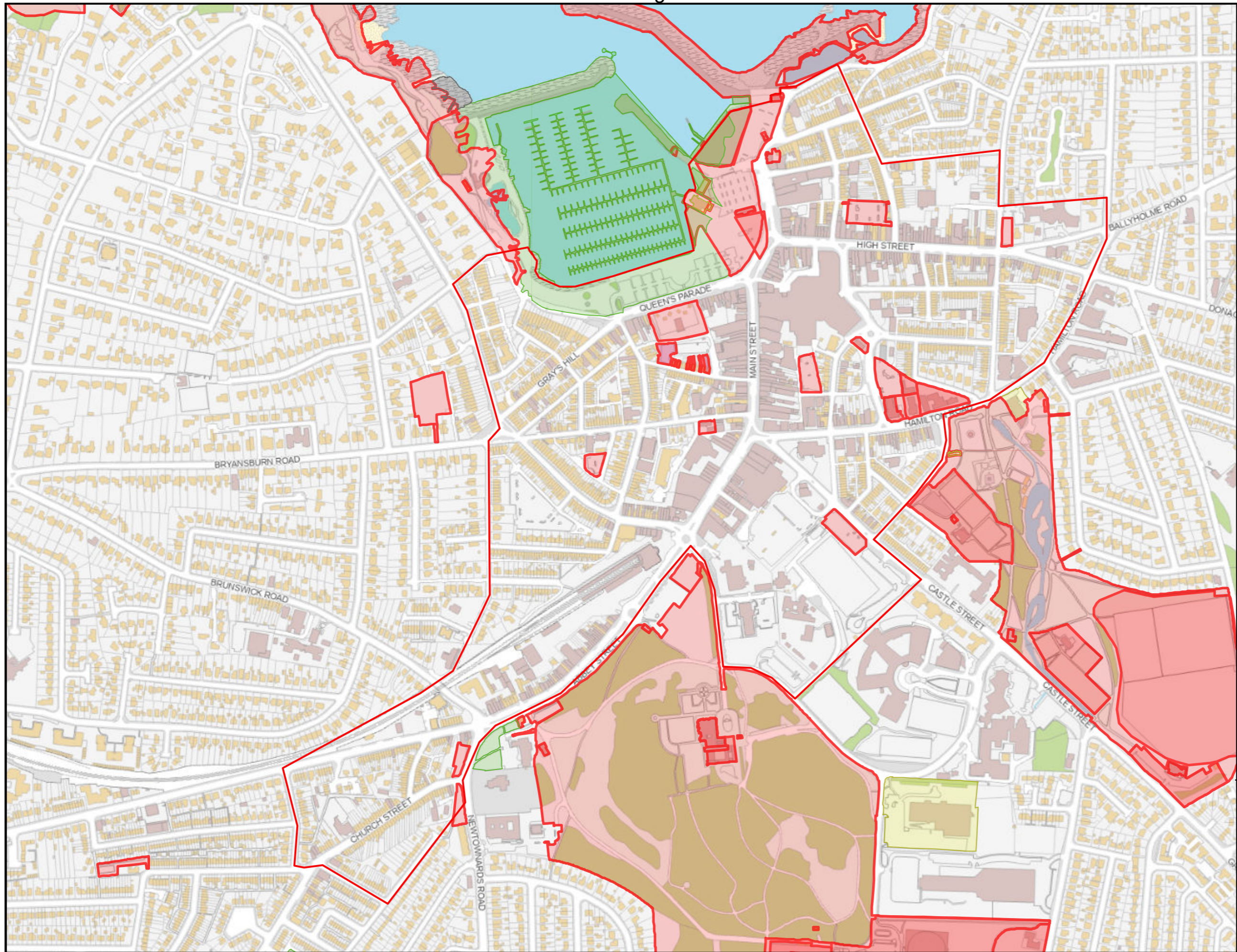

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	Date: 12/11/2025
	Author:

Bangor - Council Land Data



ANDBC_Underutilised_Land

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- Blue (Outline Only)
- Red (Fill)
- Red (Outline Only)

Council Land Data

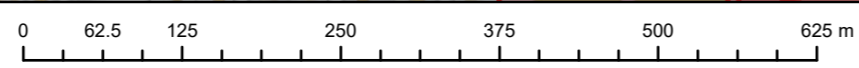
- Active
- Leased In
- Leased Out
- Other
- Sold
- Sold - With Registered Charge
- Owned - awaiting title

Ards and North Down Borough Council

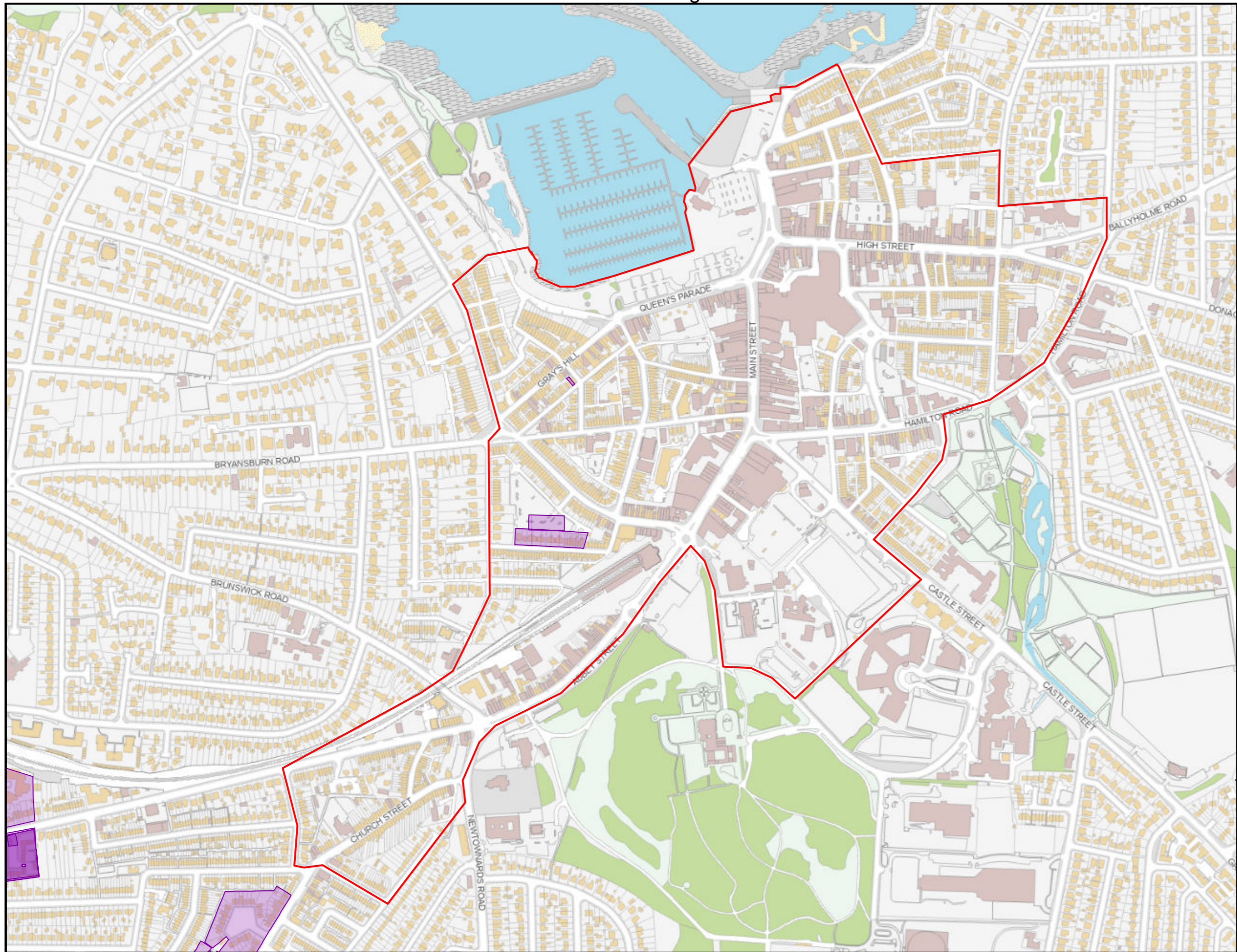
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	Author:

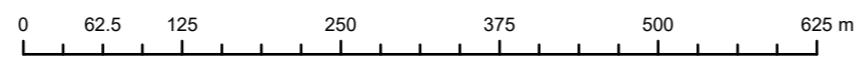


Bangor - NIHE Data



ANDBC_Underutilised_Land 25

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- Blue (Outline Only)
- Red (Fill)
- Red (Outline Only)
- NIHE Land Data

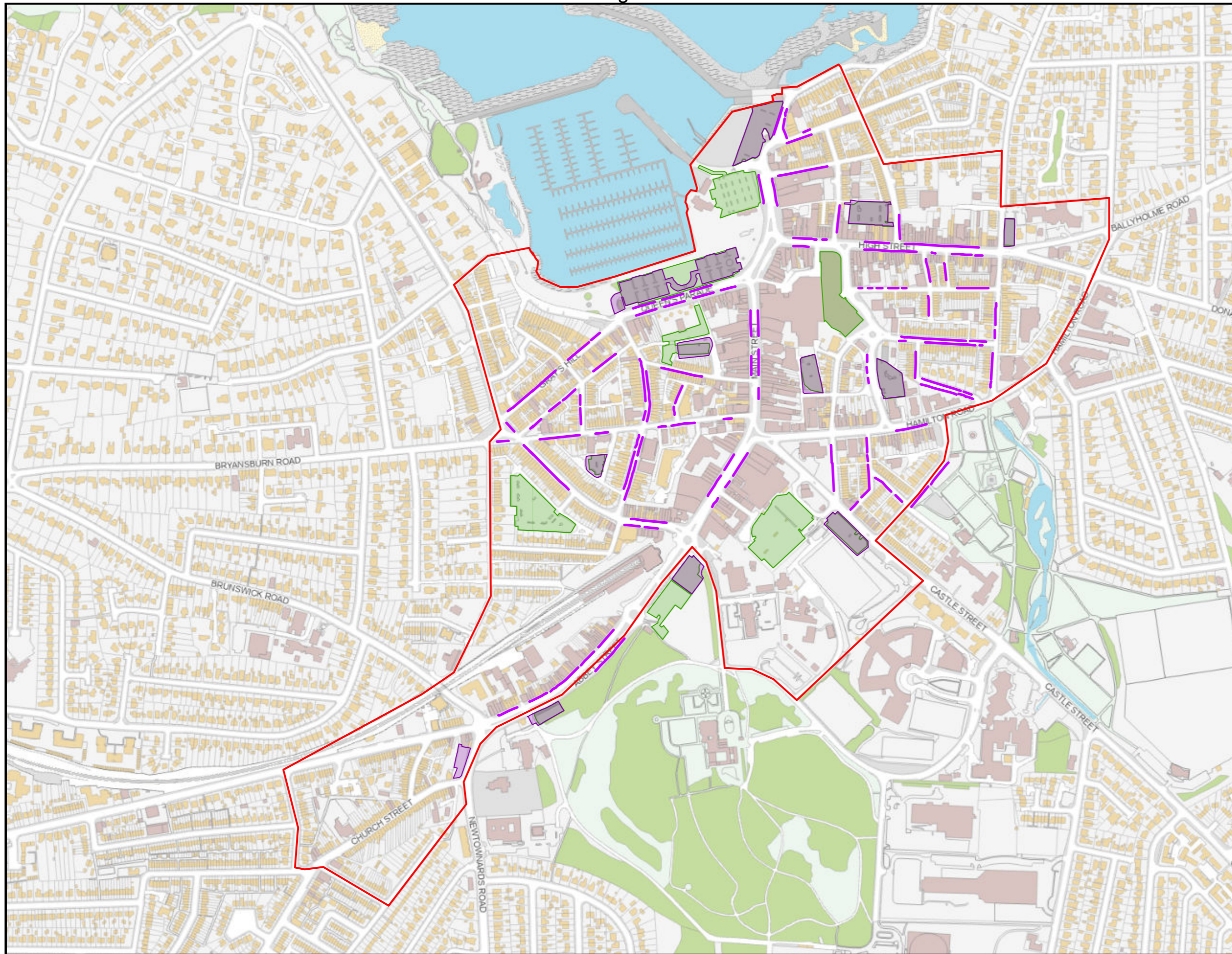


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	Date: 20/04/2026
	Author:


Bangor - ANDBC/DFI Car Park Data



ANDBC_Underutilised_Land 26

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- Red (Fill)
- Red (Outline Only)
- DFI On Street Parking
- Car Parks (Site Extents)
- ANDBC DFI Car Parks






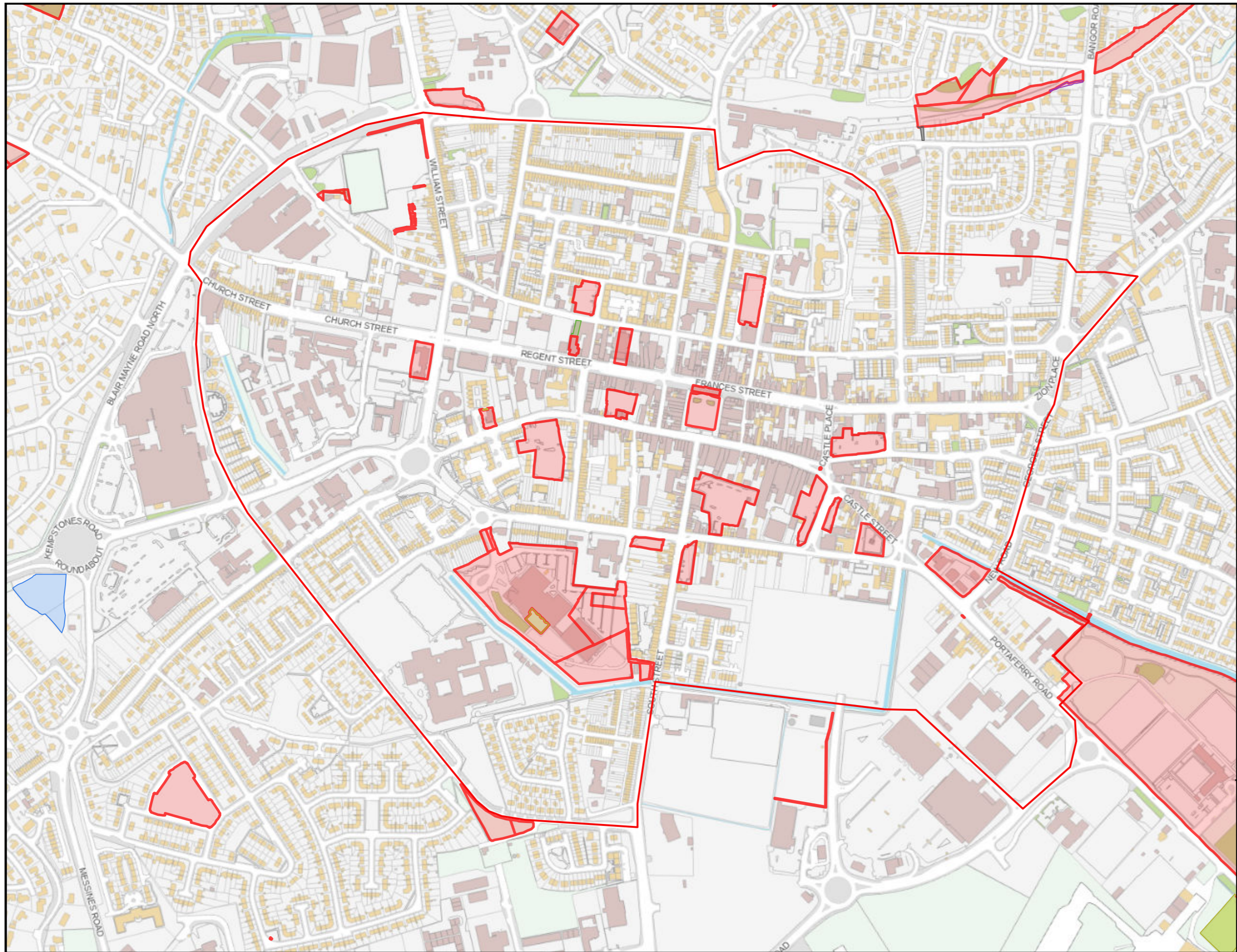
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	Author:

Newtownards - Council Land Data



ANDBC_Underutilised_Land

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- Blue (Outline Only)
- Red (Fill)
- Red (Outline Only)

Council Land Data

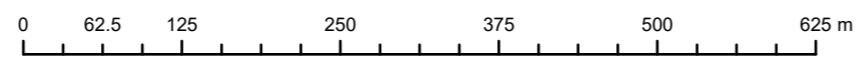
- Active
- Leased In
- Leased Out
- Other
- Sold
- Sold - With Registered Charge
- Owned - awaiting title

Ards and North Down Borough Council

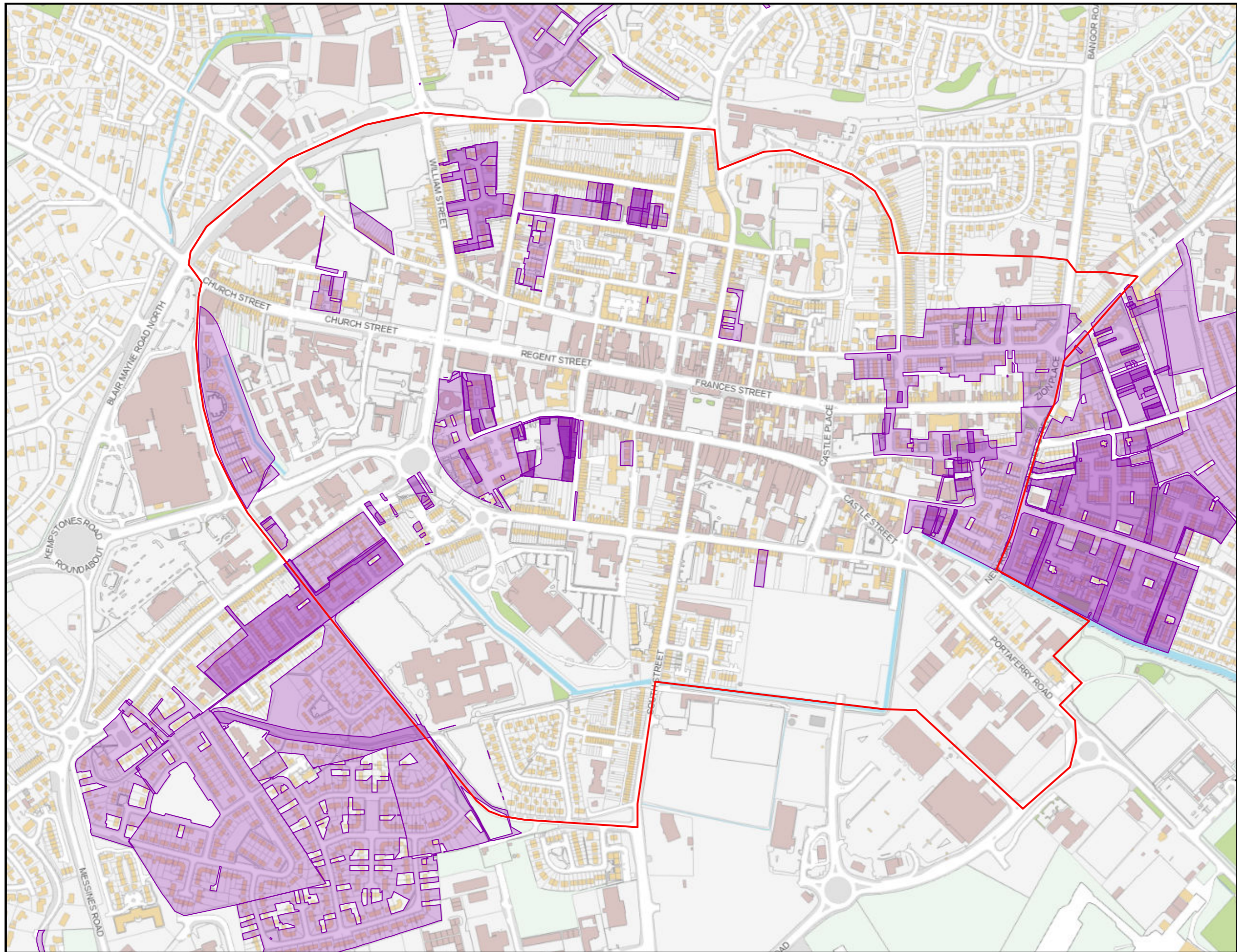
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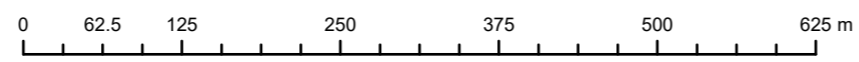



Newtownards - NIHE Land Data



ANDBC_Underutilised_Land 28

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- Red (Fill)
- Red (Outline Only)
- NIHE Land Data






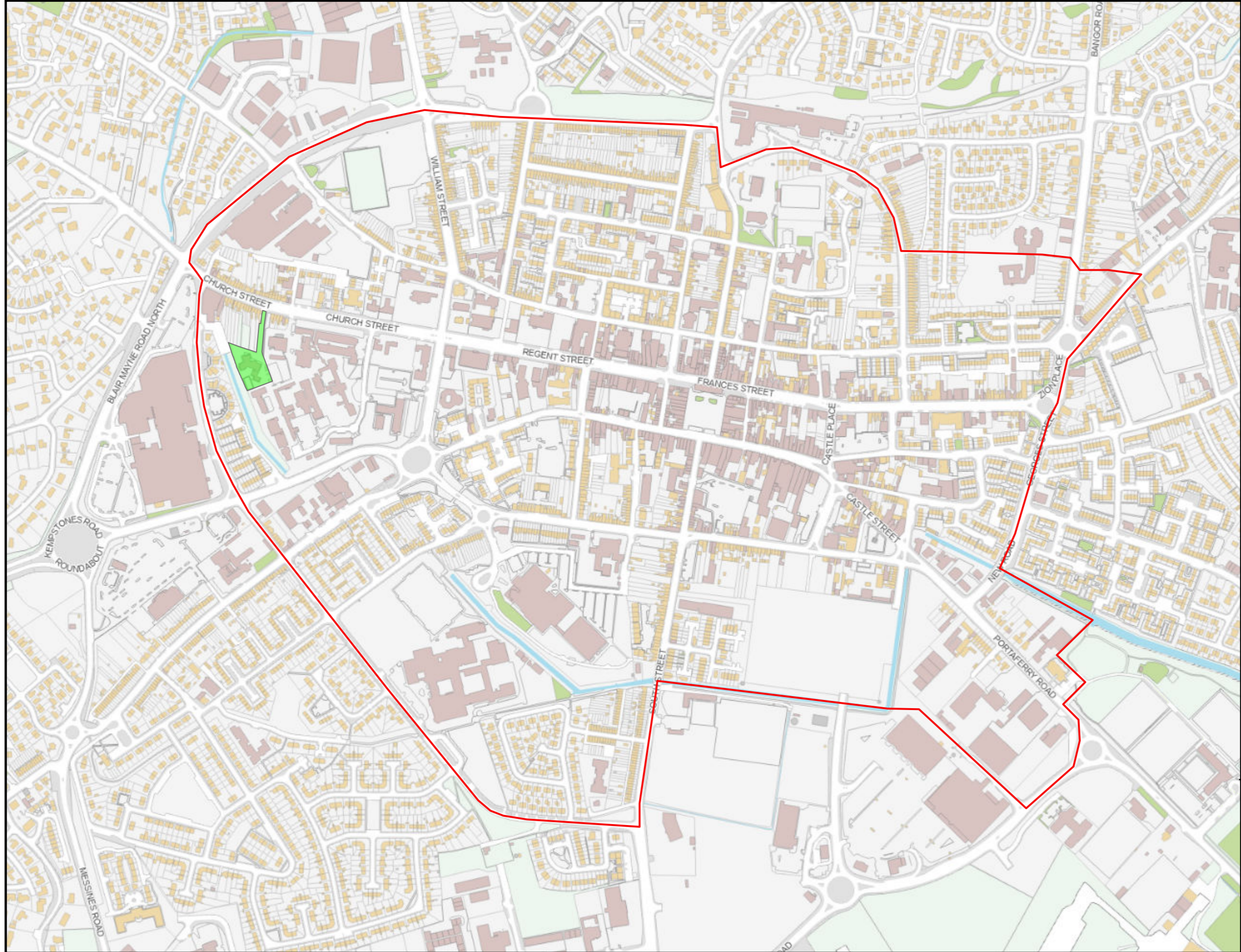
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	Author:

Newtownards - SEHSCT Land Data



ANDBC_Underutilised_Land


- Blue (Fill)
- Blue (Outline Only)
- Red (Fill)
- Red (Outline Only)
- SEHSCT Land Data (Jan 2023 Snapshot)

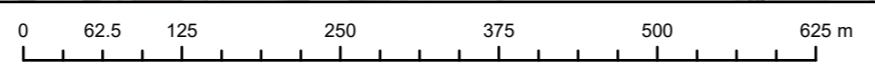


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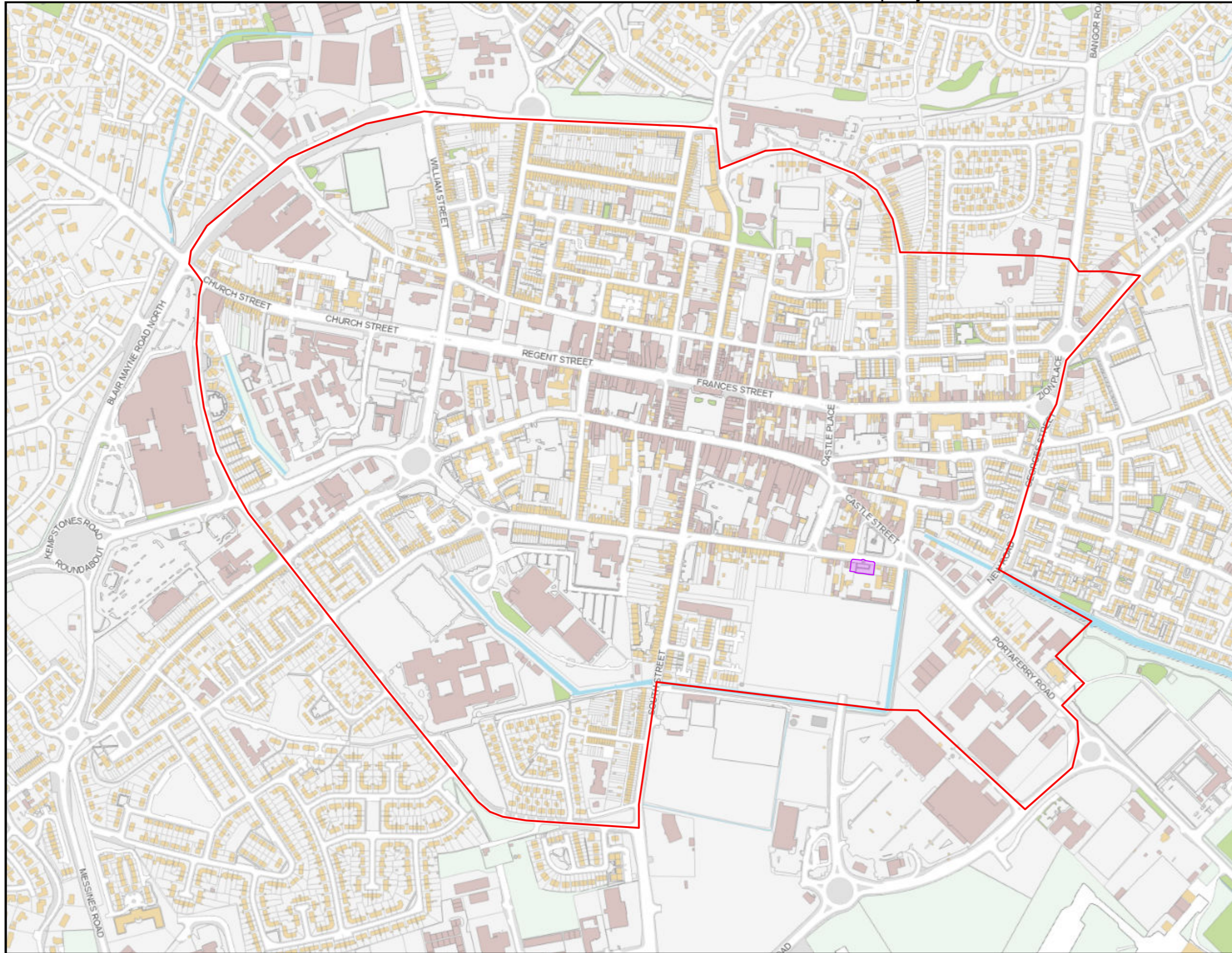
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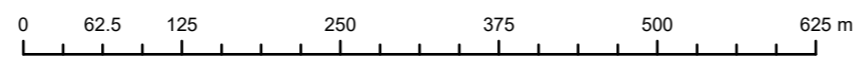



Newtownards - DfC Historic Land or Property Data



ANDBC_Underutilised_Land

- Blue (Fill)
- Blue (Outline Only)
- Red (Fill)
- Red (Outline Only)
- DfC - Historical Environment Property Boundaries






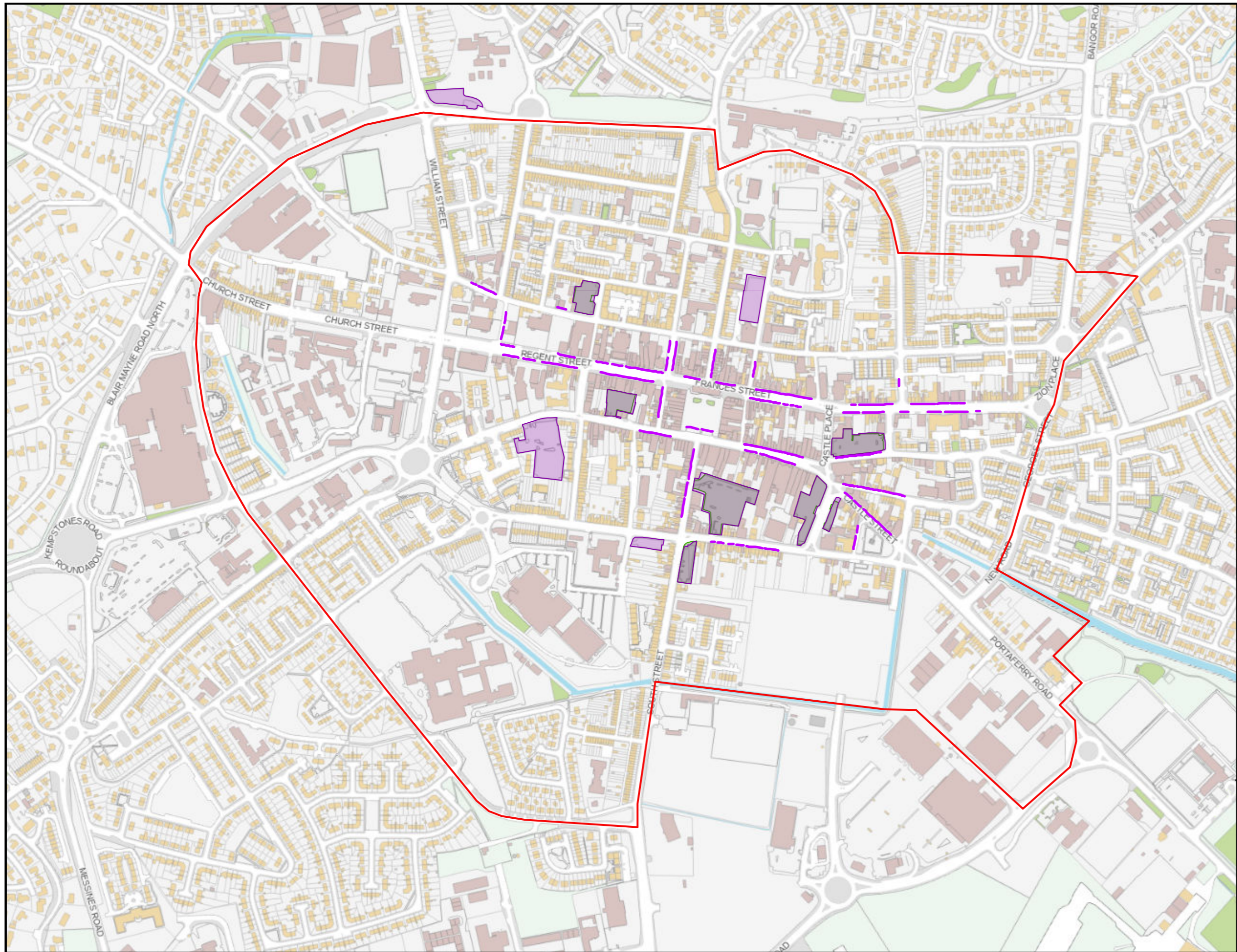
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	Author:

Newtownards - ANDBC/DFI Car Park Data



ANDBC_Underutilised_Land 31


- Blue (Fill)
- Blue (Outline Only)
- Red (Fill)
- Red (Outline Only)
- DFI On Street Parking
- Car Parks (Site Extents)
- ANDBC DFI Car Parks

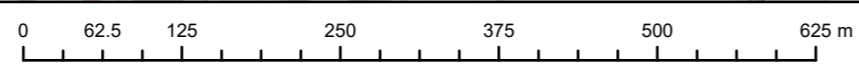


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	Date: 20/04/2026
	Author:



Unclassified

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

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple: n/a
Meeting	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	07 May 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Economic Growth (Vacant)
Report title	Peace Plus Donaghadee Pump Track
Attachments	n/a
File Reference (if applicable)	
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	None Narrative:
Screening Requirements	<i>The Council will commit to consider the implication of all reports under the categories of Section 75, Rural Needs, Data Protection, Climate and Sustainability:</i> Screening of report not required
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Multiple Multiple If multiple: An engaged Borough with citizens and businesses who have opportunities to influence the delivery of services, plans and investment; A vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors;

If multiple: n/a

	<p>Safe, welcoming and inclusive communities that are flourishing; and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opportunities for people to be active and healthy.
--	---

Background

In 2021, the Council appointed AECOM as a landscape design led multi-disciplinary team to reimagine the Donaghadee Commons Park as a great destination that can strengthen the market positioning and appeal of Donaghadee. The Commons is a linear stretch of open parkland that is underutilised, therefore the Council agreed to develop a Masterplan for this area.

In developing the Masterplan, extensive public engagement was undertaken, to include:

- 2no stakeholder workshops November 2021
- Presentation to the Donaghadee Town Advisory Group November 2021
- 2no online public consultation sessions January and February 2022
- Public consultation meeting October 2022
- Paper and digital survey

66.59% of those consulted via the online survey said they were in support of the proposed Masterplan.

The Masterplan and can be viewed online at [The Donaghadee Commons Masterplan - Ards and North Down Borough Council](#)

The Commons Masterplan presents a unique opportunity for Donaghadee to be seen as a successful sustainable growth town with a contemporary mix of live, work, visit, play and study opportunities. As a signature tourism, recreation, and leisure destination, the Commons parkland defined by its wellness opportunities, and sea views, combined with adjacent lands for development, will continue Donaghadee’s revitalisation and growing appeal as a place to live and visitor destination.

The Masterplan outlines three zones of activity –

- Zone 1 - North – mixed use development as an urban extension of the town centre.
- Zone 2 - Central – the core Commons Parkland – a place to walk, run, relax and enjoy the sea views.
- Zone 3 - South – Activity Area – amenities for activity by all ages.

An activity hub was identified to inject new energy and vibrancy into the area in Zone 3. The activity hub features a mix of recreational activities including a pump track, skate park, play zone and outdoor exercise zone.

A key feature of the Activity Area is the proposed 'Pump Track' designed for enthusiasts of wheeled sports. The pump track aims to create a vibrant and welcoming space where individuals of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities can gather, interact, and enjoy shared experiences.

PEACEPLUS Programme

PEACEPLUS is a cross-border EU funding programme aimed at strengthening peace and prosperity across Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland.

Under Theme 1: Building Peaceful and Thriving Communities, Ards and North Down Borough Council was allocated €5.68 million to deliver a co-designed local action plan. The plan focuses on community regeneration, building inclusive and peaceful communities, and celebrating cultural diversity. Through the PEACEPLUS Partnership, made up of elected members, public sector reps, and community voices, the programme will support projects that promote shared spaces, tackle division, and bring people together to create a more connected, inclusive, and resilient community.

PEACEPLUS co-designed consultations began in June 2022 until May 2024 and resulted in a number of co-designed projects that will make a significant and lasting contribution to peace and reconciliation at the local level.

Donaghadee Pump track is one of the co-designed projects agreed by the PEACEPLUS Partnership and the Council.

The Community and Wellbeing Committee agreed to recommend that Council proceed with the Donaghadee Pump Track at the meeting of the 11th December 2024, the decision was upheld by Council on the 16th December 2024.

The Pump Track was successfully awarded £219,000 funding under the PEACEPLUS programme in 2025.

A concept design was developed under the Urban Regeneration Working Up Projects budget.

Pump Track

The Donaghadee Pump Track facility will provide a catalyst for an improved healthy lifestyle for the community, by working in partnership it will empower the local community to regenerate this underutilised area.

The project will engender a sense of community and pride and as a free to consume activity it is anticipated that it will appeal to people of all backgrounds and ages.

As part of the Donaghadee Commons Park Masterplan, this project will act as a catalyst for ongoing improvements to the area.

The project will include pump track, beginner pump track and a picnic area social space.



The project will be adjacent to the existing play park surrounded by green space; this location will create a welcoming environment with activity for everyone to enjoy. Fostering fun, community and outdoor engagement.

The pump track has been reduced in size to minimise the impact on the natural environment; ensuring it remains contained within a designated site that preserves the surrounding greenery and promotes sustainable enjoyment for all.

The pump track area is 0.14 hectares with the overall site being 6.9 hectares, occupying just 2% of the overall site, ensuring to continue to protect natural environment.



Public Engagement

Extensive public consultation was carried out in developing the Commons Masterplan, as detailed above.

PEACEPLUS co-designed consultations were held across the borough in stages. A summary is provided below:

Stage 1

- 14no DEA area-based co-design meetings across the 7 DEAs
- 9no Section 75 and PEACEPLUS Target Group co-design meetings
- Various one to one co-design meetings/ workshops with key stakeholders (358 participants)
- 1no online e-survey (439 responses)

Collectively, this resulted in the engagement of 797 people involved in co-design activities for the development of the Local PEACEPLUS Action Plan.

In total, 545 concepts were identified through this detailed and comprehensive stage 1 process.

Stage 2

This involved a detailed review process in partnership with the PEACEPLUS Partnership that considered and reviewed all 545 concept ideas gleaned through the Stage 1 co-design meetings.

In total 5no co-designed Stage 2 workshops were undertaken across the Borough with 31 organisations taking part.

During stage 1 and stage 2, 828 participants were engaged. This was then supplemented by a range of PEACEPLUS Partnership co-design workshops to take forward the considerations from these Stage 1 and Stage 2 co-design workshops. These included two detailed sifting processes.

Under Theme 1 the capital project concepts that passed the initial sifting process were then invited to submit an Expression of Interest. Regeneration officers submitted the EOI for Donaghadee Pump Track on the in 2023.

The Donaghadee Pump Track was one of the 11 EOI's to pass the next stage in the assessment process using the SEUPB PEACEPLUS selection criteria.

SEUPB then advised all PEACEPLUS Partnerships that an Enhanced Application Form would be required, this was submitted by Regeneration officers in early 2024. From this process, 6 projects passed the next assessment stage, undertaken by a scoring panel. Following a special Community and Wellbeing Committee meeting it was agreed to proceed with three capital projects including Donaghadee Pump Track, Bangor Cycle Park and Portaferry Parklands.

Public Engagement | June 2025

A concept design was developed taking consideration of public feedback during the Masterplan and the PEACEPLUS programme consultation.

At concept design stage a public engagement session was held, encouraging residents to come along and view the proposed concept design.

- 18% objected to the Pump Track
- 35% objected to the location of the Pump Track at the Commons
- 47% are supportive of the Pump Track located at the Commons

Feedback from those in support of the Pump Track included:

“Fantastic; Community Asset; Will Support active lifestyle in the area and beyond; will bring people to the area who will spend locally in shops and restaurants; can’t wait to have another reason to visit Donaghadee.”

“A great idea to utilize existing infrastructure and provide more facilities for the younger age profiles. I shall look forward to seeing further information as this project develops.”

“Plan looks good and links well with the other play areas.”

It should be noted that officers have considered alternative location proposals, including Hunts Park. The Play Strategy designates Hunts Park for future investment in alignment with the greenway plan. It is also important to note that there is no parking available at this site, and the location has not been identified in any other strategy.

The proposed location of the Commons was developed through the Masterplan process and aligns with the need identified in the Play Strategy to deliver an older children provision in this area. The project will be complimented by the existing play park, outdoor gym equipment, and natural walking routes, with parking available for visitors arriving by car.

Public Information Session | April 2025

A further public information session will be delivered onsite on Wednesday 29 April from 4-6pm.

The purpose of this session is to inform the public of the agreed project, update on timelines and provide response to any queries.

Project Outcomes

At present there are no cycling facilities in Donaghadee other than public roads. The Donaghadee Pump track will provide a facility for people of all ages to enjoy cycling /wheel-based vehicles in a safe environment. Beginners can learn how to cycle, and more experienced cyclists can hone and develop their skills, learning from each other.

The pump track, with its versatile design and appeal to a wide range of ages and skill levels, can serve as a powerful tool for community empowerment on a cross-border basis in several ways:

1. **Promoting Social Interaction:** it is anticipated that the pump track will attract people from different communities and backgrounds who share a passion for biking and skateboarding. This creates opportunities for social interaction, fostering connections and understanding between individuals from neighbouring regions or even different countries.
2. **Growing the Town:** the pump track will become a tourist attraction, drawing visitors from nearby areas and even across borders. This influx of visitors can stimulate local economies through spending on accommodations, food, and other services, benefiting businesses on both sides of the border.
3. **Promoting Cultural Exchange:** communities on either side of a border may have different cultures, languages, and traditions. The pump track can serve as a neutral ground where people can come together, share experiences, and learn from one another, promoting cultural exchange and understanding.
4. **Empowering Youth:** the pump track will offer a safe and constructive outlet for youth to engage in physical activity and develop skills in biking or skateboarding.

Unlike some sports, cycling is already a well-established sport enjoyed by all communities therefore it is important that facilities are provided within the community of Donaghadee.

It is hoped that in time the Borough will have a network of pump tracks (and similar facilities for older children) located at various hubs. As demand grows the levels of participation will increase, making this a popular choice of sport.

Long term it is hoped that the various hubs throughout the Borough will form clubs which can come together to compete and learn from each other, providing sustained contact between people of different backgrounds.

Strategic Context

The project has a strategic fit with the Council's 'Big Plan':

To have empowered, resilient individuals and communities, to reduce inequalities; to promote good relations and sustainability; and to improve the accessibility of all public services.

The Donaghadee Pump track will create a central location where all members of every community can come together to enjoy a shared interest. Providing a safe and inclusive space that will endeavour to empower and promote positive relations.

The project directly aligns with the following outcomes of the Big Plan:

- Outcome 2: All people in Ards and North Down benefit from being equipped to enjoy good health and wellbeing;
- Outcome 3: All people in Ards and North Down benefit from communities where they are respected, are safe and feel secure; and
- Outcome 5: All people in Ards and North Down benefit from an environment that is valued, well-managed and accessible.

The project directly aligns with the vision of the Council's Corporate Plan 2024-2028 - "*A Sustainable Borough*", our priority of improving wellbeing through social inclusion and reducing inequality and will assist in achieving the following outcomes of the Corporate Plan:

- A engaged Borough with citizens and businesses who have opportunities to influence the delivery of services, plans and investment;
- A vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors;
- Safe, welcoming and inclusive communities that are flourishing; and
- Opportunities for people to be active and healthy.

The project supports the placemaking theme within the Council's Integrated Tourism, Regeneration and Economic Development Strategy:

Key placemaking principles:

- Accentuating an area's unique Sense of Place to attract visitors and investment;
- Planning and designing mixed use areas and buildings that contribute to vitality;
- Driving standards of architectural, landscape and urban design across the Borough;
- Animating public spaces through the creative management of uses, events and artworks.

The Council's Play Strategy highlighted the need for older children provision in Donaghadee and identified The Commons as a potential location for such a facility.

The Council is committed to promoting equality and good relations for everyone in the Borough. Equality, inclusivity, and diversity are placed at the core of all the Council's services and actions, as it strives to work towards achieving a shared future for all. The project utilises sports as a positive catalyst for empowering communities, helping to strengthen social cohesion and build connections between communities.

Programme

It is anticipated that works will commence on site in late August 2026, with completion expected towards the end of September 2026. During the construction period, there will be minor access restrictions, but these will be managed effectively through clearly signposted diversions implemented ahead of the works.

Disruptions are expected as with any construction project, but in advance of site works commencing, officers will ensure early notification to business and neighbours, along with public communications to keep everyone informed.

Financial

The awarding of external PEACEPLUS funding to ANDBC will fund all aspects of the capital build and the animation programmes.

Therefore no capital funding is required from Council.

The total budgeted awarded is £219,000

Next Steps

1. Public Information Session | Wednesday 29 April | 4-6pm Onsite
2. Onsite works commence – late August 2026

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council **Notes** this report.

Unclassified

ITEM 5

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	07 May 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Economic Growth (vacant)
Report title	Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Glow Up Grant Appendix 2 - Empty to Energised Pilot Grant Appendix 3 - Freshen Up Grant
File Reference (if applicable)	
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	None Narrative:
Screening Requirements	<i>The Council will commit to consider the implication of all reports under the categories of Section 75, Rural Needs, Data Protection, Climate and Sustainability:</i> Screening of report not required
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Priority 1: Economic Multiple If multiple: 3. A thriving and sustainable economy

If multiple:

	4. A vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for all citizens, visitors, businesses and investors
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Background

Members will be aware the 'Supporting Thriving High Streets' programme was launched in summer 2025. This programme of support is designed to revitalise our city and town centre high streets through targeted grant schemes and regeneration initiatives. The programme aims to create safer, more attractive streetscapes, increase footfall, and attract new businesses.

Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme

The initial strand of support to be made available, the 'Glow Up' Grant Scheme was launched in June 2025, this was followed by the 'Empty to Energised' Pilot Grant Scheme in January 2026, and most recently the 'Freshen Up' Grant Scheme on the 01st May 2026.

In addition to the support provided through the various grant schemes, an application is currently being prepared for submitting to the Department for Communities for funding to deliver the 'Clean City and Tidy Towns' public realm improvement/upgrade scheme which will further enhance our high street regeneration efforts.

Next Steps

Regeneration officers have been working with McGarry Consultants to undertake Vacancy and Dereliction Studies in Holywood, Comber, Donaghadee, and each of the rural villages. The outcomes of which will inform the development of future strands of support and facilitate expanding the programme to rural areas.

The Vacancy and Dereliction Studies will be presented to members at the Committee in June 2026.

It should be noted that a Vacancy and Dereliction Study was completed for Bangor and Newtownards in 2025, the reports can be accessed via the following link [Tackling Vacancy and Dereliction - Ards and North Down Borough Council](#)

Summary

Officers will be presenting the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme to the City and Town Local Action Groups in June 2026, therefore an appendix detailing the status of the active schemes has been provided to ensure members are fully briefed in advance.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council **Notes** this report.

Appendix 1

Supporting Thriving High Streets | Glow Up Grant

Introduction

The Glow Up Grant is a capital grant scheme that provided businesses within the city and town centre boundary the opportunity to apply for a one-off grant of up to £2,500 per property to support up to 90% of shopfront improvement costs. A 10% contribution was required from the applicant.

The scheme was funded by the Department for Communities with a 10% contribution from the Council.

Application

The scheme opened for applications at 9am on Monday 23rd June 2025 and was due to close at 12noon on Friday 01st August 2025 but was extended by an additional 7 days to Friday 08th August 2025 – this was in response to feedback received around the difficulty of obtaining quotations during the summer period. Following the closing date applicants were provided additional time to submit their supporting documentation.

Applicants were required to complete an application form demonstrating how their proposed project is an enhancement to the streetscape, and submit the following supporting documentation:

1. Minimum number of quotations in line with the Council’s Procurement Policy
2. Preferred contractor insurance cover
3. Confirmation re statutory requirements (planning, building control)
4. Landlord consent (if different from the applicant)

A total of 261 applications were submitted.

The assessment of applications involved a two-stage verification process, site inspection and management approval of a Letter of Offer.

Letter of Offer

A total of 162 Letters of Offer were issued, provided below is a breakdown of the allocation at Letter of Offer stage.

	Bangor	Comber	Donaghadee	Hollywood	Newtownards
Total No of Letters of Offer	76	24	14	11	37
Total Gross Cost of Works	£194,587.72	£81,975.40	£37,865.41	£26,284.93	£106,065.44
Total Eligible Cost of Works	£181,559.95	£71,305.00	£36,743.41	£24,149.24	£94,844.24
Total Grant Award	£147,431.22	£51,035.70	£28,124.91	£19,327.80	£71,167.22

Total Trader Contribution	£34,128.73	£20,269.30	£8,618.50	£4,821.44	£23,677.02
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Total Gross Costs of Works at Letter of Offer stage - £446,778.90
 Total Eligible Costs of Works at Letter of Offer - £408,861.84
 Total Grant Award at Letter of Offer - £317,320.85
 Total Trader Contribution at Letter of Offer - £91,540.99

The approved works included a variety of shopfront enhancements including painting, signage, lighting, and façade upgrades, with applicants using innovative approaches to maximise the benefit of the grant.

The Letter of Offer stated completion of all works no later than 01st March 2026. Due to weather conditions, applicants were struggling to meet this timeframe and officers extended the closing date up to the 31st March 2026 to provide further opportunity.

Claims for Grant Payment

Following completion of the project, applicants were required to submit a claim pack, this included a claim form, invoices, payment evidence and post completion images. Where statutory approvals were obtained, a copy of the relevant certificate was required.

The assessment of works to enable the release of grant funding included a two-stage verification process, site inspection and manager approval.

- A total of 162 Letters of Offer were issued.
- 119 claims are now complete.
- 12 Letters of Offer withdrawn.
- 28 claims currently being processed (additional information is required)
- 3 claims not submitted (at the time of writing)

Provided below is a summary of the total gross costs, total eligible cost, grant awarded and trader contribution at each stage of the process.

		BANGOR	COMBER	DONAGHADEE	HOLYWOOD	NEWTOWNARDS	TOTALS
LETTER OF OFFER	TOTAL GROSS COST OF CAPITAL WORKS	£ 194,587.72	£ 81,975.40	£ 37,865.41	£ 26,284.93	£ 106,065.44	£ 446,778.90
	TOTAL ELIGIBLE COST OF CAPITAL WORKS	£ 181,559.95	£ 71,305.00	£ 36,743.41	£ 24,149.24	£ 94,844.24	£ 408,601.84
	TOTAL GRANT AWARDED	£ 147,431.22	£ 51,035.70	£ 28,124.91	£ 19,327.80	£ 71,167.22	£ 317,086.85
	TOTAL TRADER CONTRIBUTION	£ 34,128.73	£ 20,269.30	£ 8,618.50	£ 4,821.44	£ 23,677.02	£ 91,514.99
CLAIMS COMPLETE	TOTAL GROSS COST OF CAPITAL WORKS	£ 141,976.08	£ 54,020.00	£ 25,596.23	£ 19,859.47	£ 85,800.44	£ 327,252.22
	TOTAL ELIGIBLE COST OF CAPITAL WORKS	£ 131,037.67	£ 46,073.00	£ 24,216.23	£ 17,823.78	£ 76,642.24	£ 295,792.92
	TOTAL GRANT AWARDED	£ 106,484.56	£ 33,326.30	£ 18,782.05	£ 13,258.40	£ 56,598.42	£ 228,449.73
	TOTAL TRADER CONTRIBUTION	£ 24,588.11	£ 12,746.70	£ 5,434.18	£ 4,565.38	£ 20,043.83	£ 67,378.20
CLAIMS PENDING	TOTAL GROSS COST OF CAPITAL WORKS	£ 36,052.00	£ 22,379.00	£ 10,813.39	£ 5,472.00	£ 9,536.00	£ 84,252.39
	TOTAL ELIGIBLE COST OF CAPITAL WORKS	£ 35,175.33	£ 21,325.00	£ 10,803.49	£ 5,472.00	£ 8,760.00	£ 81,535.82
	TOTAL GRANT AWARDED	£ 31,437.80	£ 14,248.00	£ 8,259.54	£ 4,714.00	£ 7,794.00	£ 66,453.34
	TOTAL TRADER CONTRIBUTION	£ 3,737.53	£ 7,077.00	£ 2,543.95	£ 758.00	£ 966.00	£ 15,082.48

To date:

- Works to the value of £327,252.22 have been completed to shopfronts across the High Streets (Approx. £80K pending approval)
- £228,449.73 grant has been paid to eligible businesses.
- £67,378.20 trader contribution, currently at 22% overall - 12% above minimum contribution.

It is expected:

- Further grant of approx. £60K will be released following completion of the remaining claims

This is a significant investment in our High Streets in a considerably short space of time, with the scheme being launched in late June 2025 and all capital works completed by March 2026 (approx. 9months).

The final claims for grant funding are currently being processed and are expected to be completed late April 2026.

Marketing and Promotion

The positive response to the scheme on social media has significantly contributed to its success with high levels of online engagement from both the business community and members of the public, who have recognised the benefits of the scheme and the tangible improvements made to our High Streets, examples provided below.

There is a tendency to think regeneration only comes through big, headline projects, when in reality the most lasting change is often delivered through something far simpler, with small improvements carried out consistently over time.

Take a look at the High Street Plaza frontage. What was once fairly plain now feels vibrant, eye-catching and full of character. Colour, artwork and detail have brought the buildings to life, turning what could have been just another row into something that draws the eye and invites people in. It feels active. It feels cared for, and crucially, it feels different.

And the difference really matters, because when one part of the street starts to stand out, it raises the bar for everything around it. One improvement encourages another. Then another. And before long, the effect begins to build across the entire High Street.

This is how real transformation often happens. Not through one single project, but through a steady rhythm of investment, creativity and pride in place.

The Plaza arcade has already shown what can be achieved inside. Now the frontage is playing its part too, helping to strengthen the link between High Street and Holborn Square while adding colour and energy to the street scene.

Keep this approach going, and the cumulative impact could be far greater than any one large development.

BANGOR'S GLOW-UP IS STARTING TO SHINE

There's something quietly happening across Bangor city centre... and if you've walked through recently, you'll have felt it.

Spaces that once felt a little tired are being brought back to life. Shopfronts are brighter. Passageways feel more inviting and walls that were once blank are now full of colour and personality.

Much of this is being driven by small "glow-up" grants, but what's really making the difference is how local businesses are using them. Rather than doing the bare minimum, many are teaming up with local artists, painters and sign-makers to create something with real character.

From eye-catching murals to bold, modern signage, these small interventions are beginning to stitch together a more vibrant, more welcoming city centre. It's the kind of change that doesn't arrive all at once, but builds steadily to something greater.

Regeneration isn't always about cranes and construction sites. Sometimes, it's about pride, creativity and a willingness to invest in your surroundings.

So next time you're in town, take a few extra minutes. Wander through places like High Street Plaza and see it for yourself.



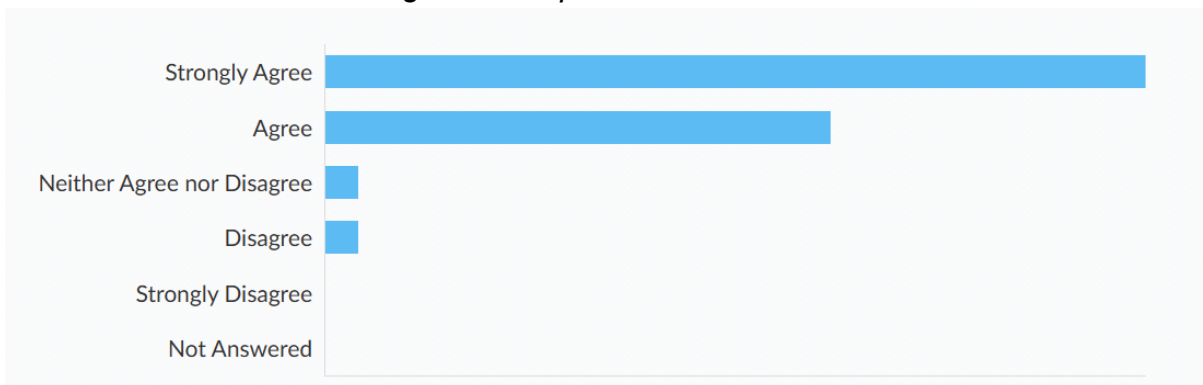


Officers from Regeneration and Corporate Communications are collaborating to implement a communication/ promotion plan targeting local businesses that are participating in the various Supporting Thriving High Street programmes, highlighting the success stories and positive benefits on the local economy. The plan will create opportunities for engagement with local chambers of commerce and members of the Local Action Groups. This will begin being rolled out from May 2026 and will include the launch of the Freshen Up Grant (refer to Appendix 3).

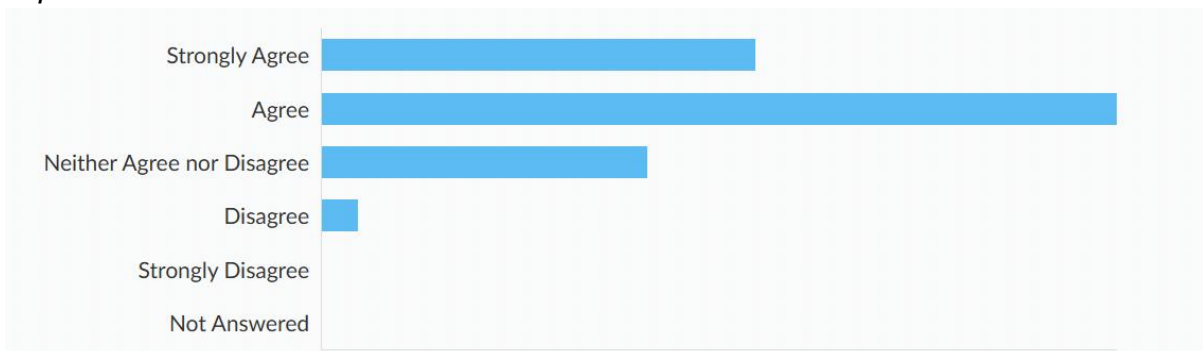
Post Project Evaluation

Successful applicants are required to submit a Post Project Evaluation to assess the benefits of the grant in accordance with the objectives of the Contract for Funding. This process is currently ongoing, and to date, the following responses have been received:

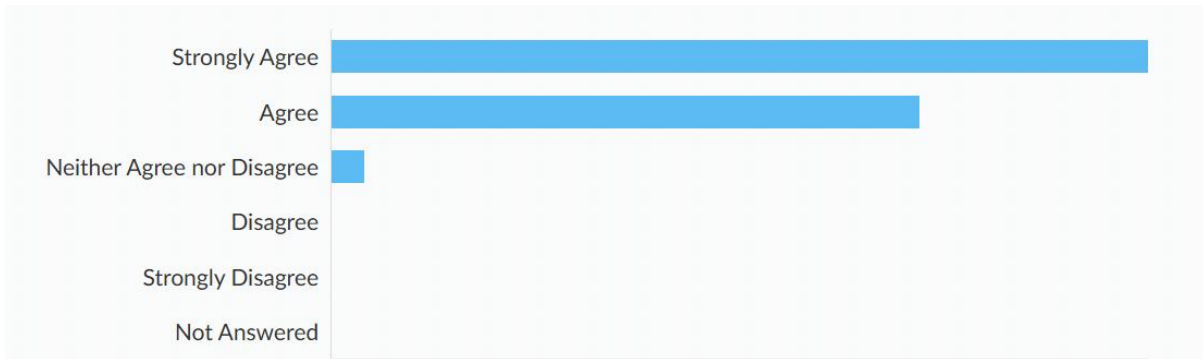
Question: *Do you agree or disagree that the Glow Up Grant delivered under the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme has positively impacted on efforts to create vibrant and welcoming streetscapes?*



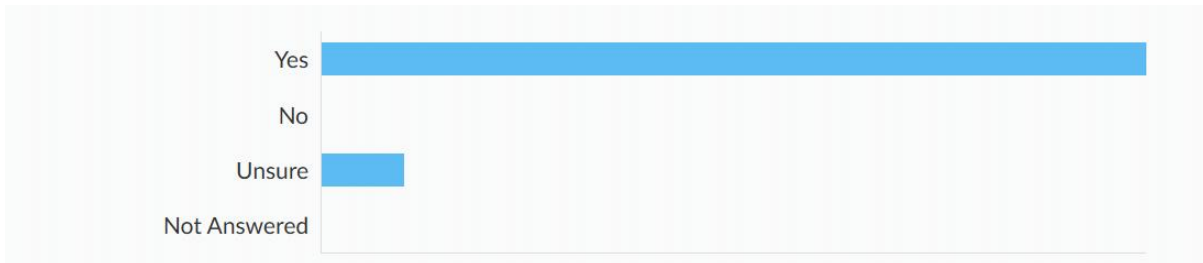
Question: *Do you agree or disagree that the Glow Up Grant delivered under the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme has positively impacted on efforts to improve footfall?*



Question: *Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The improvements to your business and other businesses (e.g. awnings, signage, outdoor furniture, painting etc) has improved the appearance of the area?*



Question: *Are you interested in applying for future regeneration-led grant schemes?*



From the results provided to date, the scheme is on track to achieve each of the objectives outlined in the Contract for Funding.

A post project evaluation report will be compiled following completion of the grant claim process, whereby all applicants will have the opportunity to complete the post project evaluation survey. A Lessons Learnt Workshop with Council officers and Department officials will also form part of the evaluation.

Budget Reallocation - Freshen Up Grant

As members will be aware the Glow Up Grant was funded by the Department for Communities, with an allocation of £500,000. It was agreed £150,000 of the total budget would be reallocated to the 26/27 financial year to deliver the Freshen Up Grant.

Please refer to Appendix 3 for further information on the Freshen Up Grant.

Appendix 2

Supporting Thriving High Streets | Empty To Energised

Background

The Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme is a £1M+ multi-layered support model focused on regenerating and revitalising our High Streets. The programme was launched in June 2025 and includes various strands of support aimed at creating safer and more attractive streetscapes, boosting footfall and attracting new businesses.

The second strand of support made available was the Empty to Energised Pilot Grant Scheme.

Empty to Energised Pilot Grant Scheme

As members will be aware The Empty to Energised Pilot Grant Scheme has a value of £460,000 over 3 years, is being delivered under the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme and is funded by the Council. The grant scheme provides financial assistance to vacant property owners who want to renovate vacant and/or derelict properties and introduce new commercial uses. The pilot scheme was rolled out into Bangor and Newtownards.

As the scheme is the first of its kind to be launched within the Borough and therefore the officers were eager to understand the potential demand for the grant, an online questionnaire was developed and property owners within Bangor and Newtownards were encouraged to complete

The questionnaire opened for responses on 23rd June 2025 and closed on 8th August 2025. The number of respondents totalled 23. Of the 23 respondents, Regeneration Officers met with 17 property owners for an in-person discussion.

Of the 23 respondents, a total of 9 submitted an application for the Empty to Energised Pilot Grant Scheme.

To the best of our knowledge, and based on correspondence with the respondents who did not apply, the reasons for non-application were as follows:

- Identified as outside the town/city grant specific boundary
- Project of works related to tourist accommodation – not eligible under the pilot grant scheme
- Secured tenant before scheme was launched
- Carried out works before scheme was launched
- Problems with NIW regarding connection to sewage network in Newtownards

Awarding Grants

The Empty to Energised Pilot Grant was designed in line with the Council's Grant Policy, as the Grants is fully funded by the Council. The grants policy details that grants should be awarded following a competitive application process, whereby applications are assessed against set criteria. The assessment criteria were clearly detailed in the Empty to Energised Pilot Grant Scheme guidance notes. As per the policy the scheme was presented to the Place and Prosperity Committee on 9th October 2025 and subsequently approved. This permitted Officers to proceed with the Pilot Grant scheme to apply the approved grants process to deliver, manage, administer the grants programme, issue letters of offer and award decisions using the following delegation thresholds (which are in line with those set out in the Purchasing and Payments Policy). As the maximum grants do not exceed £25,000 letters of offer can be issued by the Strategic Development Manager.

The progress to date of the pilot grant scheme is now being presented to Council for noting.

Marketing and Promotion

A carefully managed soft launch of the Empty to Energised Pilot Grant Scheme was undertaken in November 2025 to generate early interest and build momentum for the scheme. The scheme was advertised in the local press via a press release announcing the opening of the scheme in January 2026. This was followed up with an email sent to the Chamber of Commerce and all property agents in both Bangor and Newtownards. It was also featured in the Economic Development Business E-zine and emails were also sent to any local businesses who had signed up for the E2E database. The opportunity was also posted on the Council Social media channels.

The official launch of the scheme followed in January 2026 when the scheme opened for applications. The launch was supported by a quarter page advert in the local press and a broader email distribution to all previously contacted stakeholders, property agents and internal departments. It was also heavily featured on Council Social media pages. During the period where the scheme was opened for applications, social media posts appeared on the Council's social media channels to remind potential applicants of the upcoming application closing date. Additional reminders were also sent via email to stakeholders and businesses on the Empty to Energised database.

Applications received

The Empty to Energised Pilot Grant scheme opened for applications at 9am on Monday 5th January 2026 and closed at 12noon on Monday 16th February 2026. Following the

closing date, applicants were provided additional time to submit their supporting documentation. This was followed up by 2 emails and phone calls to all applicants. A total of 19 applications were submitted, 10 from Bangor and 9 from Newtownards.

Assessment Process

The assessment process followed a 2-stage process as detailed in the Applicant Guidance Notes:

Part 1 – Basic Eligibility

Part 2 – Scored Assessment

The assessment panel was made up of Council officers and an external specialist. Gleeds was appointed to provide a Quantity Surveyor to ensure applicants were providing value for money and that the scope of works detailed were achievable. Eligible applications were required to achieve a minimum score of 50% in order to be granted funding.

Following completion of the assessment process of 19 applications, 7 were deemed ineligible with a total of 12 applications receiving an Offer in Principle.

Applications were ineligible for the following reasons;

- Invalid contact details provided.
- Applicant did not own the property and did not have owner's consent.
- Property not within Grant Specific Area Map.
- No supporting documentation received by deadline after multiple reminders.
- Did not meet minimum grant amount of £10,000.

In line with the Council's Grant Policy and Scheme of Delegation, Offers in Principle (Letters of Offer in Principle) were issued between Monday 23rd March 2026 and 31st March 2026 to 12 successful applicants, pending completion of outstanding statutory consents.

Each applicant is given 12 months from the date of the Offer in Principle to achieve any statutory consents required. It is the Applicant's responsibility to ensure all statutory consents required are in place. Only when copies of the approvals (or confirmation that the project does not require any statutory consents) are made to the Council can applicants receive a formal final Letter of Offer. Upon receipt of a signed formal Letter of Offer from the applicant, a project commencement date is then issued.

To date there has been 7 formal final Letters of Offer issued with all 7 having had official permission to commence the project.

The below Table details the position of all applications following assessment:

APPLICATIONS RECEIVED	
Applications submitted	19
Unsuccessful Applications	7
Offers in principle issued	12
Total cost of works	£500,283.67
Total Grant to be awarded	£271,456
Total level of Applicant Contribution 20%	£228,827.67

The below Table details the position of all eligible applications per town/city following assessment:

	BANGOR	NEWTOWNARDS
Applications submitted	10	9
Offers in principle issued	7	5
Total cost of works	£259,310	£240,973.67
Total Grant to be awarded	£161,424	£110,032
Total level of Applicant Contribution 20%	£97,886	£130,941.67

The below table details the current position to date as of 20/04/26:

	BANGOR	NEWTOWNARDS
Permission to start works	5	2
Total cost of works (Letters of Offer)	£213,310	£53,575
Total Grant to be awarded	£124,624	£40,952
Total level of Applicant Contribution	£88,686	£12,623
Total of 30% upfront payment	£37,387.20	£12,285.60

By way of comparison Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council (ABCBC) have initiated two key regeneration programmes 'Empty to Occupied' and 'Fit for Future' aimed at revitalising vacant properties and stimulating economic growth within the borough.

By Q1 2025, the Empty to Occupied Scheme had 14 projects had received Letters of Offer, with four projects completed and occupied.

A complementary programme, Fit for Future, launched in 2023/24, focuses on minor refurbishment works. It offers smaller grants to improve vacant properties, although no projects had been completed at the time reported.

	Empty to Occupied	Fit for Future
Max. Grant	£90,000	£20,000
Scope	Major Structural Works	Minor touch-ups
LoOs awarded	14	23
Projects completed	4	0
Total Project costs	£200,000 - £370,000	£21,000+
Match Funding	20%	20%
Year Launched	2021	2023/24
Budget	£1,150,000	£600,000



▲ Fig 6L: ABC Council

▲ Fig 6K: Empty to Occupied (ETO) and Fit for Future (FFF) side by side comparison

source – McGarry Consulting Vacancy and Dereliction Study (2025)

Funding Allocation

The current position of funding allocation for the committed funds and grants awarded and a further allocation of approximately £271,456 towards the final applications.

The budget for year one 5025/26 was £200,000 year 1 was rolled over to year 2 leaving a total budget for 2026/27 of £320,000. The remaining budget for this financial year is £48,544. Officers will continue to work through the pilot scheme to assess the success and learning from the scheme. An additional budget of £140,000 is agreed for the 2027/28 financial year. A report will be returned to this committee in quarter 3 of this financial year to determine next steps and how to continue with the scheme to ensure remainder of the spend.

Next steps

- Officers will continue to work with applicants to deliver the current Pilot Grant Scheme.
- Post project evaluation where applicable will be carried out to measure success.
- A follow up report will be returned to committee in quarter 3 to recommend how to allocate the remainder of the spend.

Appendix 3

Supporting Thriving High Streets | Freshen Up Grant

Introduction

The 'Freshen Up' Grant presented an opportunity to reallocate the underspend identified under the Glow Up Grant to further enhance the Council and Department's commitment to supporting local businesses. The Freshen Up Grant supports businesses to carry out cost-effective shopfront improvements of power washing and/or painting, to enhance visual appeal and create welcoming streetscapes in time for the summer season, with the aim to attract more visitors and boost local economic activity.

The Freshen Up Grant provides financial assistance to commercial properties with an active business in the urban centres of Bangor, Comber, Donaghadee, Holywood and Newtownards.

Grants will provide 90% funding up to a maximum amount of £1,500 per property. A minimum 10% financial contribution is required from eligible applicants.

Eligible Works

Only power washing and/or painting to the exterior of the commercial property are eligible. The works must enhance the shopfront to assist with achieving the following outcomes:

- encourage footfall
- improve the appearance of the streetscape
- provide a welcoming and vibrant shopfront

Applying Lessons Learnt from Glow Up Grant Scheme

Feedback from the Glow Up Grant Scheme informed of the challenges encountered by local businesses in securing the minimum number of quotations in line with the procurement policy. As a result, the level of grant award has been reduced to £1,500.00 per application and only one quotation is now required for submission.

The Glow Up Grant closing date was extended in response to feedback from businesses around the difficulty in sourcing local contractors, and obtaining quotations during busy periods. To address this, officers have proactively issued a call out to local paint contractors to register their details for a call-off list which will be shared with all applicants. Contractors will need to provide their insurance details at registration, reducing the need for further submissions. This approach also supports the local economy by promoting local contractors.

Time delays occurred during the Glow Up Grant because of applicants needing to engage the planning department and building control department, and await approvals (where required). The Freshen Up Grant is limited to power washing and

painting, therefore the volume of statutory consents will be significantly reduced, as approvals will mainly pertain to murals and conservation areas only.

The revised approach will offer several benefits, including a quick and straightforward application process with the requirement for only a single quotation from the applicants preferred supplier, minimal (if any) regulatory requirements due to the lack of statutory approvals required, cost effective improvements that will enhance the visual appeal of the shopfronts and a quick turnaround of delivery resulting in immediate impact.

Open for Applications

The Freshen Up Grant will open for applications at 9am on Friday 01st May 2026.

The closing date is 12noon on Friday 29th May 2026, or sooner should all funded be awarded.

The completion deadline for all works will be Friday 28th August 2026, however it is expected that this will be much sooner in most cases.

Application Process

Interested applicants will be required to complete an online application form and submit the following documentation – 1no quotation from preferred contractor, contractor insurance (only where the contractor is not registered on the call-off list), a pre project image and property owner/ business owner consent*.

** if the applicant is the tenant applying, they must obtain permission from the building owner(s) to carry out any works to the building. If the applicant is the building owner applying, they must obtain permission from the active business tenant.*

Officers will assess applications on a rolling basis as they are received to improve turnaround times and allow applicants to begin their works promptly.

Marketing and Promotion

The Freshen Up Grant is supported by the marketing and PR campaign under the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme. The launch of the grant will be supported by the Local Action Groups and will coincide with the roll out of success stories from the Glow Up Grant to help generate awareness and interest.

A dedicated webpage will be available and a dedicated mailbox for all enquiries.



Unclassified

ITEM 6

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	07 May 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Tourism, Arts and Heritage
Report title	AND Tourism Events and Festivals Fund 25/26 Update Report and 26/27 Grants Awarded
Attachments	Appendix 1 Tourim Events Festivals Fund 25 26 Summary Appendix 2 Tourism Events and Festivaks Fund Applications 26 27
File Reference (if applicable)	
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	None Narrative:
Screening Requirements	<i>The Council will commit to consider the implication of all reports under the categories of Section 75, Rural Needs, Data Protection, Climate and Sustainability:</i> Screening of report not required
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Priority 1: Economic 4. A vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors If multiple:

Background

In September 2024, the Place and Prosperity Committee agreed the AND Tourism Events and Festivals Fund (TEFF) application form and guidance notes in line with the corporate Grants Policy. The AND TEFF 2025/26 opened on 31 October 2024, and was promoted via TEFF email mailing lists and Council social media. It closed on 25 November 2024. Two information sessions were held on 30 October 2024 for those interested in applying to the TEFF.

As previously reported to the Council in June 2025, there were 21 applications received by the closing date. Further to an assessment conducted in line with the Grants Policy, a total of £106,701.15 was awarded to 14 events in 2025/26. All events were successfully delivered and a total of £104,522.39 was drawn down by applicants. 68,310 attendees and participants were recorded over the 14 events with an average cost per visitor of £1.53.

The following events did not draw down their full grant award:

Event	Award	Drawn Down	Reason
Hollywood May Day, Hollywood & District Community Council	£4,973.25	£3,981.99	Not enough eligible invoices
Portaferry Plein Air, Portaferry Art Society	£1,187.50	£0	Event made a profit more than the amount of the grant awarded

Objectives of the Tourism Events and Festivals Fund and outputs

1. To enhance the visitor experience of the Borough

Out of the 14 successful events, three took place in Bangor, three in Portaferry, three in Newtownards, two in Hollywood, two in Comber and the remaining event was delivered in Millisle. This produced a range of varying types of events throughout the Borough and spread throughout the year.

2. To support events/festivals that increase local tourism spend by attracting attendees and participants, especially those from outside the Borough

The 14 events welcomed a total of 59,463 attendees and 8,847 participants to their events throughout the year. Of these, 29,297 (49%) attendees and 3,456 (39%) participants came from Out of the Borough.

3. To support events/festivals that have the potential to encourage attendees and participants to stay overnight within the Borough

There were 3,137 bednights generated from participants and attendees to the 14 successful events in 2025/26. Of this total, 2,671 (85%) were in commercial accommodation (Hotels, B&B's Guesthouses) and the remainder were between registered camping/caravan sites and with family and friends.

It is important to note that the bednight figures are derived from information supplied directly by event organisers. There is no formal or independently verified evidence to

substantiate these figures. Bednight data should therefore be regarded as indicative rather than definitive.

4. To support the development and capacity of the local events sectors

The Event Organisers who are successful in receiving support through the TEEF are invited to participate in the Council Festival's Forum where they hear from guest speakers who cover various event related topics. The successful applicants also have a dedicated Case Officer who assists with Event Management Plans and Risk Assessments, developing the knowledge and capacity of the local events sector.

A summary of the 14 successful events is attached at Appendix 1.

TEFF Survey Feedback

A survey was sent out to the successful and unsuccessful applicants (2025/26) to gain information on how they heard about the TEEF, seek their opinion on the Council grant information sessions and seek their views on the TEEF application and guidance notes. Overall, the feedback was positive. Respondents to the survey indicated they found the application form straightforward to complete and the guidance notes were useful. One comment received was on the timeline of the notification of the award, especially if the event takes place early in the year. This has since been improved with the introduction of the new corporate Grants Policy which delegates decisions on grant panel awards to Officers, therefore shortening the required timeline of the process.

Tourism Events and Festivals Fund 2026/27

The Application Process

The AND TEEF 2026/27 opened on 14 November 2025 and closed on 15 December 2025. It was promoted via the TEEF mailing list, on Council social media and through the Council Grant information sessions which took place in April and October 2025. There were 14 applications received by the closing date, applying for a total of £132,281.

The Assessment Panel

A minimum pass mark of 60% was agreed prior to the opening of the Fund which was included in guidance notes for the fund. The applications were assessed in January 2026 by a panel of three officers comprising the Events Manager, Sports and Recreation Development Officer and Transformation Officer, using an agreed scoring matrix as per application guidance issued.

One application, Bangor International Choral Festival, was not scored as the guidance notes and application form stated that other Council funding cannot be used in conjunction with an application to the TEEF. The applicant had also applied for a grant through the Council's Arts and Heritage Service. The amount requested through the Multi-Annual Arts Fund 2026-2028 was larger than the request through the TEEF, therefore the panel did not score the application as it determined the larger amount of financial support would be more beneficial for the successful delivery of the event. This group has since received a grant from the Multi-Annual Arts Fund.

Three applications out of the 14 submitted were unsuccessful as the standard of the application was not sufficient to meet the agreed pass mark.

Each unsuccessful applicant received an email notifying them of the result on 26 February 2026. This included reasons why the application did not meet the pass mark and referenced Council's Appeal Procedure. The unsuccessful applicants were offered further feedback. One applicant took up the offer (Bangor Regatta) and was given further verbal feedback. See Appendix 2 for pass marks and awards.

The remaining 10 events were successful in receiving an award. These are detailed in Appendix 2.

Budget

The allocation of budget available to the AND TEFF is £80,000 per annum, however, the successful application grant requests exceeded this by £27,526. To enable support of all events that met or exceeded the pass mark, the assessment panel agreed that by applying a 7% reduction on each eligible requested grant, the TEFF would utilise part of an underspend from the Growth Events Fund (GEF) in 26/27 - £19,998 bringing the total award fund to £99,998. As reported to the Council in January 2025, no applications were received to the GEF last advertised in November 2024, which presented some underspend in years 2025/26 and 2026/27 across the total events grants budget. The GEF reopens later this year for a further three years subject to the rates setting process.

Evaluation of AND Tourism Events and Festivals Fund

Officers within the Tourism Events Team are preparing the annual survey to go out to successful and unsuccessful applicants in 2026/27 to gauge opinion on this year's TEFF. Feedback obtained through this survey will inform Officers understanding of applicant satisfaction and provide evidence to support evaluation of what worked well and where improvements may be considered for future funding rounds.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council **Notes** the report and appendices.

Appendix 1
Tourism Events and Festivals Fund 2025/26
Summary

DATE	EVENT	ORGANISER	Grant		Attendee and Participant Numbers		cost per attendee	*Estimated Economic Impact*
			Award	Paid Out	Target	Actual		
3-5/04/25	Bangor International Choral Festival	Bangor International Choral Festival	£2,850.00	£2,850.00	2,518	2,058	£1.28	£44,109
05/05/2025	Hollywood May Day	Hollywood & District Community Council	£4,973.25	£3,981.99	10,200	12,450	Partnership event with Council	
16-17/05/25	Gathering Stitches - Yarn & Textiles Festival	Inspiring Yarns CIC	£5,985.00	£5,985.00	1,590	1,253	£4.78	£14,796
29/05-1/06/25	Portaferry Plein Air Festival	Portaferry Arts Society	£1,187.50	£0.00	59	57	n/a	
15/06/2025	Trucks at the Track	Friends of the Track	£10,681.80	£10,681.80	620	1,345	£7.94	£17,100
28/07/1900	Ards Town Centre Races	Ards Cycling Club	£3,135.00	£3,135.00	430	397	£7.90	£7,452
11/7-17/8/25	Art in the Garden	Hastings Hotels Group Limited	£14,250.00	£14,250.00	19,506	20,291	£0.70	£418,518
26-28/7/25	The Emerald Isle Highland Dance Festival	Emerald Isle Highland Dance Committee	£7,125.00	£7,125.00	1,980	2,322	£3.07	£76,797

**Appendix 1
Tourism Events and Festivals Fund 2025/26
Summary**

DATE	EVENT	ORGANISER	Grant		Attendee and Participant Numbers		cost per attendee	*Estimated Economic Impact*
			Award	Paid Out	Target	Actual		
1-4/08/25	Sails and Sounds	Portaferry Community Services Ltd	£14,190.15	£14,190.15	7,450	6,770	£2.10	£150,072
14-17/08/25	ILCA Ireland National Championships	Ballyholme Yacht Club	£5,861.50	£5,861.50	1,685	1,688	£3.47	£347,139
16/08/2025	Ards Peninsula Kite Festival	Ards Peninsula Villages Partnership	£6,745.00	£6,745.00	5,080	10,161	£0.66	£145,620
16-23/08/25	Clandeboyne Festival	Camerata Ireland	£14,203.45	£14,203.45	1,394	1,539	£9.23	£57,537
6-7/09/25	Bangor International & National Championship Dog Shows	Bangor & North Down Canine Club	£4,826.00	£4,826.00	2,300	6,641	£0.73	£338,460
1-31/03/26	Feel Good Festival	Portico of Ards Ltd	£10,687.50	£10,687.50	1,270	1,338	£7.99	£23,328
Totals			£106,701.15	£104,522.39	56,082	68,310		

*Calculations are based on attendee and participant day visitors at £36 per day and attendee and participant bednights at £87 per night using the Tourism Northern Ireland economic calculator template (data used as provided by the applicant).

Appendix 2
Tourism Events and Festivals Fund 2026/27 – All Applications

DATE OF EVENT	EVENT	ORGANISER	SCORE (%)	AWARD	TARGET ATTENDEE AND PARTICIPANT NUMBERS
9-12/04/26	Irish Sailing Youth National Championships, Bangor	Ballyholme Yacht Club	71.2	£13,950	2,060
04/05/2026	May Day 2026, Holywood	Hollywood & District Community Council	61.5	£2,441	8,000
9-10/05/26	Gathering Stitches - Yarn & Textiles Festival, Comber	Inspiring Yarns CIC	71.2	£9,114	1,306
13-14/06/26	Trucks at the Track, Kirkistown	Friends of the track	61.5	£13,950	2,100
17/06/2026	Ards 2026 Town Centre Races, Newtownards	Ards Cycling Club	59.6	£3,041	430
25-26/07/26	The Emerald Isle Highland Dance Festival, Comber	The Emerald Isle Highland Dance Committee	80.8	£6,975	2,100
30/07/26-02/08/26	Sails and Sounds, Portaferry	Portaferry Community Services Ltd	96.2	£13,950	9,300
22-29/08/26	Clandeboyne Festival 2026, Clandeboyne	Camerata Ireland	90.4	£13,909	1,530
22/08/2026	Ards Peninsula Kite Festival, Millisle	Millisle Regeneration	63.5	£8,718	8,580
10-21/02/27	NI Science Festival, various throughout the borough	NI Science Festival	92.3	£13,950	5,130
		TOTAL		£99,998	3,976

Appendix 2
Tourism Events and Festivals Fund 2026/27 – All Applications

UNSUCCESSFUL APPLICATIONS

28-31/5/26	Portaferry Art Society	Portaferry Plein Air Festival	44.2	0	
25-28/6/25	Royal Ulster Yacht Club	Bangor Regatta	57.7	0	
22-23/8/26	Northern Community Leisure Trust	Bangor Festival of Sport	55.8	0	

INELIGIBLE APPLICATIONS

23-25/4/26	Bangor Choral Festival	Bangor Choral Festival	n/a		
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Unclassified

ITEM 7

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	07 May 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Tourism, Arts and Heritage
Report title	Annual Tourism Events Programme 25/26 Evaluation
Attachments	Appendix 1 Tourism Events 2025 Evaluation Summary Appendix 2 Dates for Tourism Events 2026
File Reference (if applicable)	TO/EV121
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	None Narrative:
Screening Requirements	<i>The Council will commit to consider the implication of all reports under the categories of Section 75, Rural Needs, Data Protection, Climate and Sustainability:</i> Screening of report not required
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Priority 1: Economic Multiple If multiple: 4, 5 & 6

Background

The following nine Tourism Events were delivered between May and November in 2025/26.

Event	Date (2025)	Budget
May Day, Holywood	Monday 05.05.25	£21,300
Sea Bangor	Saturday 24.05.25 Sunday 25.05.25	£108,500
Armed Forces Day	Saturday 21.06.25	£130,000
Summer Food Festival incorporating Comber Earlies Food Festival	Saturday 28.06.25	£86,500
Pipeband Championships, Newtownards	Saturday 19.07.25	£36,700
Autumn Food Festival incorporating Tide and Turf, Portavogie	Saturday 06.09.25	£97,000
Shorelife Celebration	Saturday 04.10.25	£30,000
Bangor Christmas Event	Saturday 22.11.25	£30,000
Newtownards Christmas Event	Saturday 29.11.25	£30,000
		£570,000

The programme attracted a total of 101,808 attendees which was below the target of 109,000. No attendance figures were recorded for the Shorelife Festival as it was unfortunately cancelled due to Storm Amy.

This figure only includes events directly delivered by the Tourism Events team, excluding shoulder events and other related events within the Taste Summer and Autumn Food Festivals.

Market research was undertaken at each of the tourism events. One event had market research undertaken by the in-house team - May Day. All other research was undertaken by an independent market research agency. Sample sizes ranged widely and therefore results should be interpreted by the reader accordingly. A summary is included in Appendix 1.

Hollywood May Day — Monday 5 May 2025

The Hollywood May Day celebrations on Monday 5 May 2025 were delivered in partnership with Holywood and District Community Council (HDCC). The event attracted an estimated 12,000 attendees, representing a significant increase on previous years. Dwell time improved, with attendees arriving earlier and remaining onsite longer.

The revised event layout contributed positively to crowd flow, accessibility, and the overall event experience. Set-up and de-rig operations were completed effectively, although high footfall at close-down created challenges for vehicle access.

The event programme retained its traditional elements, including community-led activities, musical performances, children's entertainment, and a dedicated food and seating area.

Key Successes

- HDCC reported strong engagement across all community-led elements, including a full turnout for the Tea Dance.
- Local businesses and charities reported a positive trading day. Performers, funfair providers, and community groups provided positive feedback on the event layout and atmosphere.
- The revised layout encouraged longer dwell time and improved attendee experience.
- Achieved a 70.42% recycling rate, diverting 1,420 tonnes of waste from landfill. Zero cross-contamination was recorded across all waste streams. Waste volumes almost doubled compared to 2024, reflecting increased attendance and activity levels.

Challenges and Observations

- Review the management of the 'close' period and extend the road closure by one hour to assist with vehicle access and support safe de-rigging and increase stewarding during event close-down.
- Review and reposition recycling stations to avoid obstructing business frontages.
- Review coning arrangements from Belfast Road to Sullivan Place.
- Enhance signage and social media messaging to direct attendees to available parking.
- Review food area and May Pole area for queue management.

A combined 53.33% of attendees stayed for more than two hours, supporting the observation that the revised layout increased dwell time. 85% of attendees are AND or close to Holywood (Belfast recorded postcodes) residents.

Sea Bangor — Saturday 28 and Sunday 29 June 2025

Sea Bangor 2025 was delivered over two days along Bangor's seafront attracting an estimated 10,000 attendees. Attendance was lower than previous years, assumed largely due to adverse weather conditions, which impacted elements of the programme. Despite this, the event operated smoothly, with strong partnership working and positive public engagement.

Key Successes

- The event team demonstrated resilience in adapting the programme in response to poor weather.
- The Passport Trail achieved full uptake (1,500)
- Footfall remained consistent between the main event site and the TK Maxx Craft Market.
- The Old Market House recorded approximately 2,650 attendees on Saturday.
- Positive feedback overall from Bangor Harbour, despite weather related cancellations.

Challenges and Observations

- Severe weather on Sunday resulted in the cancellation of all water-based activities. Significant programme adjustments were required to weatherproof the site. The pier and festival bar areas require improved weatherproofing for future events.
- Across the Sea Bangor weekend, a total of 1,520 kg of waste was collected, with recycling rates of 61.11% on Saturday and 57.50% on Sunday. While the majority of waste was successfully diverted from general waste, overall recycling performance was lower than 2025 and below the standard achieved at other events delivered this season. While the event maintained a majority recycling rate, the drop in performance highlights the need for stronger trader compliance checks and improved staff training to ensure future events meet our sustainability standards.

85% of attendees to the event were local with an additional 15% from out of the Borough, this is a reduction for Out of Borough attendance (30% in 2023, 19% in 2024). As this is one of the key Growth events identified in the Borough Events Strategic Direction officers have been reviewing programming for 2026 and look forward to revise the event in 2027 with new Waterfront development event site. However the Out of Borough attendees needs to growth for this to be still recognised as a key Growth event.

Despite challenging weather conditions, Sea Bangor 2025 was delivered safely and effectively, with strong stakeholder collaboration and positive public engagement. While attendance was lower than previous years, the insights gathered provide clear direction for enhancing resilience, infrastructure, and programming for 2026. Programming will refocus on the maritime theme which has been missing in recent years.

Taste Ards and North Down Summer Food Festival incorporating Comber Earlies Food Festival – 7 June

The Comber Earlies Food Festival is the headline event in the Taste Summer in Ards and North Down programme which showcases the Borough's food and drink offering. Programming at the event included artisan stalls featuring local producers, a demo kitchen featuring celebrity chef, local produce, music stage and bar along with family themed arts, crafts and activities.

Key successes

- Celebrity chef, Anna Haugh, proved a major draw, significantly boosting footfall at the demo kitchen. Local chefs were well represented, strengthening the festival's focus on regional produce.
- The new Q&A area in the stretch tent was well received and supported audience engagement.
- Walkabout performers positioned on Bridge Street Link added atmosphere and improved flow.
- Collaborative working with ANDBC Parks enhanced site presentation and operations and the event benefitted from strong partnership working across Council services, local businesses, and community groups.

- The Passport activity across Comber generated strong participation and positive business feedback. The team hope to continue to support and expand the scheme.
- Activities in the Square including craft stalls, bands, and the Historical Society contributed to a lively town-wide experience.
- Translink reported increased use of the free bus service to the event. Officers will assess the continued viability of the Downpatrick route, which saw lower demand, and may replace it with a route via Saintfield and Ballygowan.
- The festival delivered excellent environmental performance: 90.54% recycling rate and Zero cross-contamination. High organic recycling was attributed to widespread use of compostable packaging by traders.

Challenges and observations

- Increase directional and parking signage to alleviate issues with build days (Thursday and Friday), part closure of Comber Leisure Centre car park.
- Improve communication with Traffic Wardens regarding festival parking badges.
- Music area later in the afternoon was popular, particularly near the bar and food vendors. Monitoring was effective, and circulation improved without requiring zone closure.
- The bar area was busier than in previous years. The introduction of non-alcohol beer / cider was both a huge success.
- It is acknowledged that the event is at close to capacity, however the existing monitoring will ensure safety is maintained throughout.
- Some traders within the event site reported lower takings than last year, potentially due to attendees spending more time in the bar and music areas.
- Some town centre businesses voiced concerns around the location of the event site and that they did not benefit directly from the event. A report was presented to Place and Prosperity Committee in March 2026 to review the event location. The Council agreed for the event to remain at the Comber Leisure Centre Car Park. The team will continue to engage with impacted businesses going forward.

23% of attendees to the event were from out of the Borough with an additional 1% from outside of Northern Ireland. The largest percentage of attendees stayed at the event for between two and three hours and 63% of attendees travelled to Comber specifically for the event.

Armed Forces Day - Saturday 21 June 2025

Armed Forces Day was a flagship event for both the Armed Forces and the Borough, delivering community and economic benefits. The event was delivered with strong partnership working and excellent public engagement, attracting c.50,000 attendees to Newtownards Airfield throughout the day. Feedback from the public, partners, and stakeholders was very positive.

The collaborative approach between Council services, military partners, and external agencies was widely praised and contributed strongly to the smooth running and positive public experience.

Key successes

- Attendance exceeded expectations, with attendees travelling from across Northern Ireland and beyond.
- Social media campaigns and advance communications were highly effective in promoting the event and managing public expectations.
- The Red Arrows display was a major attraction and contributed to the exceptionally high turnout.
- The “one team” approach across Council services and military partners was a key success factor.
- Communications, PR, and stakeholder engagement were consistently highlighted as strengths.
- Local charities and traders reported strong performance, with one charity raising £5,000 on the day.
- The event showcased the Borough’s ability to deliver high-profile regional events to a high standard.

Challenges and observations

While the event was extremely successful, several areas were identified for learnings in future years:

- The contracted security provider acknowledged shortcomings in planning and delivery. Future events will require a fully endorsed security plan and clearer lines of communication.
- High attendance created pressure on access routes, particularly around peak display times.
- Earlier use of alternative exit routes and greater reliance on Park and Ride are recommended for future planning.

32% of attendees to the event came from out of the Borough and an additional 2% from outside of Northern Ireland. The highest percentage of attendees stayed at the event for more than 4 hours with 69% spending money at the event.

Pipe Band Championships – Saturday 19 July 2025

The 2025 Pipe Band Championships were delivered in Newtownards at Regent House School sports grounds. The new venue was widely praised by partners for its suitability, accessibility, and proximity to the town centre. The event attracted an estimated 3,000 attendees, lower than expected. More than likely the footfall was impacted by its timing during the Twelfth fortnight. Despite this, the event operated smoothly, with positive feedback from bands, partners and attendees.

The parade at the end of the competition worked particularly well and will be retained, subject to operational arrangements, as part of the event model going forward.

Key successes

- The venue was highly regarded by the Royal Scottish Pipe Bands Association NI team, offering a well contained and easily managed site.
- End of day parade received strong support from local bands and the public.

- Partnership working with the Chamber of Trade helped to drive footfall into the town centre.
- Achieved a 91.06% recycling rate, with zero cross contamination. The venue was considered the easiest to manage for waste operations so far this year.

Challenges and observations

- The event date, falling within the Twelfth fortnight, negatively affected attendance levels.
- Maintain partnership working with the Chamber to support town centre footfall.

47% came from out of the Borough, compared to 20% in 2024. Most attendees stayed at the event for more than 4 hours and 84% spent money at the event, the same percentage as the 2024 event.

Taste Ards and North Down Autumn Food Festival incorporating Tide and Turf, Portavogie – Saturday 6 September

The Tide and Turf Festival welcomed approximately 6,000 attendees, a strong turnout given the number of competing events across Northern Ireland on the same weekend. The festival delivered a positive visitor experience, showcased local food and coastal themed activity, and maintained a well-managed, contained event footprint. Anna Haugh was the celebrity chef and attracted a dedicated audience.

Key successes

- The stargazing and Demo and Dine events were both sold out.
- Smooth visitor flow throughout the site, supported by favourable weather conditions.
- Effective Park and Ride operations, with no concerns raised by PSNI.
- Strong environmental performance, with no cross-contamination.

Challenges and observations

- Ongoing issue with no wet fish available for sale at this event due to most providers having existing commitments on Saturdays. The team with continue with efforts to source wet fish suppliers to trade at the event
- Unregulated private stalls positioned opposite the event site.
- Last-minute arrival of commercial boats, requiring space for a large lorry and resulting in a reduced bar marquee footprint. Harbour representatives confirmed that boat owners had been notified of the event set up times but emphasised the need for physical barriers to prevent unauthorised parking.
- Parking pressures around the harbour area, requiring earlier placement of cones and barriers.
- Improve communication protocols with local stakeholders to alleviate any concerns during set-up.

23% came from out of the Borough, similar to previous years. Most attendees stayed for between one to two hours, falling from 2-3 hours in 2024. 96% of attendees spent money at the event.

Bangor Christmas event – Friday 21 and Saturday 22 November

The Bangor Christmas Switch-On took place over two days and attracted an estimated 5,000 attendees on Saturday and 1,000 on Sunday. Despite mixed weather conditions, the event delivered a positive family experience, with good engagement around the lighting installations and festive activities. Set-up and take-down were completed smoothly with no incidents reported.

While the event succeeded in attracting attendees, challenges around business engagement, communication, and festive atmosphere were clearly identified.

As requested by Council in November 2025, a full review of the Bangor and the Newtownards Christmas events is being completed and a report will be presented to the Bangor Local Advisory Group outlining plans for 2026. However, the detail below sets out the key success and challenges for the purposes of this report.

Key successes

- City of Bangor Passport initiative was well received, with 1,000 passports completed.
- Market House activities delivered by Kilcooley Women's Centre were well received.
- The choir/music programme in Translink contributed positively to the event.
- Funfair and lighting installations were popular attractions, particularly for families seeking photo opportunities.
- Operational delivery was smooth, with no issues during set-up or take-down.
- PSNI support ensured safe road closures and adequate officer presence throughout.

Challenges and observations

- Weather conditions, particularly on Sunday, reduced footfall and overall attendance.
- It is acknowledged through the market research and social media commentary that attendees to this event have an expectation of the "switch on" moment being an integral part of the programme. This will be a priority for future planning of Christmas events.
- Chamber of Commerce expressed concerns about low business activity - changes to event programming created uncertainty for traders and partners.

The attendance at the event remains local, with 89% coming from throughout the Borough, similar to previous years. The majority of attendees stayed at the event for up to one hour and 79% spent money at the event. 63% of attendees indicated that they travelled to Bangor specifically for the event. 69% said they enjoyed the wider range of activities and the extra days at this year's event.

The attendees were asked how important an actual "Switch-On" moment was to them, 74% indicated that it was either fairly or very important.

Newtownards Christmas event – Friday 28 and Saturday 29 November

The Newtownards Christmas event took place over two days, attracting approximately 1,000 attendees on Friday and 2,000 on Saturday. This is considerably lower than previous years; it is acknowledged there was confusion over the event programming and the earlier switch on time on Friday which likely impacted on attendee numbers, as many potential people were still in work and school.

The event ran smoothly, with Paddington Bear proving a major attraction for families. Set-up and take-down were completed without issue and the event maintained a safe and welcoming atmosphere throughout. As already presented in the report, a review of the Newtownards event is being completed and a report will be presented to the Newtownards Local Advisory Group outlining plans for 2026.

Key successes

- Strong family attendance, particularly on Saturday, with Paddington Bear drawing significant interest.
- Smooth operational delivery, with no issues reported during set-up or take-down.
- Chalet village and festive infrastructure installed successfully, contributing to the overall atmosphere.

Challenges and observations

- It is acknowledged through the market research and social media commentary that attendees to this event have an expectation of the “switch on” moment being an integral part of the programme. This will be a priority for future planning of Christmas events.
- Switch-on timing impacted on attendee numbers and impact of the switch on moment.
- Revert to a later switch-on time to maximise attendance and enhance the impact of the switch-on moment after dark.

As with previous years, the main attendance is from local people, with 91% coming from throughout the Borough. Most attendees stayed at the event up to one hour, compared to 1 to 2 hours in 2024, and 81% spent money at the event. Only 32% of attendees came to Newtownards specifically for the event, falling from 76% in 2024.

56% of respondents visited the event on the Saturday only, 34% on the Friday only, and 10% on both days. Additionally, 45% said they enjoyed the wider range of activities and the extra days at this year’s event. The attendees were asked how important an actual “Switch-On” moment was to them, 75% indicated that it was either fairly or very important.

Key Issues and next steps

Key areas for development in 2026 will be around the accessibility offering – officers will introduce a quiet hour to some events to trial a short, designated period at the start of an event where noise, lighting and activity levels are reduced to create a calmer, lower-sensory environment. This supports attendees who may be sensitive

to busy or high-stimulus settings, including autistic attendees, families with young children, and those who prefer a gentler introduction to the event.

With the opening of Marine Gardens in 2026, officers will explore opportunities to programme festive activity within this new space.

Summary

Costs to deliver events continues to increase with additional event delivery requirements. It is increasingly challenging for the Council to provide quality programming alongside necessary infrastructure and operational requirements. This was particularly noted in the delivery of Armed Forces Day with the unexpected, but favourable, securement of the Red Arrows increasing the profile and logistical requirements of the event. The 'booking' and increase in costs to deliver this aspect was not able to be anticipated at the time of budget setting. The overspend incurred within this year's programme was offset against underspends within the programme and the overall Tourism event service budget.

While overall attendance fell slightly below target and overall Out of Borough attendance has reduced across a number of events, attendee spend at the Food events has either increased or equalled 2024 and both have achieved good Out of Borough attendance. However, other events such as Sea Bangor – an identified Growth event has not performed as hoped with decreasing Out of Borough attendance and spend per attendee. The cost per attendee has increased. The Christmas events and May Day are recognised as primarily local or close to local attendance. The Shorelife Celebration has yet to complete a second year to identify trends and assess its performance in the overall programme.

Key successes in 2025 included:

- High-performing flagship events, including Armed Forces Day, Comber Earlies Food Festival, and Tide and Turf.
- Strong environmental performance, with multiple events achieving recycling rates above 90% and maintaining zero contamination.
- Partnership working, particularly across Council services, community groups, military partners, and town-centre organisations.
- Improved attendee experience, supported by enhanced layouts and increased dwell times.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council **Notes** the report and attached appendices.

Appendix 1 - Tourism Events 2025 Evaluation Summary

Event	Date	Sample Size	Budget	Actual Net Cost	Target Attendees	Actual Attendees	Cost per Attendee	Total estimated attendee spend ¹	Estimated average attendee spend	OoB % of attendee	Ex NI % of attendee	Return on Council Investment	% Customer satisfaction
² May Day	5 May	60	£21,300	£21,800	8,000	12,000	£1.82	£381,000	£31.75	28.3%	0%	£17.48	85.0%
Sea Bangor	24/25 May	298	£108,500	£113,300	30,000	10,000	£11.33	£77,978	£7.80	13.3%	1.7%	£0.69	79.8%
Armed Forces Day	21 June	392	£130,000	£206,110	25,000	50,000	£4.12	£474,199	£9.48	32%	2%	£2.30	80.6%
³ Summer Food Festival CEFF 28 June		156	£86,500	£82,000	10,000	12,600	£6.51	£247,998	£19.68	23%	1%	£3.02	89.6%
Pipe Bands	19 July	245	£36,700	£27,200	5,000	3,000	£9.07	£27,230	£9.08	47%	1%	£1.00	76.2%
⁴ Autumn Food Festival T&T 6 Sept		150	£97,000	£91,457	10,000	6,208	£14.73	£86,896	£14.48	20%	3%	£0.95	90.6%
Shorelife Celebration	4 Oct	0	£30,000	£16,730	4,000	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Christmas in the City	22 Nov	80	£30,000	£38,339	10,000	5000	£7.67	£47,057	£9.41	8%	3%	£1.23	76.2%
Christmas in the Square	29 Nov	79	£30,000	£40,720	7,000	3000	£13.57	£32,369	£10.79	9%	0%	£0.79	64.2%
TOTAL			£570,000	£637,656	109,000	101,808	Av. £8.60	£1,374,727	Av. £14.06			Av.£2.16	

¹ based on each attendee spending the av. spend per person. Surveys conducted ranged in sample size.

² May Day market research carried out in house (OoB 13.3% Belfast)

³ 12,600 attendees CEFF & c.500 at Slow Food Festival. Stats from other Festival activity is third party. Total estimated attendee spend, av. spend, OoB, ex NI attendees and customer satisfaction data CEFF only

⁴ 6,000 attendees T&T, 108 at Star Gazing and 100 at Demo and Dine during Festival. Chilli Fest cancelled due to weather and 5,500 at Taste at The Castle. Stats from other Festival activity is third party. Total estimated attendee spend, av. spend, OoB, ex NI attendees and customer satisfaction data T&T only

Tourism Events Programme 2026

Date 2026	Event
Mon 4 May	May Day, Holywood
Sat 23 and Sun 24 May	Sea Bangor
Wed 17 to Sun 28 June	Summer Food Festival including Comber Earlies Food Festival (Sat 20 June)
Sat 1 Aug	Ulster Pipe Band Championships, Ward Park, Bangor
Sat 1 Aug	Fringe Fleadh event delivery by Peter Corry Productions
Fri 11 to Sun 27 Sept	Autumn Food Festival, incorporating Tide and Turf, Portavogie (Sat 12 Sept)
Sat 10 Oct	Shorelife Celebration (multi venue)
Sat 21 Nov	Bangor Switch On
Sat 28 Nov	Newtownards Switch On

Unclassified

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

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	07 May 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Tourism, Arts and Heritage
Report title	Growth Events Fund - Year 2 Update
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Growth Event Fund Year 2 Summary
File Reference (if applicable)	TO/EG69
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	None Narrative:
Screening Requirements	<i>The Council will commit to consider the implication of all reports under the categories of Section 75, Rural Needs, Data Protection, Climate and Sustainability:</i> Screening of report not required
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Priority 1: Economic 4. A vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors If multiple: 2, 3, 4

Background

In September 2023, the Council approved the introduction of a multi-year events fund - The Growth Event Fund (GEF) and a budget of £150,000 per year subject to the annual rates setting process.

In January 2024, the Committee approved the Growth Event Fund award to Open House Festival for 2024/25 to the value of £105,000, subject to rates setting, and awards of £105,000 for 25/26 and £105,000 for 26/27 subject to annual Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and adherence to terms and conditions within the Letter of Offer (LoO).

In March 2025, the Council received an update report on year one of the GEF and in June 2025 Open House received a LoO with KPIs aligned to targets agreed after the evaluation process of year one was complete.

There are three objectives within the Growth Events Fund:

- Grow our Local Economy
- Grow our Visitor Experience and Destination and
- Grow the potential of our local Community and Place.

Each of the above has a series of KPIs which Open House Festival is required to meet annually. Should a KPI not be met, a rationale as to why this is the case is required. Further detail on the individual KPIs relating to Open House Festival is provided in Appendix 1.

The Event

The Open House Festival was delivered between 4 July to 31 August 2025 as per the LoO description. There were several key elements to the festival, delivering 144 events in total. Although there were 147 events planned, 3 were cancelled (Celtic Soul, Pickie to Pier Swim and Boom Art Walk) therefore 144 events were delivered.

1. Picnic in the Park - free concerts at Ward Park every Sunday in July and August – 27,100 attendees.
2. Jazz and Blues 23 and 24 August to replace the Seaside Revival Vintage Festival – across 8 venues, 44 events and 4,897 attendees.
3. Pickie to Pier Swim – cancelled
4. The Walled Garden series of events - ticketed events ranging from music to comedy*
5. Court House programme of events ticketed events ranging from music to comedy*
6. Folk on a Boat*
7. Additional fringe events*

NB. *total attendees 9,762 for these events. Other free event activities e.g. music sessions made up the total attendee figure.

Performance against Objectives

OBJECTIVE 1: GROW OUR LOCAL ECONOMY

This objective includes participant and attendee numbers, where they are from, bednights generated and local business partnerships.

	Number	Out of Borough	Bednights
Participants	848	53.1%	30
Attendees	41,759	27.8%	585
Total	42,607		615

Market research carried out by the organiser indicated 585 bednights (from attendees to ticketed events only). 2.8% of the visitors surveyed indicated they booked accommodation and a further 2.5% stayed with family and friends. The participant bednights were booked directly by the event organisers. These figures do not take into consideration any of the free events.

The organisers booked 30 bednights for the participants which makes the total bednights generated by the event (using ticketed events only) as 615.

A new element to this year's Festival was the Bangor Blues and Jazz Weekend. This element of the event started with paid concerts on 18, 19 and 20 August, and continued with free events from 21 to 24 August. 44 events were held in eight venues over the seven-day event and feedback from bar owners was positive with many indicating they would wish to participate again. There were over 40 artists and bands from throughout the UK and Ireland who took part in the Bangor Blues and Jazz Weekend.

Other local businesses were engaged throughout the festival. These included a number of tasting events where The Guillemot worked alongside Bullhouse Brewery and Neill Wines, French food events with local chef Joery Castel, and the Court House Vintage Market that attracted 15 stalls including local craft makers. There were two partnerships created for the 2025 Festival. United Wines/Beamish sponsored the Blues and Jazz Music weekend, also providing bunting for all bars involved and t-shirts for staff on top of the monetary support. The second partnership was with Waterstones, Bloomfield Shopping Centre. They carried all books that were involved in the literary events and offered a 10% discount to people who bought those books to attend the festival.

The total expenditure has been reported as £334,641. Total raised income, from ticket sales, sponsorship, stalls and traders, was £216,546, therefore 64.7% of total expenditure.

The organiser of the event has indicated a return on Council investment as £12.81. This has been calculated by:

- £32.20 average spend per person (as per market research carried out by the organiser)
- multiplied by 41,759 attendees
- equals £1,344,640 total economic benefit

- divided by £105,000 award

OBJECTIVE 2: GROW OUR VISITOR EXPERIENCE AND DESTINATION

This objective seeks to understand how the organiser has delivered a stand out and sustainable event that increases awareness of AND.

Recycling at events

The Festival worked with The Peppery Cat to devise additional innovative recycling plans. They provided additional recycling stations for cans, crisp packets and disposable gloves. Over the period of nine weeks at the Ward Park events, there were over four x 1100 litre sized bins of cans collected that were donated for recycling and raised money for a cancer charity.

Initiatives at the Venue

The Court House now use hard plastic reusable glasses for events. This has been trialled and has been a success. After the initial cost of purchasing the glasses, the organisers report a decrease in waste, spillages and general cleaning costs in comparison to glass or soft plastic glasses. Hard plastic reusable wine glasses have now been purchased as a result of the successful trial.

Marketing

The marketing plan was delivered successfully showing growth overall from the 2024 event. The engagement evidenced within the marketing plan overview shows growth in increased user engagement by 4.7% and increased subscriptions to the mailing list by 3.6% in comparison to 2024.

The overall media reach was 48.8 million (including social media) with an advertising value of c£880,000. *Note: Meta now use 'views' instead of 'reach'

Council support was acknowledged via logos on banners at Ward Park for Picnic in the Park and at the entrance of Walled Garden. ANDBC was tagged on social media posts and mentioned in press releases, including quotes from the Mayor.

Disability Audits

Following audits, a number of positive actions have been taken at the Court House including signage at the entrance, shelving in accessible toilets for people who need to change a stoma bag and a stoma bin contract is now in place. Staff training sessions have drawn attention to small but important issues such as ensuring the alarm pull cord in the disabled toilets are touching the floor, and encouraging customers not to congregate at exits to allow easy access for disabled customers.

At the Walled Garden tracking was put down on grass if it became soft, to ensure wheelchairs had easy access, a quieter area with extra room was created for use by disabled customers, the website's accessibility section was made clearer so that people who needed to get in touch could do so easier and carer tickets were available at all shows.

The organisers have continued to make improvements as they came up throughout the Festival, such as making the booking system online more accessible for those with impaired eyesight.

OBJECTIVE 3: GROW THE POTENTIAL OF OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY AND PLACE

The final objective included volunteer recruitment and training, strategic partnership development and utilising unusual event spaces.

Volunteer recruitment and training

A total of 83 volunteers were involved in this year's Festival, their ages ranging from 18 to 84 years old. There was a total of 1,596 volunteering hours throughout Ward Park and Walled Garden events and a 99.3% satisfaction rating from the volunteer survey after the Festival. Every volunteer attended a 1-hour induction session covering safety and event information along with new elements of the recycling of cans and crisp packets, managing the disabled area at Ward Park and how to use the ticket scanners at the Walled Garden

Strategic Partnerships

There were a number of strategic partnerships that continued from previous years alongside a number of new partnerships. These included continuing with media partner County Down Spectator, along with specific partners for Pickie to Pier Swim - Bangor Marina, RNLI, and Safer Waters. New partnerships were made with The Nines and Guillemot Deli as well as the eight bars on Main Street and High Street to enable the Bangor Blues and Jazz trail to take place.

Event spaces included Ward Park – Picnic in the Park at the bandstand, Skippingstone Beach – start and finish of Pickie to Pier swim, as well as the Court House and the Walled Garden.

Budget

The organiser reports the cost to deliver the event was £334,641. £216,546 of the income total was from raised income (box office, traders, bar sales) £13,901 from the Arts Council National Lottery Fund and the remainder from the Council contribution.

Support Services

In addition to financial support from Council via the Growth Event Fund, the Tourism Events Team offered the following additional support:

A dedicated Case Officer who offered advice on completion of risk assessments and Event Management Plan when needed.

Event Management Toolkit to ensure all event organisers are equipped with skills/knowledge to run their event safely, the Council has established an online toolkit, which is a valuable resource for all event organisers, irrespective of the size of the event.

Festivals Forum – This Forum is an opportunity for Festival organisers in the Borough to network and share experiences. High profile speakers deliver quality training on key subjects – this year the subjects have included social media, Counter terrorism and Disability and Inclusion. Open House Festival staff have contributed by delivering a case study of the theory put into practice using Ward Park as an example.

Closing Year 2 and progression to Year 3

Officers have validated the claim against the LoO for year two and have progressed the payment of the remainder of the award in line with the Council approved Scheme of Delegation. The organiser has satisfactorily evidenced or has supplied evidence as to how they endeavoured to meet the objectives to a sufficient level, meeting the terms and conditions associated with the LoO.

The organisers have submitted an initial budget and plan for the 2026 event. At the time of writing this report, the Letter of Offer for Year 3 is in draft and a meeting has been scheduled with the organisers to agree the Key Performance Indicators, as required by Council, for 2026.

Future of Growth Events Fund

In September 2023, the Council approved the Growth Events Fund which stated that 'the number and size of grants approved in Year 1 of the Fund (2024) would determine whether the GEF would reopen in Years 2 or 3. There were no eligible applicants to the Growth Events Fund in 25/26. Suitable applicants were not in the position to meet the criteria aligned to this Fund for one year only i.e. Year 3 of the Fund. The primary aim being that the Council can support events to grow from year to year, therefore, with that in mind, the Growth Events Fund did not reopen for year 26/27. A new three-year fund will be planned for opening for years 27/28, 28/29 and 29/30. The application form and guidance will be reported to the Place and Prosperity Committee for approval prior to release as per Corporate Grants Policy.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council **Notes** the report.

Appendix 1

GEF KPIs Year Two 2025 - Open House Festival

Objective 1: Grow our local economy

KPI no.	Target	Year 1 2024 actual	Year 2 2025 projected	Year 2 2025 actual	Notes	KPI met Y/N	If no, justification
1.1	Number of participants from the Borough	428	400	398	46.9% of total	No	cancellation of 3 events
	Number of participants out of the Borough but within NI	348	360	371	43.8% of total	Yes	
	Number of participants from out of NI	56	50	79	9.3% of total	Yes	
	TOTAL PARTICIPANTS	832	810	848	100%		
	Number of attendees from the Borough	39,021	34,401	30,162	72.2% of total	No	Illness and event cancellation
	Number of attendees out of the Borough but within NI	9,629	8,489	10,313	24.7% of total	Yes	
	Number of attendees from out of NI	2,027	1,787	1,284	3.1% of total	No	Cancellation of events and no Seaside Revival
	TOTAL ATTENDEES	50,677	44,677	41,759	100%		
	TOTAL PARTICIPANTS AND ATTENDEES	51,509	45,487	42,607			

Appendix 1

1.2	Number of bednights (commercial and family and friends)	629	650	630	30 participants 585 attendees	No	based on ticketed events only
1.3	Number of events	88	90	147	147 planned, 144 delivered as 3 were cancelled due to weather and illness	Yes	
1.4	Investment in local businesses through new initiatives	Yes	Bangor Blues and Jazz Weekend, continuing to develop the variety markets.	Bangor Blues and Jazz weekend delivered; Vintage Market delivered	8 bars on Main and High Street delivered 44 events throughout 22-24 August weekend. Market included 15 stalls Additional initiatives included beer tasting event, 3x food and drink events, French food event all using local businesses	Yes	
1.5	Develop a series of local partnerships and sponsorship opportunities	Yes	Reviving relationship with Translink; Drinks partner for Bangor Blues and Jazz weekend	Translink relationship revival attempted. Drinks partner developed. Additional partnership with	United Wines/Beamish partnership for Blues and Jazz weekend. Waterstones, Bloomfield Shopping Centre carried all books involved in literary events and gave 10% discount	Yes	Translink - For the 2 nd year, OH encouraged to submit a sponsorship application to Translink but, despite repeated prompting, the proposal was never formally

Appendix 1

				Waterstones developed	to people who bought those books. Promoted Translink widely throughout programme, including Train Friendly events with consistent messaging on website and social media encouraging customers to use public transport.		accepted or declined.
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Objective 2: Grow our Visitor Experience and Destination

	Target	Year 2 actual KPI met Y/N
2.1	Continue to work with Council to reduce waste at open air events and introduce new initiative/s to reduce environmental impact including options for re-usable plastic glasses to be trailed at Court House events.	Yes
2.2	Economic sustainability – A minimum of 60% of total expenditure to be raised income (ticket sales/sponsorship)	Yes 64.7% of the total income was raised from box office and stall fees

Appendix 1

<p>2.3</p>	<p>Deliver a marketing plan to achieve:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="338 304 1153 660"> <tr> <td>Website</td> <td>440,000 page views, 170,000 user engagement, 60,000 new visitors</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Google search</td> <td>est. 220,000 impressions</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Facebook</td> <td>27,000 followers, 170,000 people reached</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Instagram</td> <td>6,500 followers, 100,000 people reached</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mailing list</td> <td>19,000 Festival subscribers x 20 emails, 11,000 Court House subscribers x 8 Emails</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Other</td> <td>five press releases</td> </tr> </table>	Website	440,000 page views, 170,000 user engagement, 60,000 new visitors	Google search	est. 220,000 impressions	Facebook	27,000 followers, 170,000 people reached	Instagram	6,500 followers, 100,000 people reached	Mailing list	19,000 Festival subscribers x 20 emails, 11,000 Court House subscribers x 8 Emails	Other	five press releases	<p>Yes</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="1245 268 2060 655"> <tr> <td>Website</td> <td>439,101 page views, 178,000 user engagement, 42,000 new visitors</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Google search</td> <td>est. 220,000 impressions</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Facebook</td> <td>27,117 followers, 967,444 views* 85 festival updates posted</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Instagram</td> <td>6,551 followers, 346,954 views*</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mailing list</td> <td>19,496 Festival subscribers x 14 emails, 11,581 Court House subscribers x 6 Emails</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Other</td> <td>8 press releases delivered</td> </tr> </table> <p>*Meta now use Views instead of reach</p> <p>The overall media reach was 48.8 million (including social media) with an advertising value of £880,000.</p>	Website	439,101 page views, 178,000 user engagement, 42,000 new visitors	Google search	est. 220,000 impressions	Facebook	27,117 followers, 967,444 views* 85 festival updates posted	Instagram	6,551 followers, 346,954 views*	Mailing list	19,496 Festival subscribers x 14 emails, 11,581 Court House subscribers x 6 Emails	Other	8 press releases delivered
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<p>2.4</p>	<p>Use ANDBC Logo</p>	<p>Yes - appeared on banners at Ward Park, Walled Garden, posters, social media and quotes within 5no. press releases.</p>																								
<p>2.5</p>	<p>Undertake a Disability Audit of The Court House and the Walled Garden</p>	<p>Yes – both completed successfully.</p>																								

Appendix 1

Objective 3: Grow the potential of our Local Community and Place

Target no.	Target	Year 1 actual	Year 2 projected	Year 2 actual	Notes	KPI met – Y/N	If no, justification
3.1	90 volunteers recruited or retained	100	90	83	576 volunteering hours at Ward Park and 1020 from Walled Garden events	No	Cancellation of Seaside Revival reduced need for a number of volunteers
3.2	Increase depth of Volunteer Training (include recycling and enhance disability/access training)	Increased depth	Increased	Increased	Training on recycling stations (added recycling this year with crisp packets and cans), training on ticket scanners at Walled Garden, management of the disabled area at Ward Park, as briefings before every event.	Yes	
3.3	Deliver 10 strategic partnerships	10	10	12	County Down Spectator, RNLI, Safer Waters, Bangor Marina, Repair Café, Bullhouse Brewery, Neil Wines, Boom Studio, The Nines, Guillemot Deli, Market stall holders (14 in total) 8x Bars	Yes	

Appendix 1

					on Main street and High Street		
3.4	Utilise a minimum of 6 unusual event spaces, public spaces and highlight natural assets throughout the event	6	6	6	Ward Park, Picnic in the Park, Bangor Castle Walled Garden, fully seated 400 pax stretch tent, rear yard of Court House for markets and food events, Pickie Pier and Bangor Harbour for folk on a boat, Bangor Main and High Street for Blues and Jazz free music trail across 8 local bars/venues, Bangor Seafront for Boom Studio partnership to deliver street art tour and sketch tour along the seafront.	Yes	

Unclassified

ITEM 9

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	07 May 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Tourism, Arts and Heritage
Report title	Arts and Heritage Panel Minutes - 2 February 2026
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Arts and Heritage Minutes 2 February 2026
File Reference (if applicable)	ART 01 02/02 26
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	None
	Narrative:
Screening Requirements	<i>The Council will commit to consider the implication of all reports under the categories of Section 75, Rural Needs, Data Protection, Climate and Sustainability:</i> Screening of report not required
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Priority 3: Social 5. Safe, welcoming and inclusive communities that are flourishing If multiple:

Background

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

Minutes of the meeting that took place on Monday 2 February 2026 can be found at Appendix 1.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council Notes the February minutes of the Arts and Heritage Panel meeting.



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

Monday 2 February 2026 at 5.30pm

At Ards Arts Centre

Minutes of the Meeting of Ards and North Down Borough Council Arts and Heritage Advisory Panel at Ards Arts Centre on Monday 2 February 2026 at 5.30pm.

Minutes Secretary: Ms Diane McCaw

Chairperson: Cllr Richard Smart

Present:
Cllr Pete Wray
Cllr Alex Harbinson
Cllr Eddie Thompson
Ms Anna Smyth
Ms Jane McCann
Ms Catherine Charley
Ms Linda Wilson
Ms Jenny Kirkwood
Mr Billy Carlile
Ms Eve Williams

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

1. **Apologies:**
Ms Gail Prentice
Mr Marcus Hunter Neil

Appendix 1

2. Minutes of Meeting on Monday 3 November 2025

Ms Catherine Charley proposed that the Minutes be approved as a correct record. This was seconded by Cllr Alex Harbinson.

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

The AHM highlighted the following points from the tabled report:

- The Arts Centre recently hosted an exhibition to celebrate the 125th anniversary of Ards Football Club which was very well supported. This brought a new demographic of visitors to the centre.
- Friday Night Lives were well supported with the autumn events sold out.
- The Puppet Festival proved another success with approximately 800 attendees over the 2 days.
- Aspects Festival Club is trialling a monthly gathering which has been very successful with consistent numbers.
- Christmas events included the annual Creative Peninsula Fayre with 2920 visitors over the 2 days despite the weather being bad. Squashbox Theatre Company performed their Christmas show in the Queens Hall with a public performance and a separate school's performance. Both were well attended.
- Individual Artist, Youth, Heritage and Arts Project Grants are currently open. The Bursaries have just been awarded with recipients due to be informed shortly.
- Funding of £7,100 has been received from ACNI which will go towards a project called Peninsula Parade in partnership with Beat Carnival. This is a follow on from the Beach of Dreams Festival which took place last May.
- Match funding of £10,000 has also been received from ACNI to place an Artist in Residence at Seacourt Print Workshop.

Ms Anna Smyth asked would it be possible to look at altering the amounts of funding which could be received under the Individual Artist Grant as providing a larger pot to an Artist may enable them to fulfil a project that a smaller pot couldn't. The AHM will discuss this with the team.

Ms Smyth also asked would it be possible for the Creative Peninsula members to have a review meeting. The AHM stated that she would be happy for this to happen but that it has proved difficult to get engagement with Artists.

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

The MM highlighted the following points from the tabled report:

- The recent History Detectives Exhibition was very successful and is now on show in PRONI. It has been great to strike up a trust relationship with PRONI and have items on loan from them. The exhibition Between Worlds was well supported with coverage making UTV Life. The Ulster Scots exhibition was also proved popular with coverage on NTV.
- The Christmas pop-up shop was well supported again with over £9,000 in artist sales.
- The Halloween events were successful with workshops being tailored to cover a wider age range.
- Funding from NIMC has allowed for the development of further loan boxes which can be loaned to schools and care homes.

Appendix 1

- The Fields of Change one day conference was very successful with the quality of the speakers and presentation being praised by attendees.
- The MM informed the panel that it is planned to hold a 2-day conference around the 1798 Rebellion. This would be in conjunction with Newry, Mourne & Down Council.

Mr Billy Carlile asked about the possibility of moving the talks to a larger location to bring more people in. The MM stated that this could be looked at down the line if demand was high as this would involve additional costs and therefore higher ticket prices.

CLlr Harbinson left the meeting at 6.30pm.

5. Strategic Priorities:

a. Strategic Review

The AHM informed the panel that herself and the HTAH would be meeting with the Transformation Team to look at the Strategy later this week.

b. AND Arts Network Development

It is planned to hold another Arts Network event on 17 February. This will be led by Patricia Hamilton.

c. Artist Residency

As mentioned earlier, we have received £10,000 match funding (50%) to place an Artist in Residence at Seacourt Print Workshop. Recruitment will take place in March with a view to the artist taking up position in April. The artist will work with ANDBC arts/events and SPW to observe, engage with the community and document the changing cityscape of Bangor reflecting on the importance of place and identity

6. Bangor Makes Noise Project – Eve Williams

Ms Eve Williams wished to inform the panel of The Bangor Makes Noise project. Ms Williams stated that the closure of the Goats Toe had left local up and coming artists with fewer places to play.

The purpose of the project is to harness the potential of music to contribute towards the city's regeneration. This would be done in two stages with research and fact finding then creating a strategy. The project is currently in the research phase with surveys being completed by local residents and musicians and interviews have been conducted with local venue owners.

Ms Williams asked firstly if the panel would help by completing the survey at <https://singinglessonsni.com/bangor-makes-noise/> and if the Council would be able to help. The AHM stated that she would be happy to have further conversations with Ms Williams. The HTAH stated that events could be listed on the Tourism website and that she would forward relevant contact details on.

7. Any Other Business

The AHM informed the panel of the change of date for the April meeting due to Easter and the Guitar Festival. This will be held on Monday 20 April in person at Ards Arts Centre.

Appendix 1

95

Ms Anna Smyth mentioned that there isn't a shop in Newtownards where Artists and Makers can sell their work. Ms Smyth stated that she has recently been looking at commercial premises however the rates in Newtownards are very high. The HTAH informed Anna that there is a retail space in the Visitor Information Centre where they would be happy to sell local Artist's work.

Date of Next Meeting:

Date and venue for the next meeting:

- Monday 20 April 2026 at 5.30pm – Ards Arts Centre
- Monday 1 June 2026 at 5.30pm – Familiarisation visit tbc

As there was no further business, the meeting closed at 7.10 pm