

# Agenda

## Agenda

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### 1. Apologies

### 2. Declarations of Interest

### Reports for Approval

### 3. Growth Events Fund 2027-2030

Report attached

*Attachment: 3. Growth Events Fund 2027-2030.pdf*

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*Attachment: 3.1 Appendix 1 GEF guidance notes for Applicants 2027-30.pdf*

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*Attachment: 3.2 Appendix 2 GEF application form 2027-30.pdf*

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### 4. Bangor Waterfront Update (June 2026)

Report attached

*Attachment: 4. Bangor Waterfront Update (June 2026).pdf*

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### 5. East Border Region Contribution 2026-27

Report attached

*Attachment: 5. East Border Region Contribution 2026-27.pdf*

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*Attachment: 5.1 Appendix 1 East Border Region Past Projects.pdf*

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### 6. Mini Digi Hub - Update

Report attached

*Attachment: 6. Mini Digi Hub - Update.pdf*

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### 7. Summit of the Cities Conference 2026

Report attached

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## Reports for Noting

### 8. Minutes of the Local Action Groups

Report attached

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*Attachment: 8.1 Newtownards LAG Meeting Minutes 21 April 2026.pdf*

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*Attachment: 8.2 Donaghadee Local Action Group Meeting Minutes 23 April 2026.pdf*

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*Attachment: 8.3 Comber Local Action Group Minutes 27 April 2026.pdf*

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*Attachment: 8.5 Bangor City LAG Meeting Minutes 30 April 2026.pdf*

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*Attachment: 8.6 Newtownards LAG Meeting Minutes Christmas Special Meeting 12 May 2026.pdf*

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*Attachment: 8.7 Christmas Lighting Proposals.pdf*

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### 9. Economic Growth Half Yearly Performance Report 2025/26

Report attached

*Attachment: 9. Economic Growth Half Yearly Performance Report 2025.26.pdf*

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### 10. Economic Development Annual Activity 2025-26

Report attached

*Attachment: 10. Economic Development Annual Activity Report 2025-26.pdf*

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*Attachment: 10.1 Appendix 1 - ED Annual Activity Summary Report 2025-26.pdf*

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### 11. Tourism, Arts and Heritage Half Yearly Performance Report 2025/26

Report attached

## **12. Visitor Information Centre Review 2025/26**

Report attached

*Attachment: 12. Visitor Information Centre Review 2025.26.pdf*

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*Attachment: 12.1 Appendix 1 Visitor Information Centre Summary 2025.26.pdf*

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## **13. Strategic Capital Development Half Yearly Performance Report 2025/26**

Report attached

*Attachment: 13. Strategic Capital Development Half Yearly Performance Report 2025.26.pdf*

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## **14. Notices of Motion (if any)**

**\*\*\*IN CONFIDENCE\*\*\***

## **15. Any Other Notified Business**

**Reports for Approval (In Confidence)**

## **16. Bangor Waterfront - Urban Waterfront and Public Realm - Appointment of the Integrated Consultancy Team**

Report attached

*Attachment: 16. Bangor Waterfront - Urban Waterfront and Public Realm - Appointment of ICT.pdf*

*Not included*

## **17. Local Economic Partnership - Update**

Report attached

*Attachment: 17. Local Economic Partnership - Update.pdf*

*Not included*

*Attachment: 17.1 Appendix 1 Minutes LEP 20.05.26.pdf*

*Not included*

*Attachment: 17.2 Appendix 2 LEP Space to Grow 31.03.26.pdf*

*Not included*

*Attachment: 17.3 Appendix 3 LEP Business Growth and Export Accelerator 19.03.26.pdf*

*Not included*

*Attachment: 17.4 Appendix 4 LEP Growth and Export Accelerator 23.04.26.pdf* **Not included**

*Attachment: 17.5 Appendix 5 LEP Sector Propositions and Investment 24.03.26.pdf* **Not included**

*Attachment: 17.6 LEP Sector Propositions and Investment 6.5.26.pdf* **Not included**

*Attachment: 17.7 Appendix 7 LEP Business Space Revival 26.03.26.pdf* **Not included**

*Attachment: 17.8 Appendix 8 LEP Enablers and Advocacy 30.03.26.pdf* **Not included**

*Attachment: 17.9 Appendix 9 LEP Building Culture and Innovation 02.04.26.pdf* **Not included**

## **18. Innovation Hub Operator Procurement**

Report attached

*Attachment: 18. Innovation Hub Operator Procurement.pdf* **Not included**

## **19. Project Development (Working Up) Annual Budget Proposal**

Report attached

*Attachment: 19. Project Development (Working Up) Annual Budget Proposal.pdf* **Not included**

### **Reports for Noting (In Confidence)**

## **20. Completion of Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2025/26**

Report attached

*Attachment: 20. Completion of Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2025-26.pdf* **Not included**

## **21. Proposed Business Improvement Districts for Bangor - Update**

Report attached

*Attachment: 21. Proposed Business Improvement Districts for Bangor - Update.pdf* **Not included**

*Attachment: 21.1 Appendix 1 - BID Steering Group Survey Results.pptx* **Not included**

*Attachment: 21.2 Email received from Bangor Chamber President.pdf* **Not included**

## **22. Pickie Fun Park - Period 2 2025-26**

Report attached

*Attachment: 22. Pickie Funpark - Period 2 2025.26.pdf*

*Not included*

## **23. Exploris - Period 2 2025-26**

Report attached

*Attachment: 23. Exploris - Period 2 2025.26.pdf*

*Not included*

## **24. War Years Remembered Update**

Report attached

*Attachment: 24. War Years Remembered Update.pdf*

*Not included*

## **25. Newtownards Citizen Hub - Queen's Hall Update - \*\*\*including presentation\*\*\***

Report attached

*Attachment: 25. Newtownards Citizen Hub - Queen's Hall Update.pdf*

*Not included*

*Attachment: 25.1 Appendix 1 Queens Hall Stage 2 Report.pdf*

*Not included*

*Attachment: 25.2 Appendix 2 Queens Hall Newtownards Hub Presentation.pdf*

*Not included*

*Attachment: 25.3 Appendix 3 Newtownards Library Draft MOU.pdf*

*Not included*

**ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL**

3 June 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 11 June 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**

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4. Bangor Waterfront Update (June 2026) (report attached)
5. East Border Region Contribution 2026-27 (report attached)
6. Mini Digi Hub – Update (report attached)
7. Summit of the Cities Conference 2026 (report attached)

**Reports for Noting**

8. Minutes of the Local Action Groups (report attached)
9. Economic Growth Half Yearly Performance Report 2025/26 (report attached)
10. Economic Development Annual Activity 2025-26 (report attached)
11. Tourism, Arts and Heritage Half Yearly Performance Report 2025/26 (report attached)
12. Visitor Information Centre Review 2025/26 (report attached)
13. Strategic Capital Development Half Yearly Performance Report 2025/26 (report attached)

- 14. Notices of Motion (if any)
- 15. Any Other Notified Business

**\*\*\*IN CONFIDENCE\*\*\***

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- 17. Local Economic Partnership – Update (report attached)
- 18. Innovation Hub Operator Procurement (report attached)
- 19. Project Development (Working Up) Annual Budget Proposal (report attached)

**Reports for Noting (In Confidence)**

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- 21. Proposed Business Improvement Districts for Bangor - Update (report attached)
- 22. Pickie Fun Park – Period 2 2025-26 (report attached)
- 23. Exploris - Period 2 2025-26 (report attached)
- 24. War Years Remembered Update (report attached)
- 25. Newtownards Citizen Hub – Queen's Hall Update – **\*\*\*including presentation\*\*\*** (report attached)

**MEMBERSHIP OF PLACE AND PROSPERITY COMMITTEE (16 MEMBERS)**

Alderman Adair	Councillor Hollywood
Alderman Armstrong-Cotter	
Alderman McDowell	Councillor McCollum
Councillor Blaney	Councillor McCracken
Councillor Brady (Vice-Chair)	Councillor Morgan
Councillor Edmund	Councillor Newman
Councillor Gilmour	Councillor Smart (Chair)
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	11 June 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Tourism, Arts and Heritage
Report title	Growth Events Fund 2027-2030
Attachments	Appendix 1 - GEF 2027-2030 Guidance Notes for Applicants Appendix 2 - GEF 2027-2030 Application Form
File Reference (if applicable)	TO/EG68
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	Budget Narrative: £150,000 for 2027/28, 2028/29 and 2029/30 subject to Rate Setting
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 carried out – Screened out
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 and 4

**Background**

In November 2020, the Council approved the Borough Events Strategic Direction 2021-2026 (BESD). The BESD outlines a vision for a more sustainable, successful, and impactful portfolio of events that deliver a range of cultural, social and economic outcomes for the Borough. Two requirements to make this happen were recommended within the BESD as follows.

1. The Council reviews and develops actions across four key strategic areas:
  - Events Delivery
  - Capacity Development
  - **Grant Schemes and Funding Models**
  - Event Bid for Model and
  
2. The Council rebalances its financial resource for event delivery and event industry support to underpin current growth and success and attract new ideas and organisers.

As a result of the requirements above, the Growth Events Fund (GEF) was approved by the Council in September 2023, and further to this an annual budget of £150,000 for the Fund was approved for three years, subject to Rates setting process.

The GEF was advertised and launched in November 2023. Prior to completing an application, interested parties were invited to attend a meeting with officers to assess if their event met the criteria of GEF. Conversations were held with four potential applicants, one event was eligible to complete an application. In January 2024, the Council approved the GEF award to one successful applicant, Open House Festival, for three years, subject to rates setting, annual Key Performance Indicators (KPI’s) and adherence to terms and conditions within each year’s Letter of Offer (LoO).

Year 2 of the GEF opened in November 2024, two event organisers made contact with the Tourism Events Team with one eligible to apply. After a meeting with the event organisers, the organiser made the decision to apply to the Tourism Events and Festivals Fund meaning GEF had no applications for Year 2. As the fund is for multiple years support, GEF did not open for Year 3.

At the time of writing this report, Year 1 and Year 2 of the GEF has been administered successfully with Year 3 underway. A full review of the ‘first’ applicant will be conducted at the end of year 3.

Key outputs of Year 1 and 2 of the current GEF round include:

Objective	Outputs
Grow our local economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Organiser delivered a total of 232 events throughout the summer months over the past two years. Attendees at these events include over 22,000 visitors from Out of the Borough.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total economic benefit - £3,112,428 over two years.</li> <li>• Return on investment £14.82 for every £1 invested by Council.</li> <li>• With the introduction of a Blues and Jazz Weekend in Year 2 to replace Seaside Revival, the organisers have successfully engaged with an increasing number of local businesses. This includes eight bars on Main Street and High Street as well as local hot food providers.</li> </ul>
<p>Grow our visitor experience and destination</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The event delivered a marketing plan each year that gained total media reach of over 67.3million over the past 2 years.</li> <li>• New sustainable measures have been implemented over the past two years including recycling of cans and crisp packets at Ward Park and re-usable plastic glasses at the Court House events.</li> <li>• Over the past two years, the three main venues for the event (Walled Garden, Ward Park and the Court House) have all undertaken successful disability audits enhancing the appeal of the event to a broader audience and implementing innovative responses to the findings.</li> </ul>
<p>Grow the potential of our local community and place</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The event has recruited and trained 183 volunteers over the two years and showcased six unusual event spaces throughout Bangor each year.</li> <li>• Use of some space within Bangor has been restricted due to the development work at the Waterfront.</li> </ul>

**Next Steps**

Officers’ assessment is that the first round of the GEF has met the objectives of the Fund with the data available to date. The longer-term funding model enables the applicant to develop the event sustainably which is ‘distinctive to place’ and aligned with the objectives of the Fund.

Officers are therefore proposing only minimal amendments to the current GEF Guidance and Application Form. The existing criteria remains aligned with the Corporate Plan’s Economic Priority and the following outcomes:

Outcome 2	An environmentally sustainable and resilient Council and Borough meeting our net zero carbon targets.
Outcome 3	A thriving and sustainable economy
Outcome 4	A vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors.
Outcome 6	Opportunities for people to be active and healthy.

For purposes of clarity and ease of reading, the proposed changes to the GEF 2027-2030 are set out below.

**Introduction section**

The following addition will apply to previous applicants, giving consideration to the fact that this is a second round of a three year Growth Fund which aims to enable events to grow and become more sustainable.

*Where an applicant previously received a Letter of Offer under GEF 2024-2027, plans for substantial growth across the event must be clearly detailed. There is no guarantee of a similar level of grant or any grant to any applicant.*

**Eligibility section**

Inclusion of in-kind support as part of the match funding criteria.

This currently reads:

Must demonstrate need for the Council’s financial support by showing match funding of a minimum of 50% (this can be made up from own funds or other sources of funds/sponsorship/grants).

The proposed change is:

*Must demonstrate need for the Council’s financial support by showing match funding of a minimum of 50% (this can be made up from own funds or other sources of funds/sponsorship/grants and can include a maximum of 20% in-kind support).*

**Surplus**

Requirements on surplus are updated in line with the Council Grants Policy.

**Budget**

To ensure the Fund can deliver the aim and strategic objectives of the GEF, Officers are recommending the budget remains at £150,000 for 2027/28, 2028/29 and 2029/30, subject to each annual Rates setting process.

**Timeline**

The AND Tourism Events and Festival Fund is advertised annually in October/November, to allow event organisers sufficient lead time to organise their events/festivals the following year. The formal awards are made once the budget is confirmed after the Rates setting process. As with the previous GEF, it is proposed

that the Fund will run alongside the current AND Tourism Events and Festivals Fund.

As was the case with the GEF 2024-2027, applications will be accepted for two or three years support and the number and size of grants approved in Year 1 of the Fund (2027) will determine whether the GEF will reopen in Year 2.

### Summary

In addition to financial support from the GEF, the Tourism Events Team will offer the following additional support alongside any GEF award:

- A dedicated Case Officer who will offer advice on completion of risk assessments, apply for use of Council land (if applicable) licencing etc., and provide additional advice on how to run and promote the respective event.
- 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. [Event Management Toolkit - Ards and North Down Borough Council](#)
- Festivals Forum - Following discussions with local festival organisers, officers have established an AND Events and Festivals Forum specifically for event organisers and venues that host events. It meets up to four times annually, featuring guest speakers, case studies, training and practical advice. Each event organiser who is successful in receiving funding will be invited to become a member of the Festivals Forum.

## RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council **Approves** the Growth Events Fund Guidance Notes and Application Form, and further approves an annual budget of £150,000 per annum for the years 27/28, 28/29 and 29/30, subject to the rates setting process.



ARDS AND NORTH DOWN  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

GROWTH EVENTS FUND  
2027-2030

GUIDANCE NOTES FOR  
APPLICANTS

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## YOUR GUIDE TO COMPLETING AN APPLICATION TO THE GROWTH EVENTS FUND 2027 - 2030

The information in these guidance notes will tell you about and help you apply for the multi-annual **Growth Events Fund**.

Please note that you cannot apply for both the AND Tourism Events and Festivals Fund and the Growth Events Fund.

**In order to apply to the Growth Events Fund, you must meet with the Events Team to discuss the eligibility of your event. If your event is eligible, you will be sent an application form to complete.**

It is anticipated that applications for multi-annual grants will be very competitive. If you are unsure if your event meets the criteria for the Growth Events Fund, talk to us. Our contact details are available at the end of the Guidance Notes.

Where an applicant previously received a Letter of Offer under GEF 2024-2027, **plans for substantial growth across the event must be clearly detailed**. There is no guarantee of a similar level of grant or any grant to any applicant.

### Introduction

In November 2020, Ards and North Down Borough Council approved the Borough Events Strategic Direction (BESD 2021-2028). The BESD outlines a vision for a more sustainable, successful, and impactful portfolio of events that deliver a range of cultural, social and economic outcomes for the Borough. To enable this to happen, ANDBC developed a tiered funding model to support events and festivals. The first tier, the Tourism Events and Festivals Fund, opens annually and aims to provide grant aid for events and festivals which can best demonstrate a positive economic impact to the Borough of Ards and North Down.

In 2023, ANDBC introduced a further tier of support - the **Growth Events Fund**. This is a multi-year Fund which aims to further develop support for events to assist the Borough develop its range of Growth events. The key output being that, with the ability to support events through longer funding arrangements, and assistance with business planning, the Council will be able to link each event's key performance indicators to our strategic outcomes.

### Aim of the Growth Events Fund

The GEF 2027-2030 will be delivered by the Tourism Service (Events) of Ards and North Down Borough Council. The Fund has normally one open call per annum in Years 1 and 2 of each three year Fund lifespan. This is , subject to budget and suitability/availability of applicants which meet the requirement of 'growth'.

The aim of the Tourism, Arts and Heritage service is to facilitate, sustainably grow and promote the tourism and arts and heritage offering in the borough to the benefit of our visitors, communities and businesses, focussing on key strengths that resonate with our identified markets.

We aim to increase the overall NI visitor market share and economic return to the Borough to meet targets and outcomes set within [Integrated Strategy for Tourism, Regeneration and Economic Development](#), [The Big Plan](#) and [Corporate Plan 2024-28](#)

Supporting Tourism events and festivals is integral to growing tourism and to assist meeting Council priorities and outcomes. By providing a grant for Year 1 and committing to a maximum of two further years, we can encourage events to sustainably grow and increase the number of events 'distinctive to place' within the Borough.

**\*A Tourism Event is defined as a one-off event, or a series of related events with no significant breaks and have a distinctive theme. A theme is defined as topic or subject that runs through your entire event/festival.**

### Objectives of an AND Growth Event

1. Grow our local economy
  - ~ Increase overnight stays and visitor spend within the Borough
  - ~ Increase local attendee spend
  - ~ Increase investment in local businesses
2. Grow our visitor experience and destination
  - ~ Deliver stand out sustainable destination event/s
  - ~ Increase awareness of AND by marketing nationally and internationally
3. Grow the potential of our local community and place
  - ~ Support and invest in local people
  - ~ Support and invest in local businesses, venues and assets

### What we can fund

Our funding can be used towards the cost of delivering your event. A list of Eligible and Ineligible costs is available in Annex A.

It cannot be spent on:

- ~ commercial programmes or activities that could be undertaken on a commercial basis. If, in the reasonable opinion of the council, the organisation applying for a grant is a de facto commercial organisation, whatever the legal make-up of the organisation, then the council will not fund that organisation. The decision of the council shall be final in this regard. Regardless, our grant must only be used to support elements of your programme that are not commercial and can demonstrate public benefit;
- ~ Any event/festival that does not foster Section 75, promote positive attitudes, equality of opportunity and good relations including political opinion, religious belief or racial group
- ~ capital expenditure (that is the cost of buying physical assets for long-term use, such as buildings, land, vehicles, equipment and so on);
- ~ Events or aspects of the event outside the Borough

- ~ costs associated with filling in this application form;
- ~ ongoing operational costs;
- ~ any costs or activities before 1 April 2027

### **Funding available**

The level of grant available within the Growth Events Fund will be a minimum of £15,000 per year for a maximum of 3 years, subject to available budget.

### **Who can apply**

You must meet the following eligibility criteria to be eligible to apply.

### **Common eligibility criteria**

Your organisation **must**:

- ~ be a legally constituted group and supply evidence of this (a constitution or memorandum and articles of association);
- ~ be a not-for-profit organisation and be unable to share out profits to members or shareholders;
- ~ have a board or management committee and supply a list of members;
- ~ hold a bank account in the organisation's name and provide evidence of this;
- ~ be in good financial health, have effective financial controls and submit evidence of this such as financial accounts and bank statements;
- ~ complete the application form in full;
- ~ contribute to the promotion of a positive image of the Borough and must take steps to avert anti-social behaviour;
- ~ ensure the proper and efficient use of and the accountability of public monies.
- ~ deliver Year 1 of the event in the Borough of Ards and North Down, between 1 April 2027 and 31 March 2028;
- ~ If 2 years event funding is sought, Year 2 must be complete by 31 March 2029. If 3 years event funding is sought, Year 3 must be complete by 31 March 2030.

We may verify information you provide about the management and governance of your organisation by checking it with Companies House or the Charity Commission NI.

### **Growth Events Fund specific eligibility criteria**

In addition to the common eligibility criteria above, to apply to the Growth Events Fund you must be able to demonstrate how the event meets the criteria as set out below:

- ~ Provide evidence of the event growth to date and a robust plan for growth up to, Year 2 and/or 3 (as applicable), over a number of areas i.e. increase in ability to bring additional revenue into local economy, social sustainability (use of volunteers with availability of training and an increase in local business partnerships), increase in attendees (includes participants), increase in duration of event and/or venues used.
- ~ provide recent (within last 2 years) evidence of the event attracting at least 20% of attendees (and/or participants) from Out of Borough (OoB), including at least 5% from out of Northern Ireland and an evidence-based plan to continue to grow this percentage OR a structured business plan detailing how

the event will attract at least this percentage in Year 1 i.e. first year event will receive funding from the Growth Events Fund.

- ~ provide a detailed marketing plan which includes OoB promotion, and a plan to increase this going forward in Year 2 and 3 (as applicable)
- ~ Must take place within the Borough and showcase its assets
- ~ Must take place over a maximum of an 8-week period and have a distinctive theme. A theme is defined as topic or subject that run through your entire event such as maritime, art, or music etc.
- ~ Minimum eligible expenditure threshold £50,000
- ~ Must demonstrate need for Council's financial support by showing match funding of a minimum of 50% (this can be made up from own funds or other sources of funds/sponsorship/grants and can include a maximum of 20% in-kind support).
- ~ Event must be open to the general public, whether for free or paid-for elements

All of your organisation's policies and procedures must be in place, up to date and fit for purpose to comply with all relevant legal and regulatory requirements for the group, services and activities for which your organisation is wholly liable. Please see Annex B, Additional Information for further information.

### **Ineligible Applications**

Applications will **not** be accepted from the following:

- ~ Individuals or sole traders
- ~ Trade or professional conferences/conventions
- ~ Organisations not legally established in the UK
- ~ Events that are substantially fundraising vehicles, whether for the event organisation itself or to raise funds for transmission to a third party
- ~ Events not compliant with the Council's aims and objectives

It is unlikely that we will invest in you if you have previously received a grant from us that was not managed satisfactorily or was not completed. This includes if you did not send us monitoring reports within the agreed timescales or if you did not seek approval for changes to your project.

### **Overview of the application – what we will ask for**

The same level of award will be received each year. For example, if you apply and are awarded £50,000, you will receive £50,000 each year. If you wish to request a reduced amount each year, please indicate this on your application form.

As this is a competitive fund subject to the confirmation of budget via the annual rates setting process, we may offer you less than the amount you applied for annually. If this is the case, we will talk to you about the impact this may have on your programme before we issue your Letter of Offer.

The organisation completing the form must be the same organisation that will receive the grant and deliver the event. We will not consider an application made by one organisation on behalf of another.

Your responses should be well structured and clearly linked to the specific question. We recommend you use bullet points and headings where possible.

It is important that the answers you give are clear and detailed. It is not enough to repeat what we say in these guidance notes.

We can only assess your application on the information you provide within it. We may already be familiar with you and your event but we cannot take this knowledge or experience into account. We will also not take into account information we have not specifically asked for as part of the application, such as press clippings, photographs, evaluation reports, CVs and so on.

**In addition to completing the application form in full, you must provide us with a copy of your Event Business Plan.** It should describe the targets you want to reach and how you plan to achieve them. It should include an action plan covering all aspects of your event delivery, including how, when and how much and must demonstrate how the event will meet the aim and objectives of the GEF. .

You must assure us that you have the skills, systems and procedures in place to deliver a safe event and that you have considered:

- facilities, such as access, utilities, toilets, accommodation, catering, communication, technology and so on
- services, such as medical, police, child protection, fire, traffic management, health and safety, security and so on
- production, such as power, fencing, staging, sound, lighting, vision, heavy plant and so on
- legal requirements, including contractual arrangements, licences, permits and so on
- insurance to cover all aspects of the event.

You should tell us who is going to carry out this work – the skills, roles and responsibilities of your management team, staff, freelancers, subcontractors etc.

You should also demonstrate that your activity is financially viable. That includes having realistic plans to secure adequate income and maintain sufficient cash flow. You should describe the systems and process you have in place to control your finances.

You should identify key challenges and risks to the achievement of your business plan, and how you will manage these. You should include a clear statement of your vision, long-term goals and desired impacts. It should consider how you are going to achieve your vision, goals and impacts, including resources required.

## Growth

It is unlikely that you will have your event planned to a high level of detail for years 2 and 3 (if applicable). However, within the application form, we will ask you to provide us with an outline of the projected growth throughout the form. This will cover the following areas:

- Growth of our local economy (attendees/participants, bednights, investment with local businesses etc)
- Growth of the visitor experience, event duration or programme of event and how you market the event to achieve this growth and showcase the Borough
- Growth and increase in potential of community and place such as more volunteers and training, more venues used etc

Detail and other projected growth can be outlined in your business plan.

Finally, you should tell us how you will monitor and evaluate, review and revise your business plan.

Alongside the application and business plan, **you must provide us with a copy of your event Marketing Plan**. The information contained in your marketing plan and business plan should support what you have told us in the application form. We will be looking for a connection between your application form and these supporting documents. Your marketing plan can be included within your business plan, as 1 document.

Applications that are not complete or do not provide detailed financial **budgets in the tables provided in the application form** will be deemed ineligible.

Organisations/groups can only apply for funding through **one** application, for **one** event to Ards and North Down Borough Council. This is a competitive grants scheme and applications will be determined on the basis of merit and need.

## Completing the Application

### About your organisation

This section gathers basic information on your organisation, its setup and management, and the main contact who we can speak with regarding the application.

### Management Committee and Staff

You should submit copies of minutes of any board meetings you have had over the last 12 months. If your organisation has not been running for 12 months, you should submit minutes of any board meetings you have had since it was formed.

### Financial information and procedures

If your organisation has been operating for several years, you are required to submit copies of the following information to demonstrate that the organisation is financially sound:

- Two years' most recent signed annual accounts
- Management accounts dated within the last three months and signed as agreed by the board of directors or management committee
- Three months' most recent bank statements

If your organisation has only been established recently and cannot reasonably have produced two years' annual accounts, you must submit copies of the following information:

- Management accounts dated within the last three months and signed as agreed by the board of directors or management committee
- Six months' most recent bank statements
- If available, one year's signed annual accounts

Annual accounts and management accounts must be signed and dated by your chairperson or treasurer to confirm they are your organisation's accounts.

**Ards and North Down Borough Council is highly unlikely to invest in an organisation that is in poor financial health or that does not have effective financial controls.**

Events and Festivals should endeavour not to run on the same date as a Council delivered event. Check the dates and times of Council delivered events by contacting [tourismgrants@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk](mailto:tourismgrants@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk)  
You are asked to confirm you have checked by ticking the box within the application.

**Section 1: Your Event – Information**  
**Questions within this section will be scored**

This is your opportunity to tell us about your event.

In this section, please provide us with enough detail so that we understand what will happen on each day of your event, i.e the programming.  
 For 2027/28 (i.e. Year 1), this should include a description of each element of your event, including:

<b>Your activity</b>	<b>What it is you are planning</b>
When and where it will take place	Tell us the name of your event, where it takes place, dates and times, programming and so on.
Facilities	Those already at the venue and those you have brought in specifically for the event and how they impact your attendees and participants, including catering all Section 75 groups.

**Quality**

We realise that quality can be defined in many different ways depending on what you do. This is your opportunity to demonstrate how you define, measure and deliver quality. It is important that you support your response by providing evidence from a variety of sources. It is great if you can tell us that your work is excellent because your beneficiaries said it was. It is stronger still if you can say that your beneficiaries told you and that it also received positive media coverage.

These are some of the signs of quality we are particularly interested in.

- Is your work distinctive? That is, work that could not have emerged elsewhere, or is it significant that it is happening within the Borough?
- Does your event provide an opportunity for people to immerse themselves in local culture?
- Is your activity unique within the Borough? That is, if you don't programme it, nobody else will.
- Tell us about the calibre, skills and experience of participants you work with - don't assume we know who the participants are by name
- Do you consider the experience of your audience and take steps to improve, eg. Add on / merchandise / food and drink offer / map / signage / ambience etc?

**Section 2:**  
**Objective 1: Grow our local economy**  
These questions will be scored

**Attendees and Participants**

You must complete the table to show the targets you intend to achieve through your event. If a target is not relevant to your activity, write “N/A” in the appropriate box. Your targets should be based on a good understanding of what you are currently delivering. Please provide baseline figures from your most recent event.

If your application is successful, your targets will form part of your Letter of Offer. For this reason, you should make sure you can realistically achieve them. If you do not meet your targets, we may not pay out all or some of the grant.

Target	How this should be calculated
Number of volunteers	This is staff or helpers who receive no wages or salary or who receive no more than basic expenses. You can include your board. You should count each volunteer once even if they help out several times throughout your event.
Number of volunteer hours	
Number of participants	This is the number of people who actively take part in activities, those who make your event happen. These can be performers, security, bar staff, traders etc <b>You must only count</b> participants who take part in event you are applying for, not those that may run throughout the year, including outreach or audience development. Please break these down as to where you project where they are coming from. Please include a rationale for these numbers, how have you arrived at that figure.
Number of attendees	This is the number of people attending your event, your spectators. These can be calculated using ticket sales or digital registration– and verifiable.  Please break these down as to where you project where they are coming from. Please include a rationale for these numbers, how have you arrived at that figure. This can be ticket sales from a previous year event, PSNI numbers at the event, market research etc

Please let us know how your event encourages overnight stays and please let us know how many bednights, if these are attendees/and or participant bednights and the type of accommodation you project they will be staying in.

Please note, a bednight is the number of nights a person occupies a bed, for example if an attendee at your event stays in a hotel for 2 nights with their partner, that would equal 4 bednights – 2 people staying for 2 nights.

<b>Type of accommodation</b>
Commercial (hotel, Guest House, B&B, Self Catering)
Registered camping/caravanning
Motorhome
Family/friends
Other

**Investment in local businesses**

<p>Businesses and Partnerships</p>	<p>This is the number of local businesses your event partners with to increase spend within the Borough.</p> <p>Tell us about how these partnerships will assist the businesses and venues and increase spend in the borough. This includes spend from local attendees as well as those travelling to be at your event. This could include encouraging attendees and participants to spend locally, including partnerships with local businesses, transport, use of local suppliers.</p> <p>You must clearly state how you hope to achieve this and give specific examples.</p>
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**Section 3:**  
**Objective 2: Grow our visitor experience and destination**  
These questions will be scored

Deliver a standout and sustainable destination event

<b><u>Stand out</u></b>	<p>Your event should be attracting attendees from outside of the Borough and Northern Ireland. It may also bring the area/Borough to the world. This impact is about looking outward and connecting the Borough to the rest of the world.</p> <p>Tell us how you will deliver a standout event. Are there elements of your event that are unique and not available or limited at other events? Does the event have a USP? Or a wow factor? Is it unique to the Borough?</p>
<b><u>Sustainability</u></b>	<p>Environmental sustainability is a high priority on Ards and North Down Borough Council’s agenda. We recognise the need to take responsibility for our environment and the role of events in changing behaviours.</p> <p>Tell us about the impact your event has on the environment, and what proactive steps you will take to reduce this impact. Your event should strive to meet social, economic and environmental sustainability.</p> <p>You should enclose a copy of your environmental or sustainability policy if you have one.</p>

**Marketing Plan**

You must include an event marketing plan with your application. This must be for at least your 2027/28 event. It may form a part of your business plan as long as the level of detail provided explains exactly how you plan to market the event to your audiences, including costs.

Your marketing plan should show that you understand your audience and are communicating with them efficiently and effectively, including digitally.

<b>Your activity</b>	<b>What it is you are planning</b>
Your target audience	Who they are, where they come from and number of participants and known and estimated attendees.

Your activity	What it is you are planning
	<p>Tell us about the market and audience segments your event appeals to and why your event will appeal to those segments and markets</p>
<p>Domestic market</p>	<p>Tell us about how you market to residents and how you market to beyond borough and within NI.</p> <p>What budget and channels are used and when.</p> <p>You should include actions, targets, timescales – including when and how you will review and revise your plan – and the resources involved – both people and money.</p>
<p>International market</p>	<p>Tell us about how you market to ROI, UK and other markets (if applicable).</p> <p>What budgets and channels are used and when.</p> <p>You should include actions, targets, timescales – including when and how you will review and revise your plan – and the resources involved – both people and money.</p>
<p>Tourism</p>	<p>Your event should be attracting attendees from outside of the Borough and Northern Ireland. It may also bring the area/Borough to the world through promotion, showcases or international networks. This impact is about looking outward and connecting the Borough to the rest of the world.</p>
<p>How did you do</p>	<p>Tell us about your monitoring and evaluation arrangements. How will you gather data, insights and evidence that your event is having the desired impact on the area/Borough and its people? How will you reflect on and learn from this data?</p>

**Section 4:**  
**Objective 3: Grow the potential of our local community and place**  
These questions will be scored

This section is about the impact your event has on the area/Borough and its people.

Impact on	What difference we want to make
People	<p>We want to support events that are inclusive. That means providing experiences and events that are not only open to all, but that increase knowledge and skills. This also means showcasing talent from local people and helping grow their confidence.</p> <p>Tell us how your event fosters equality of opportunity and good relations and supports /invests in local people – local talent, volunteers and residents.</p>
Local Businesses	<p>We also want to support activity that engages with local businesses, whether it be through financial support or otherwise.</p> <p>Tell us about how you work with other organisations</p>
Place	<p>We want to support activity that strengthens our residents’ connection to the place they call home. This can be emotional change – so that people feel like they are part of their community or are proud of their area. Or physical transformation – bringing public spaces to life or creating extraordinary experiences in unexpected places.</p> <p>Tell us about the stand out elements of your event, those that aren’t available anywhere else or how you tell the story of the town/city your event is in.</p> <p>Tell us how your event supports and invest in local businesses, venues and assets.</p>

## **Section 5: Finance/Economic Impact**

### These questions will be scored

You must fill in the tables to show your event's projected income and expenditure. Your income and expenditure must match. The figures you give should be accurate, detailed, realistic and consistent with your business plan and information you have provided elsewhere in the application form. You should use the same budget lines you use in your organisation's own financial reporting, for example, in your annual or management accounts, excluding any capital income and expenditure.

Organisers are encouraged to develop a plan to improve the event's financial sustainability and reduce reliance on public funding. ANDBC will only provide the minimum level of financial assistance to allow the event, or elements of the event, to take place. In some cases, without Council intervention, events would be unlikely to happen or would take place at a reduced size or scale.

The Growth Events Fund is not designed to be a core funder of events but will support the development of your event.

You do not need to tell us where you will spend our money at this stage. We will agree this with you if your application is successful, in line with eligible costs.

Successful applicants will receive the same level of investment from ANDBC each year, subject to the annual Rate setting process. Should you wish the award to reduce each year, please indicate this in your application form. Year 2 or Year 3 funding will be subject to an annual evaluation and assessment of continuing need going forward, Council may reduce funding on that basis. The applicant has the right to declare a withdrawal from any requirement for funding beyond the first year.

Applications must show minimum eligible expenditure of £50,000 and must demonstrate need for Council's financial support by showing match funding of a minimum of 50% (this can be made up from own funds or other sources of funds/sponsorship/grants and a maximum of 20% in-kind costs).

In-kind support is a non-cash contribution of a good or service, provided instead of cash, that is necessary to deliver the event/festival.

In-kind contributions can include:

- Staff time: You can calculate this by using the minimum wage and multiplying by the number of hours worked.
- Donated equipment/goods: How much the equipment or goods would cost to purchase or hire
- Services donated from other companies or organisations: How much this service would cost if you were to pay for it
- Use of premises or office space for the event/festival

Please ensure in-kind support is in both the expenditure and income sides of the budget.

*Where an applicant previously received a Letter of Offer under GEF 2024-2027, plans for substantial growth across the event must be clearly detailed. There is no guarantee of a similar level of grant or any grant to any applicant.*

**If you do not provide detailed financial budgets in the tables provided, your application will be deemed ineligible.**

A list of eligible and ineligible costs is at Annex A

## **SURPLUS**

You must declare any profit/surplus made during your event at the time you submit your grant claim. If your event delivers a surplus, the Council may consider allowing some or all of this to be rolled over to develop your event in the following year.

A limit on retention of surplus is the lesser of £3,000 or 10% of the annual award. However, each event will be looked at on a case by case basis and the event organiser will need to demonstrate a need to retain a surplus at the time of the post-event evaluation of their grant claim.

The event organiser must confirm that any retained surplus will be used for the future event only and for no other purpose.

Any surplus accrued over the agreed retention limit will be deducted from the grant balance payable. Any surplus retained must be shown as income/retained surplus in the event account in the following year.

Should the event not go ahead in the following year, or fail to attract a grant, the Council will require repayment of the retained surplus.

**For note. This is a multi-annual award there can be no carry over at the end of the award period.**

**DEADLINE**

The Growth Events Fund will close on **xxxxxxxxxxxx at 12noon**. Incomplete applications or those received after this time will NOT be considered.

**Return to**

Email (preferable) [tourismgrants@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk](mailto:tourismgrants@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk)

By post to: **Visitor Information Centre, Tower House, 34 Quay Street, Bangor, BT20 5ED.**

**WHAT HAPPENS NEXT**

**EVALUATION**

Following the closing date, applications will be assessed and scored according to the criteria below.

**Evaluation Panel:**

Your application will be assessed by an assessment panel that will comprise of at least 3 officers of which one will be from the service delivering the grant. At least 2 other officers that have experience in administering grants will make up the panel.

**Evaluation Criteria:**

The answers to each of the questions above will be given a score out of 4 using the matrix in the Table below.

<b>Measure</b>	<b>Score</b>
Excellent response that fully answers the question Indicates an excellent response with detailed supporting evidence and no weaknesses.	4
A good response to the question with good supporting evidence.	3
A response with reservations. Lacks convincing detail to demonstrate that the proposed response answers the question.	2
An unacceptable response with serious reservations. Very limited detail to demonstrate that the proposed response answers the question.	1
The applicant failed to address the question.	0

As part of the scoring, the Panel will also use your answers to complete an economic impact assessment. This will help gauge how much economic benefit your event will

bring to the Borough, as well as calculate a return on ANDBC investment and value for money.

A passmark of 60% has been set for the Growth Events Fund.

**Oversubscription to the Fund**

Where the amount of grant funding requested exceeds the available grant budget, all successful grants will be reduced by an equal percentage.

**TIMETABLE**

Scheme advertised	xxx November 2026
Growth Events Fund open	xxxx November 2026 at 12noon
Tourism Events and Festivals Fund close	Xxxxx December 2026 at 12noon
Date of Assessment	xxxx
Award and regret letters issued	February 2027
Letter of acceptance received	Within timeline contained in Letter of Offer
Completion of grant period	Within timeline contained in Letter of Offer
Claim to be submitted	Within timeline contained in Letter of Offer
Monitoring Form to be Submitted	Within timeline contained in Letter of Offer
Scheme close	31 March 2030

If your application is unsuccessful, you will be notified via email. You will be sent a copy of Council appeal procedure. Feedback on your application can be provided on written request. However, an appeal can only be made where an applicant can evidence that the process of assessment was not followed in accordance with the criteria detailed in the Guidance Notes.

The aim of the appeals process is to ensure a fair and transparent process for the assessment of grant applications. Grants will be assessed based on the criteria set out in the Guidance Notes.

If your Application is successful, we will:

- arrange a meeting with Council officers to discuss and agree the **Letter of Offer** (LoO) conditions and our requirements for the evaluation of your event. Evaluation expectations will be in line with the level of grant.

- send you a LoO confirming the amount of the award and detailing the conditions attached to the award. The Form of Acceptance within the LoO must be signed and returned within 4 weeks of the date printed on the LoO.

You must provide appropriate insurance, risk assessments and an event management plan (EMP) **at least** 3 months before the start of your event, or as soon as possible after receiving confirmation of a grant (Council officers will provide a template for the EMP or your risk assessment if required).

You should expect a visit from a Council officer during the event who will observe/check that you are compliant with any conditions within your LoO.

After each year of your event, we will provide templates for monitoring and arrange a meeting with you to discuss these. These include:

- Attendee and participant numbers
- Lessons learned
- Marketing
- Budget
- Section 75 monitoring arrangements

## Annex A

### Eligible and Ineligible Costs

Please note, this list is not exhaustive

Eligible Costs	Ineligible Costs
Event Costs (including entertainment/performer costs, equipment hire, venue hire/ security / Health and Safety/First Aid/freelance fees	Bank Fees/Bank Charges/ Interest Charges/ Bank Commission / Tax and VAT Payments /Accountancy Fees /Corporation Tax/Legal Fees
Marketing– Advertising / PR Activities / Advertising Promotional Material/ Media Monitoring / Promoter fee / Market Research/Event Evaluation	Hospitality – The cost of alcohol cannot be claimed in any context/circumstance
Judges' Fees/Accommodation/Travel	Cash Payments/Transactions including Petty Cash
Road closures (including licence, stewarding/traffic management costs)	Capital Repayments /Capital Expenditure e.g. equipment such as cameras or computers etc
Participants and volunteers catering (NO alcohol)	Rates/ Fuel /Electricity/Rent / Phone Bills
Prize Awards and Trophies (NOT cash prizes)	Charitable Donations
Administration Costs (excluding wages)	Prize Fund - Cash
Event Insurance	Membership Fees
any reasonable adjustment requests under the DDA 1995	Liquor Licences
	Staff salaries

## Annex B

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Organisations in receipt of public funding must comply with all statutory obligations regarding the safe delivery of and access to their events. All of your organisation's policies and procedures must be in place, up to date and fit for purpose. These may include:

#### **SAFEGUARDING**

Individuals and organisations working with children, young people and/or adults who may be vulnerable must have an existing policy that ensures good practice guidelines are followed.

You can adopt the Council's Safeguarding policy if your organisation does not have a policy in place by signing and returning the **Confirmation of Safeguarding arrangements** form at Appendix 1 of the Council's Safeguarding Policy.

This is available to download at: [www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/about-the-Council/safeguarding](http://www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/about-the-Council/safeguarding).

The signed form should be returned along with your acceptance of the LoO.

#### **DISABILITY ACCESS AND INCLUSION**

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) aims to ensure that disabled people are not treated less favourably than people who are not disabled. It covers access to goods, services, facilities, education and transport. This means that you have a duty to anticipate that disabled people will want to use your services and you should make changes accordingly to increase accessibility.

The DDA also requires employers not to discriminate against disabled people and to make reasonable adjustments for applications and in the workplace.

We expect all applicants to be familiar with the DDA and have made reasonable adjustments that aim to provide equality of access, dignity and choice.

#### **SECTION 75 CATEGORIES**

Section 75 categories are:

Religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status, sexual orientation, men and women generally, disability and dependents

## **TOOLKIT**

Ards and North Down Borough Council have developed a Toolkit to assist in organising a safe and successful event. The toolkit and other relevant templates can be accessed at [Event Management Toolkit](#)

## **CONTACTS**

Email

[tourismgrants@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk](mailto:tourismgrants@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk)

By post to:

**Visitor Information Centre, Tower House, 34 Quay Street,  
Bangor, BT20 5ED.**



# GROWTH EVENTS FUND 2027-2030

## APPLICATION FORM Year 1 – 2027/28

**ABOUT YOUR ORGANISATION**

Name of your Organisation, as it appears on your governing document or set of rules.

**Main Contact for your Organisation** (this should be the person who can answer questions on your event/application form)

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Position in Organisation</b>	
<b>Contact Address for correspondence</b>	
<b>Telephone Number</b>	
<b>E-mail address</b>	
<b>Website address for your organisation</b>	

**Please indicate your organisation type**

- Constituted Community Group (Please see Guidelines for a definition)**
- Limited Company**
- Charity**

**Please give Company/Charity Registration No.**

**When was your organisation formed?**

**Are there any restrictions on who can join your organisation?**

**Management Committee and Staff**

**Please list members of your board or management committee or trustees**

(Please add additional lines if required)

NAME	POSITION ON BOARD	RELEVANT SKILLS AND EXPERTISE	HOW LONG HAS THIS PERSON SERVED ON THE BOARD

How long can a board member sit on your board or management committee?

How often do the board or management committee meet?

Are any of your employees, members of your board, management committee or trustees - elected members(councillors) or employees of Ards and North Down Borough Council, or related to an elected member or employee of Ards and North Down Borough Council?

**Staff**

Please list the names and jobs titles of the staff that will be responsible for managing and delivering your event (Please add additional lines if required)

NAME	JOB TITLE

Are there likely to be any changes to your staff structure during the coming financial year (April 2027 to March 2028)?

**Financial Information**

The bank account must be in the name of the organisation as this is the account we will pay funding into. Please do not provide us with an account code or sort code. These will be requested with your letter of offer if your application is successful.

<b>Bank Name:</b>	
<b>Bank Address:</b>	
<b>Bank Account Name:</b>	

**Has your organisation been operating for more than 2 years?**

--

**What period does your organisation’s financial year cover?**

--

**What was your organisations total income and expenditure for the most recent full financial year?**

<b>INCOME</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>

<b>What is your organisational turnover?</b>

**Financial Manager**

Please give details for the person responsible for the day to day financial management within the organisation

Name	
Phone Number	
Email	

What procedures are in place for financial transactions such as cheques, electronic payments, petty cash? Please give details of the authorisation process and the number of people needed to sign relevant documents.

**SECTION 1: YOUR EVENT – INFORMATION**

In this section, questions 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 will be scored.

**Event/Festival Name and Proposed Dates for Year 1**

<b>What is the name of your event/festival?</b>	
<b>Start date [day/month/year]</b>	
<b>End date [day/month/year]</b>	
<b>Venue and Location of event/festival</b>	

**Have you confirmed this event/festival will not coincide with a Council delivered event** Yes  No

**Will your event require the use of Council Land?** Yes  No

**If yes, please detail where**

--

Please note that a separate booking **must** be completed to hire the Council Land via the Compliance Section of Ards and North Down Borough Council. Please see details in Guidance Notes.

**Is the event open to the general public (please tick)** Yes  No

**Is this a new event to Ards and North Down?** Yes  No

**Is your event free, ticketed or has elements of both?**  
 Free  Ticketed  Both

**1.1 Please tell us about the content/planned activity of your event. i.e. the programming?**

**1.2 Please demonstrate how your event is of high quality.**  
Please reference page 9 of the Guidance Notes for information on Quality.

**1.3 What facilities and policies do you have in place to ensure your event is accessible and inclusive to all and how are you actively promoting the event to ensure it is accessible to all?**

**Please include your Business Plan with your application.**

**SECTION 2:**

**OBJECTIVE 1: GROW OUR LOCAL ECONOMY**

In this section, Q2.1-2.8 will be scored and/or used as part of an economic impact assessment

**Attendees and Participants**

**Table 2.1**

**Please fill in the table below to show your targets for the coming years and your baseline from previous years event, if applicable**

	<b>Baseline</b>	<b>Year 1 2027/28</b>	<b>Year 2 2028/29</b>	<b>Year 3 2029/30</b>
<b>Number of volunteers</b>				
<b>Number of volunteer hours</b>				
<b>Number of participants from the Borough</b>				
<b>Number of participants out of the Borough but within NI</b>				
<b>Number of participants from out of NI</b>				
<b>Number of attendees from the Borough</b>				
<b>Number of attendees out of the Borough but within NI</b>				
<b>Number of attendees from out of NI</b>				
<b>TOTAL NUMBERS</b>				

Please note: Must have a minimum of 20% attendees and participants from out of the Borough. This must include at least 5% of attendees from out of Northern Ireland.

**2.2 Please provide a rationale for the ATTENDEE numbers projected above including how you intend to grow the numbers over the 2/3 year period.**

**2.3 Please complete the table below for the PARTICIPANT numbers projected above.**

	Year 1 – 27/28	Year 2 – 28/29	Year 3 – 29/30
<b>Roles and numbers per role</b>			
<b>Rationale for the numbers in Table 2.1, including how you plan to grow the numbers in Years 2 and 3.</b>			

**2.4 For Year 1, how many days do you project attendees and participants will attend your event?**

Attendees	Participants

**2.5 How do you ensure that disabled people are not treated less favourably than people without a disability?**

**2.6 How does your event encourage attendees and participants to stay overnight?**

**Please complete the table below detailing the numbers and type of accommodation you project your attendees/participants will be staying in.**

Type of accommodation	No. of attendee bednights	No. of participant bednights	Total
Commercial (hotel, Guest House, B&B, Self-Catering)			
Registered camping/caravanning			

Motorhome			
Family/friends			
Other			

If other category is used, you please let us know the type and bednight calculation

**2.7 Please let us know how you came to these figures.**

**2.7 Please complete the table below detailing how do you plan to grow the number of overnight stays in Year 2 and Year 3 of your event?**

Year 2 projected bednight numbers	Growth plan	Year 3 projected bednight numbers	Growth plan

**Investment within the Borough**

**2.8 Please detail the local businesses your event partners with and how the event intends to increase spend by attendees and participants within the Borough through these partnerships. Please provide specific examples of how these partnerships and spend will grow in year one.**



### **3.3 Marketing Plan**

Please submit your event Marketing Plan with your application.

The marketing plan must clearly demonstrate how the event will increase awareness of AND by marketing nationally and internationally

Please ensure this is detailed and shows how you plan to market the event to your visitors, especially those who come from out of the Borough, detailed costs and reach of each element.

**SECTION 4:**  
**OBJECTIVE 3: GROW THE POTENTIAL OF OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY AND**  
**PLACE**

all questions in this section will be scored

**4.1 What impact does your event have on the “Place”?**  
Please refer to page 15 of the Guidance Notes for what we would like to see in this section.

**4.2 How does your event support and invest local people and talent, including fostering equality of opportunity and good relations?**

**4.3 Who will you work in partnership with and how? Are there any strategic partnerships or engagement opportunities for local businesses that bring value to the event/the Borough?**

**4.4 If the event provides any opportunities for volunteers, please detail these. Please include number of volunteers, roles and if you will provide training or development opportunities for those involved in the event.**



**Table 5.2 Income (please do not include ANDBC request)**

	<b>Year 1 2027/28</b>	<b>Year 2 2028/29</b>	<b>Year 3 2029/30</b>
<b>Other public sector (eg Arts Council, DfC etc.)</b>			
<b>Sponsorship</b>			
<b>Ticket Income</b>			
<b>Advertising Income</b>			
<b>Merchandise</b>			
<b>Stall holder income</b>			
<b>Other Income</b>			
<b>In-kind</b>			
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>			

**Please provide further detail on any grants or sponsorship included in your budget such as if an application has been made, whether funding has been awarded or when you expect a decision etc.**

**If applicable, please explain Other Income**

**Table 5.3 Expenditure**

	<b>Year 1 2027/28</b>	<b>Year 2 2028/29</b>	<b>Year 3 2029/30</b>
<b>Production and Venue Costs</b>			
<b>Artists Costs</b>			
<b>Marketing costs</b>			
<b>Health and Safety</b>			
<b>Administration</b>			
<b>Other costs</b>			
<b>In-kind</b>			

<b>TOTAL COSTS</b>			
--------------------	--	--	--

<b>If applicable, please explain Other Income</b>

<b>5.4 If you project any in-kind support, please detail this below.</b>

<b>5.5 What expenditure will be spent outside of the Borough of Ards and North Down?</b>

**5.6 What are the additional economic benefits to the Borough?**

**5.7 What additional paid employment does the event provide, from inside and outside of the Borough?**

Please tick to confirm you have included the following with your application form:

Business plan/strategy (will be used for scoring)	
Marketing plan (will be used for scoring)	
Environmental or Sustainability Plan (if applicable) (can be part of your business plan and is not mandatory)	
Constitution or Memorandum and Articles of Association	
Minutes of any board meetings you have had over the last 12 months. If your organisation has not been running for 12 months, you should submit minutes of any board meetings you have had since it was formed.	

**If your organisation has been operating for several years:**

Two years' most recent signed annual accounts	
Management accounts dated within the last three months	
Three months' most recent bank statements	

**If your organisation has only been established recently:**

Management accounts dated within the last three months	
Six months' most recent bank statements	
If available, one year's signed annual accounts	

Annual accounts and management accounts must be signed and dated by your chairperson or treasurer to confirm they are your organisation's accounts.

**DECLARATION**

**Please tick to confirm that you have the following insurances/policies and procedures in place. If your application is successful, we will require evidence of these.**

- Details of relevant Insurance relating to the event (where appropriate)
  
- Safeguarding/Child Protection Policy/ Statement

**Fundraising Declaration**

As per Ards and North Down Grants Policy, provision of funds to organisations to host fundraising / donation-led events is not permitted. Therefore, if your event would not go ahead without the collection of donations intended for retention by your organisation or distribution to third parties, you should not accept any grant offered.

**I confirm the event/festival applied for is not a fundraising event as defined in the guidelines.**

**Equality of Opportunity, Section 75 and Good Relations.**

Ards and North Down Borough Council is required to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between

- persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation
- men and women generally
- persons with a disability or without
- persons with dependants or without.

In addition, without prejudice to the obligations above, Council is required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

Council is committed to fulfilling the Section 75 statutory duties across all functions (including service provision, employment and procurement)

**Freedom of Information**

Ards and North Down Borough Council is subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. This Act came into operation on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2005. Applicants

should be aware that the information provided in the completed application document could be disclosed in response to a request under the Freedom of Information Act.

The Council will proceed on the basis of disclosure unless an appropriate exemption applies. No information provided by applicants will be accepted “in confidence” and Ards and North Down Borough Council will not accept liability for loss as a result of any information disclosed in response to a request under the Freedom of Information Act.

Ards and North Down Borough Council does not have a discretion regarding whether or not to disclose information in response to a request under the Freedom of Information Act, unless an exemption applies. Decisions in relation to disclosure will be taken by appropriate individuals in Ards and North Down Borough Council having due regard to the exemptions available and the Public Interest. Applicants should be aware that despite the availability of some exemptions, information may still be disclosed if the Public Interest in its disclosure outweighs the Public Interest in maintaining the exemption. Applicants are required to highlight information included in the application documents which they consider to be commercially sensitive or confidential in nature, and should state the precise reasons, why that view is taken. In particular, issues concerning trade secrets and commercial sensitivity should be highlighted. Applicants are advised against recording unnecessary information.

In accordance with the Lord Chancellors Code of Practice on the discharge of public functions, Ards and North Down Borough Council will **not** accept any contractual term that purports to restrict the disclosure of information held by the Council in respect of the contract or grant process save as permitted by the Freedom of Information Act. The decision whether to disclose information rests solely with Ards and North Down Borough Council.

Ards and North Down Borough Council will consult with applicants, where it is considered appropriate, in relation to the release of controversial information.

### **Data Protection**

Ards and North Down Borough Council values your right to personal privacy. We collect this information solely for the purposes of this application and do not share it with anyone. We comply with the DPA (Data Protection Act) 2018 and UK GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation), ensuring that information is collected fairly and lawfully, is accurate, adequate, secure, up to date and not held any longer than necessary.

For further information our Privacy Statement can be viewed at <https://www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/privacy-and-cookies>

**[Please tick the box to confirm you have read the Freedom of Information, Data Protection and Equality statements above](#)**

**We declare that this application is made with the authority and consent of the above organisation and that the information provided is true, accurate and complete.**

Name (in capitals):

Position held:

Signature (on behalf of the applicant):

Date:

Name (in capitals):

Position held:

Signature (on behalf of the applicant):

Date:

**Completed application forms and supporting documentation should be forwarded by no later than: 12noon on xxxxx**

Please note: **Late or Incomplete applications will not be considered**

**Applications will not be reviewed by the Grants Team until after the closing date and time.**

### **Return to**

Email (preferable) [tourismgrants@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk](mailto:tourismgrants@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk)

By post to: **Visitor Information Centre, Tower House, 34 Quay Street, Bangor, BT20 5ED.**

**You are advised to encrypt emails that contain sensitive data in order to keep you and your personal information safe.**

Unclassified

**ITEM 4**

**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	11 June 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Strategic Capital Development
Report title	Bangor Waterfront Update (June 2026)
Attachments	
File Reference (if applicable)	PCU43
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 3. A thriving and sustainable economy If multiple: Priority 2: Environmental - 2. An environmentally sustainable and resilient Council and Borough meeting our net zero carbon targets Priority 3: Social - 6. Opportunities for people to be active and healthy

## 1 Purpose of Report

This report:

- Provides an update on progress across the Bangor Waterfront Redevelopment Programme;
- Summarises the outcomes of public consultation and stakeholder engagement in respect of Pickie Fun Park and the BYC Watersports Centre; and
- Seeks approval to proceed with revised Pickie Fun Park proposals.

## 2 Background

The Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) is a significant investment programme designed to drive inclusive economic growth across the Belfast City Region through investment in tourism, regeneration, innovation and infrastructure.

The Bangor Waterfront Redevelopment Programme is the Council's flagship project within the Tourism and Regeneration pillar of the BRCD. The programme provides for the coordinated regeneration of approximately two miles of Bangor's seafront, with the aim of enhancing its attractiveness as a high-quality visitor destination, supporting local economic activity, and improving the overall experience for residents and visitors.

The programme is being delivered through a number of interrelated capital projects, including:

- Urban Waterfront and Public Realm;
- Pickie Fun Park;
- BYC Watersports Centre;
- Marina Wetside Facilities and Infrastructure; and
- Alternative approaches to the delivery of cultural and arts outcomes following the decision not to proceed with Court House, Phase II.

## 3 Programme Overview

### 3.1 Overall Programme Status

The Bangor Waterfront Redevelopment Programme continues to progress across all constituent projects under established governance and assurance arrangements. Delivery remains aligned to the objectives set out in the Belfast Region City Deal, with a continued focus on achieving design quality, value for money and long-term economic and social benefits for the Borough.

Since the previous update to the Committee in October 2025, progress has been made across all workstreams, with projects advancing through key stages of design development, planning preparation and procurement. Programme dependencies, risks and emerging issues continue to be actively managed through established programme controls and reporting structures.

### 3.2 Programme and Milestones

The overall programme remains on track in terms of strategic direction, with constituent projects progressing in line with their respective delivery pathways.

As projects have advanced, a number of interim milestone variances have arisen, primarily linked to procurement sequencing and the scale of design, survey and statutory processes required to support robust planning submissions. These variances are being actively managed and are considered recoverable within the context of the overall programme.

### **3.3 Financial Overview**

The Bangor Waterfront Redevelopment Programme continues to operate within the approved funding envelope, with funding provided through a combination of Belfast Region City Deal investment, Council contribution and private sector investment.

At programme level, there is currently no forecast increase in the overall budget. Cost pressures identified at project level, as designs have developed, are being actively managed through ongoing design review, value engineering and programme controls to ensure affordability is maintained.

## **4 Workstream Progress Updates**

### **4.1 Urban Waterfront & Public Realm (UWPR)**

**Current Stage:** Appointment of the Integrated Consultancy Team (ICT)

**Progress:**

- A compliant procurement process has been undertaken in line with the Council's procurement procedures and governance requirements.
- As part of this process, detailed clarification and evaluation of the preferred tender have been completed, with input from Procurement, CPD and legal advisers to ensure compliance, value for money and deliverability.
- The procurement process has now concluded, and a report recommending award of contract is being presented to the Committee.
- As part of the procurement process, design concept proposals were developed to inform tender evaluation; these are indicative in nature and will be reviewed and further developed with the appointed ICT prior to wider presentation to Members and stakeholders.

**Next Steps:**

- Consideration of the report recommending award of contract and subject to approval, formal appointment of the ICT.
- Commencement of initial surveys and site investigations.
- Review and further development of design concepts with the appointed ICT to inform scope, programme and planning strategy.
- Progression of early design development and associated planning approach.
- Initiation of the Gateway Review process aligned to the appointed team and updated project information.

## 4.2 Pickie Fun Park

**Current Stage:** RIBA Stage 3; progressing towards planning submission

**Progress:**

- Pre-Application Community Consultation (PACC) completed, with a strong level of engagement and overall support for investment in Pickie Fun Park.
- Feedback highlighted a number of matters for further consideration, including the scale and type of certain attractions and the potential impact on nearby residential amenity.
- Design development has progressed alongside technical assessments, including acoustic analysis and site investigations.
- Revised proposals have been developed to respond to feedback and technical considerations, supporting improved deliverability and the long-term performance of the scheme.

**Next Steps:**

- Progress the project through RIBA Stage 3 design development
- Prepare and submit a planning application, subject to approval of the revised proposals
- Continue engagement with key stakeholders and statutory consultees

*Note: Revised proposals are set out in Section 6 of this report.*

## 4.3 BYC Watersports Centre

**Current Stage:** RIBA Stage 3; progressing towards planning submission

**Progress:**

- RIBA Stage 2 design development completed, with a coordinated and fully developed design proposal.
- Planning application and Marine Licence submission progressed, supported by a comprehensive suite of surveys and technical information.
- Extensive stakeholder engagement undertaken, including statutory PACC, Youth Voice and Disability Forum engagement.
- Strong overall support for the redevelopment, with feedback informing refinements to design and accessibility proposals.
- Continued collaboration with BYC Development Committee to ensure operational requirements are aligned with the design.

**Next Steps:**

- Progress planning through determination
- Advance Stage 4 technical design
- Prepare for main contractor procurement process

## 4.4 Marina Wetside Facilities and Infrastructure

**Current Stage:** ICT procurement – Pre-Selection Questionnaire (PSQ) stage

**Progress:**

- Procurement documentation for the appointment of the Integrated Consultancy Team has been developed in line with Council procurement procedures and governance requirements.

- Pre-Selection Questionnaire (PSQ) documentation has been issued to the market, with submissions scheduled to be received in early June.
- Supporting evaluation and tender documentation has been prepared to ensure compliance and facilitate progression to the next stage of procurement.
- Ongoing engagement with funding partners is in place to support the procurement process.

#### **Next Steps:**

- Evaluation of PSQ submissions and shortlisting of tenderers.
- Progression to Invitation to Tender (ITT) stage, subject to approvals.
- Continued engagement with funding partners and key stakeholders.
- Progression of design development following appointment of the ICT.

### **4.5 Court House – Alternative Approach**

**Current Stage:** Options development

#### **Progress:**

- Following the decision not to proceed with Court House Phase II, this element of the programme remains paused.
- Work is ongoing to develop alternative approaches to deliver the intended social, cultural and economic outcomes.
- Engagement with BRCD PMO and the Department for Communities continues to ensure alignment on future proposals and funding approach.

#### **Next Steps:**

- Continue development and assessment of alternative options.
- Engage with funding partners to agree a preferred approach.
- Bring forward a defined proposal for consideration through the appropriate governance process.

## **5 Communications and Engagement**

Engagement across the Bangor Waterfront programme has been undertaken through statutory consultation and additional stakeholder engagement, including public events, online consultation and targeted engagement with groups such as Youth Voice and the Disability Forum.

This approach has ensured a broad and inclusive engagement process across both Pickie Fun Park and the BYC Watersports Centre.

### **5.1 Pickie Fun Park**

#### **Engagement:**

- 117 responses were received, including online submissions and feedback from the public engagement event.

#### **Key Messages:**

- Majority support for investment and regeneration (65.8%).
- Positive feedback on public realm improvements and visitor potential.

- A number of matters were raised for further consideration, including the scale and type of certain attractions, as well as potential local impacts such as noise, affordability and parking.

## **5.2 BYC Watersports Centre**

### **Engagement:**

- Approximately 180 participants engaged across consultation events and stakeholder activity, with around 80 questionnaires completed.

### **Key Messages:**

- Very strong support for the project (approx. 96%)
- Positive feedback on design, facilities and community value
- Matters raised included parking provision, accessibility and inclusivity, and elements of the detailed design and layout.

Overall, engagement demonstrates strong support for investment in Bangor's waterfront.

Feedback has been focused on specific design and local considerations and has been actively used to inform project development. In particular, feedback in respect of Pickie Fun Park has informed the revised proposals set out in Section 6.

## **6 Pickie Fun Park – Revised Proposals**

### **6.1 Rationale for Change**

Feedback from consultation, supported by technical assessment including acoustic analysis, identified that elements of the original proposals could present planning and deliverability risk if progressed unchanged.

In response, further design development has been undertaken at this stage to address these matters and support progression of the scheme with greater certainty.

### **6.2 Summary of Revised Proposals**

The proposals have been refined to respond to consultation feedback and introduce a more balanced, contemporary and inclusive mix of attractions.

Key changes include:

- Refinement of the attraction mix, including the removal of the Family Roller Coaster and proposed wet play elements, with these replaced by a more balanced and inclusive range of attractions aligned to the site context and consultation feedback.
- Enhancement of the existing Pickie Puffer through an enclosed, all-weather tunnel featuring immersive themed audio visual content.
- Introduction of a Zorb Pool to broaden age appeal
- Enhancement of the nature walk to a sensory trail
- Provision of a Changing Places facility
- Improvements to the amphitheatre for events and seasonal use

*Indicative image of the enhanced Pickie Puffer tunnel experience is provided below for illustrative purposes.*



**Illustrative example of an immersive tunnel experience associated with the Pickie Puffer. Final design, layout and theming will be developed as part of the next design stage.**

### **6.3 Strategic Benefits**

The revised scheme:

- Addresses planning and technical considerations
- Improves deliverability
- Enhances the quality and distinctiveness of the visitor offer
- Broadens age appeal and supports year-round use
- Improves accessibility and inclusivity

### **6.4 Financial Summary**

The revised proposals are to be delivered through a reallocation of existing programme funding and additional private sector investment.

This will be achieved through:

- Approximately £375k reallocation within the Council’s existing Bangor Waterfront programme contribution; and
- £266k additional private sector investment from the operator.

This approach does **not increase the overall programme funding envelope and no additional Council funding is being sought.**

### **6.5 Overall Position**

The revised proposals represent a proportionate response to consultation feedback and technical assessment, improving deliverability while enhancing the overall scheme and leveraging additional private investment.

### **6.6 Next Steps (Subject to Approval)**

- Progress RIBA Stage 3 design development
- Prepare and submit planning application
- Continue engagement with stakeholders, including the operator (Crumlin Road Gaol) and statutory consultees

## **7 Key Programme Risks & Issues**

The delivery of the Bangor Waterfront Redevelopment Programme continues to require active management of a number of interrelated risks and issues.

Key considerations include:

- Programme coordination and dependencies, including alignment between constituent projects and adjacent developments such as Marine Gardens
- Procurement and programme progression, including the timely appointment of key consultancy teams and the impact on downstream programme activities
- Planning and statutory approvals, including the need to secure timely approvals supported by consultation and technical evidence
- Cost and affordability, with ongoing management of cost pressures through design development and programme controls to maintain delivery within the overall funding envelope
- Private sector investment, including continued development of the investment strategy and engagement with delivery partners
- Delivery of wider programme outcomes, including progression of alternative approaches following the decision not to proceed with Court House Phase II

These risks and issues are actively managed through established programme governance and reporting arrangements.

## 8 Next Steps

The programme will continue to progress across all workstreams, with the focus on the following:

- Progressing the Urban Waterfront and Public Realm project through to appointment of the Integrated Consultancy Team and commencement of design development
- Advancing Pickie Fun Park and the BYC Watersports Centre through planning submission and determination
- Progressing the Marina Wetside Facilities procurement to the next stage
- Continued engagement with funding partners to maintain programme alignment and delivery
- Development of the private sector investment strategy and progression of alternative approaches to deliver the intended Court House outcomes

## RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council:

- **Notes** the progress to date across the Bangor Waterfront Redevelopment Programme
- **Notes** the outcomes of public consultation and stakeholder engagement in respect of Pickie Fun Park and the BYC Watersports Centre
- **Approves** the revised Pickie Fun Park proposals as set out in Section 6 of this report, including the reallocation of approximately £375k within the Council's existing Bangor Waterfront programme contribution to support delivery of the revised scheme, leveraging additional private sector investment from the operator.

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	11 June 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Economic Growth
Report title	East Border Region Contribution 2026-27
Attachments	Appendix 1 - East Border Region Past Projects
File Reference (if applicable)	DEV23
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	Budget Narrative: Provision made
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 Choose an item. If multiple:

**Background**

The East Border Region (EBR) is a cross-border organisation with local authority partners on both sides of the border that includes Ards and North Down Borough Council. By exploring various funding mechanisms, they have developed and delivered a number of EU funded initiatives, most notably projects that were developed

under Interreg and the various PEACE programmes. Its aim is to promote economic, social and cultural development within the following six partner regions: Ards and North Down Borough Council Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council Newry Mourne and Down District Council Monaghan County Council Meath County Council Louth County Council Projects Funded Through the East Border Region Since 2015, the only Economic Development led project funded through EBR is the PEACEPLUS Mini Digi Hub Project, for which a letter of offer was signed on the 28 May 2025. This €6.3M project works over the 6 partner councils and one academic institution, Dundalk Institution of Technology.

The Ards and North Down allocated budget is €553K (£482K) which will be used to re-imagine the Comber Community Centre as a Digi Hub and Internet of Things Exemplar centre. The legacy Councils of Ards BC and North Down BC would also have availed of monies from EBR for various projects including; Eisenhower Pier Project, Greyabbey Walking Trails project and Car Park, North Down Museum Christian Heritage project, Bangor Castle UV lighting project and the FASTER (electric Vehicle) project. Further details on these projects and respective budgets are available in Appendix 1: East Border Region Past Projects

A request from East Border Region has been received asking the Council to contribute £20,000 towards the organisation to support its work in securing and managing funding for the region's members for the financial year 2026-27. This is the agree amount for the past number of years.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Council agrees the request from East Border Region to contribute £20,000 to support its ongoing work as highlighted in this report. A budget provision has been made for this.

## Appendix 1: East Border Region Past Projects

The following is a breakdown of key information relating to council's membership of the East Border Region (EBR)

- Ards Borough Council joined the EBR in 2005
- North Down Borough Council joined EBR in 2007

Both councils contributed £10K each per year up to 2015 after which Ards and North Down Borough Council has paid £20K per year

The following pre 2015 projects have received funding through projects delivered by the East Border Region:

Council	Name of Project	Budget received by Council
North Down BC	North Down Museum Christian Heritage Gallery	£63,500
North Down BC	St Columbanus Feasibility Study	£125,978
North Down BC	Eisenhower Pier Upgrade	£125,978
North Down BC	Interpretation and translation at North Down Museum	£24,000
Ards BC	Greyabbey Walking Trails	£15,000
Ards BC	Greyabbey Carpark	£11,000
Ards BC	Cloughey Kearney Coastal path enhancements	£58,559

In addition, while not being a project partner, the region of Ards and North Down experienced project activity from the following projects:

- INTERREG IIIA Programme**
- INTERREG IVA Programme**
- INTERREG VA Programme**

Some of the key projects from the INTERREG portfolio for which council was an associate partner include:

- Energy Efficiency and Micro Generation Project
  - Including energy efficiency audits of Ards Arts Centre, Kircubbin Community Centre, West Winds Community Centre, Queens Leisure Centre, Bangor Sportsplex and Bangor City Hall which received solar photovoltaic panels, draft proofing of windows and replaced oil boilers with gas
- Co-Innovate
  - £16.6M project across 5 partners with Northern Ireland activity led by Enterprise NI. Aim was to help SMEs harness innovation and work smarter
- Swim Project
  - Resulting in a weather station at Ballyholme Beach allowing for the provision of real time information on bathing water quality
- FASTER Project
  - 7 partner €9M project aim was to raise awareness and facilitate behavioural change to increase use of EV's, cycling and transport. Included 73 rapid charger points across the partner regions

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	11 June 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Economic Growth
Report title	Mini Digi Hub - Update
Attachments	n/a
File Reference (if applicable)	DEVP23
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	None Narrative: fully funded project
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 will be required if agreed
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Multiple Multiple If multiple: Priority 1,2 and 3

**Background**

Members will be aware that project work is underway as part of the PEACEPLUS funded "Mini Digi Hubs" project. This cross border project is led by the East Border Region and funded through the "Smart Towns and Villages" strategic priority of PEACEPLUS. As previously recommended, the focus of the capital investment will

be with Comber Community Centre. Following on from receipt of the letter of offer in March 2025 and subsequent legal review this has now been signed following Council permission.

This project will see a significant facelift to the Comber Community Centre in line with the ambitions of the Mini Digi Hub project. The intervention will be delivered to add value to existing users of the facility while seeking to attract new users. The building will be used, in addition to current usage, to accommodate training and mentoring in digital transformation that is funded through the project. The building itself will be used as an exemplar site to demonstrate digital transformation technologies.

### **Progress**

The initial stage of the project is to establish a data collection solution at Comber Community Centre. This IoT (Internet of Things) system will collect data through the use of real time digital sensors informing officers on the environmental metrics, power consumption figures and usage of the centre. Tiger Tech have now been successfully procured and appointed to carry out this work and are currently developing the solution. The awarding of this contract will significantly further the project to answer the ambitions the “Smart Towns and Villages” funding mechanism.

In addition, a part time project officer has now been recruited to work exclusively on this project. Amidst ongoing stakeholder engagement, officers are currently in the later stages of developing procurement routes for Architectural consultancy.

### **Update**

Officers have now finalised the details relating to the procurement route to commission architectural services. Following approval from the lead partner, quotes will be sought from appropriate architectural delivery agents.

### **Financial Implications**

The Mini Digi Hub project is fully funded by PEACEPLUS with no financial contribution required by Council.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Council Approves the above and the appointment of Tiger Tech Consultancy.

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	11 June 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Economic Growth (vacant)
Report title	Summit of the Cities Conference 2026
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Agenda (draft)
File Reference (if applicable)	N/A
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	Budget Narrative: Can be met from existing budgets.
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 3. A thriving and sustainable economy If multiple:

## Background

Bangor was formally awarded City Status in December 2022 as part of the Queen's Jubilee Celebrations. At that time key local stakeholders, including the business community, indicated their desire to capitalise on this opportunity from a marketing and investment perspective in line with progress made to realise regenerations plans in the city.

## Key Issues

With the Phase 1a handover of Marine Gardens planned for Autumn 2026, and work progressing at pace on the planning applications for the redevelopments of Pickie Fun Park and Ballyholme Yacht Club (Belfast Region City Deal), there is now 'on the ground' redevelopment work to profile across Bangor City.

As such officers have accepted an invitation to participate in the 'Summit of the Cities' event in Belfast on Wednesday 24 June 2026. This event, being held for the first time, aims to bring together government leaders, policy-makers, entrepreneurs and cultural voices from every city on the island of Ireland to share ideas, confront common challenges, foster collaboration and innovation, and create a bold vision for city leadership. Agenda topics will include connectivity, housing/ community and how the arts, heritage and culture can contribute to city regeneration. The former Mayor of New York City, Bill De Blasio, is keynote speaker.

Representatives from all six cities in Northern Ireland and all five cities in Southern Ireland (Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford) are confirmed to attend the 1-day event.

## Next Steps

The Council has been offered five tickets to attend the Summit and represent Bangor at various panel and Q&A sessions. One ticket is allocated for the Mayor and one for the Chief Executive, with three remaining for elected members.

It is recommended that the Council nominates three elected members to attend the event at Belfast City Hall on Wednesday 24 June 2026, from 9.00 am – 5.00 pm.

## Summary

The Summit of the Cities is a new event aimed at fostering collaboration and shared learning between cities across the Island of Ireland. Three elected members are invited to attend the event and contribute to various panel and Q&A sessions on topical and common 'city' challenges and opportunities.

## RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council Agrees to nominate three elected members to join the Mayor and Chief Executive at the inaugural Summit of the Cities event in Belfast on Wednesday 24 June 2026.

## Summit of the Cities Conference 2026

## Appendix 1 – Agenda (draft)

 	
8.30AM	ARRIVAL & REGISTRATION
9.00AM	WELCOME - LORD MAYOR OF BELFAST
9.20AM	WELCOME - NI EXECUTIVE MINISTER
9.30AM	KEYNOTE & Q&A UK MAYOR, DAVID SKAITH, FIRST ELECTED MAYOR OF NORTH YORK AND YORKSHIRE
10.15AM	KEYNOTE & Q&A LIMERICK MAYOR OR LIMERICK DIRECT GENERAL
11.00AM	TEA, COFFEE & NETWORKING BREAK
11.30AM	KEYNOTE & Q&A SENIOR MINISTER, GOVERNMENT OF IRELAND.
12.00PM	KEYNOTE & Q&A SENIOR MINISTER, HM GOVERNMENT.
12.20PM	SUE GREY
12.50PM	GROUP PHOTO & PLEDGE SIGNING LANDMARK MEMORANDUM OF THE 12 CITIES TO WORK TOGETHER
1.00PM	LUNCH BREAK (SEPARATE LUNCH FOR LORD MAYORS CEO)
1.45PM	KEYNOTE & Q&A. CHAIR OF NEWRY MOURNES AND DOWN IS INTRODUCING BILL MAYOR BILL DE BLASIO, FORMER MAYOR, NEW YORK CITY BELFAST CEO NEWRY CEO & MAYOR BILL DE BLASIO <u>EXPERT SESSIONS:</u>
2.45PM	<u>PUTTING THE ISLAND ON TRACK:</u> TRAINS, TRANSPORT & ISLAND CONNECTIVITY.
3.15 PM	<u>GAME OF TONES:</u> HOW ARTS, CULTURE & HERITAGE SHAPE A CITY
3:45PM	TEA, COFFEE & NETWORKING BREAK <u>EXPERT SESSIONS:</u>
4.00PM	<u>REGENERATION:</u> HOUSING GAVIN WHITE
4.30PM	ALL IRELAND TRADE INTERTRADE PANEL
5.00PM	EVENT CONCLUSION, ENTERTAINMENT & NETWORKING

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	11 June 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Economic Growth (vacant post)
Report title	Minutes of the Local Action Groups
Attachments	<p>Appendix 1 - Newtownards Local Action Group Meeting Minutes 21 April 2026</p> <p>Appendix 2 - Donaghadee Local Action Group Meeting Minutes 23 April 2026</p> <p>Appendix 3 - Comber Local Action Group Meeting Minutes 27 April 2026</p> <p>Appendix 4 - Holywood Local Action Group Meeting Minutes 28 April 2026</p> <p>Appendix 5 - Bangor Local Action Group Meeting Minutes 30 April 2026</p> <p>Appendix 6 - Newtownards Local Action Group Meeting Minutes - Christmas Special Meeting 12 May 2026</p> <p>Appendix 7 - Christmas Lighting Proposals</p>
File Reference (if applicable)	
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	<p>None</p> <p>Narrative:</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>1. An engaged Borough with citizens and businesses who have opportunities to influence the delivery of services, plans and investment</p> <p>If multiple:</p>

## Background

Local Action Groups have now been established for each of the five urban areas: Bangor, Comber, Donaghadee, Holywood and Newtownards. Introductory meetings were held during January and February 2026.

The minutes and associated briefing papers for the Quarter 1 period, as listed below, are available in Appendices 1-7.

- Newtownards Local Action Group - 21 April 2026
- Donaghadee Local Action Group - 23 April 2026
- Comber Local Action Group - 27 April 2026
- Holywood Local Action Group - 28 April 2026
- Bangor City Local Action Group - 30 April 2026
- Newtownards Local Action Group 12 May 2026 (Special meeting to discuss Christmas)
- Christmas Lighting Proposals

## Key Information

Members are asked to note the following updates:

### 1. Christmas 2026 – Bangor and Newtownards

Officers from the Events Team were tasked with engaging the Bangor City and Newtownards Local Action Groups to consider arrangements for Christmas activity in 2026.

The events team attended two meetings of the Newtownards Local Action Group and attended one meeting of the Bangor City Local Action Group with a follow up meeting to be arranged in June 2026. Options for Christmas animation was discussed and associated programming. Please refer to the minutes.

## 2. Christmas Lighting

Members will be aware that a Notice of Motion was presented by Councillor McClean and Councillor Cathcart in April 2025, highlighting the tired and inconsistent presentation of Christmas lights and illuminations in Bangor city centre and asking officers to consider potential festive lighting improvements for Christmas 2025.

An amendment was subsequently proposed by Councillor Morgan and seconded by Alderman McAlpine to extend this work across the wider Borough.

In 2025, officers responded to the Notice of Motion in relation to Bangor city centre by delivering new motifs for lighting columns and catenary lighting displays on the Main Street. This was delivered in collaboration with the Bangor City Advisory Group and funded by the Department for Communities and the Council.

The upgraded Bangor display was well received by both residents and visitors, with a significant volume of positive feedback shared on social media.

Officers have since secured further funding from the Department for Communities to roll out this initiative across the urban towns. Proposals have been presented to each of the Local Action Groups for consideration.

Key points are:

- Engineering reports indicate that only Newtownards is currently suitable for a catenary lighting display.
- The proposed lighting display for the lighthouse in Donaghadee is subject to consent; if this is not granted, an alternative location will be identified.
- In Comber, further engagement with the Chamber is needed on motif design, but members are otherwise content to proceed.
- Members of the groups welcomed the Christmas enhancements.

## 3. Car Parking

The Licensing and Regulatory Services Manager was tasked with engaging with each of the Local Action Groups in relation to car parking matters.

A briefing paper was circulated in advance, and the officer attended each meeting to address questions raised by members.

The key outcomes arising from that engagement are to be noted.

## 4. Conway Square - Vehicle Access

A representative from the Department for Infrastructure attended the Newtownards Local Action Group to discuss the proposal for restricting vehicle access to Conway Square.

It should be noted that this was engagement only at this stage to determine the best way forward.

#### **5. Regeneration-led Studies**

The following studies were presented to the relevant Local Action Group for their input during the final stages of development:

1. Newtownards – Study to Explore Opportunities to Develop the Night-Time Economy
2. Donaghadee – Study to Explore Opportunities to Enhance the Tourism Offering in Donaghadee
3. Holywood | Comber | Donaghadee – Vacancy and Dereliction Study for each town

Each of the above studies will be presented to the Place and Prosperity Committee in September 2026.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Council **Notes** the minutes of the Local Action Groups Quarter 1 meetings and associated reports.

<b>Newtownards Local Action Group Meeting Minutes</b>	
<b>21 April 2026   4.00pm   Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex</b>	
<b>Attendees</b>	<p>Councillor Richard Smart   Ards and North Down Borough Council   Interim Chair  Derek Wright   Newtownards Chamber of Trade  Michael Cafolla   Newtownards Chamber of Trade  Carly McMullan   Regeneration Manager   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Pamela Dempster   Regeneration Officer   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Calum Symington   Administration Officer   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Diane Pearson   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Claire McCrea   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Sharon Mahaffy   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Wendy Smith   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Heather Shields   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Stephen Gardiner   Department for Infrastructure</p> <p>James Hennessey   Paul Hogarth Company   In attendance for Item 2  Jayne Sanderson   Paul Hogarth Company   In attendance for Item 2</p>
<b>Apologies</b>	<p>Councillor Steven Irvine   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Niall McVitty   Department for Communities  Pam Williamson   Ards and North Down Street Pastors  Rebecca Freel   Education Authority Youth Service</p>
<b>Appendix</b>	<p>Appendix 1 – Newtownards Nighttime Economy  Appendix 2 – Christmas in Newtownards 2026  Appendix 3 – Conway Square Update  Appendix 4 – Town Centre Car Parking</p>
<b><u>Item 1</u></b>	<p><b>Welcome and Apologies</b>  C McMullan welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Newtownards Local Action Group and introductions took place.</p> <p><b>Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair</b>  It was agreed to nominate the Chair and Vice Chair at the next meeting due to attendance numbers.</p> <p>Councillor Smart agreed the role of interim Chair for the meeting.</p>

	<p><b>Declarations of Interest</b> No declarations of interest. Any issues arising during the agenda will be addressed accordingly.</p> <p><b>Previous Meeting Minutes and Actions</b> C McMullan advised previous actions would be covered throughout the meeting.</p>
<p><b>Item 2</b></p>	<p><b>Opportunities to develop the nighttime economy in Newtownards town centre   Paul Hogarth Company</b></p> <p>J Hennessey opened the presentation by providing the context for their assignment and the current position.</p> <p>J Sanderson explained the processes that had been undertaken throughout the project.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Current position - draft development of report</li> <li>- Broad scope of analysis undertaken to date</li> <li>- Study examined the town centre in its entirety, rather than focusing solely on the retail sector</li> <li>- An excellent number of responses were received from the public survey with a wide range of demographics of respondents (insert no)</li> <li>- 40% of respondents visited several times a month</li> <li>- Several suggestions were put forward via the survey to encourage more time spent in the town at night including increasing activities and events in Conway Square, better advertising and increased lighting</li> <li>- Some negative responses were received such as “lifeless at night”</li> <li>- Conway Square was viewed as having potential but underutilized</li> </ul> <p>The below emerging aims were put forward:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Support and sustain existing businesses</li> <li>2. Create opportunities for growth of existing and new economic activity</li> <li>3. Improve levels of real and perceived safety</li> <li>4. Further improve attractiveness of the town centre to live, work and visit</li> </ol> <p>The following were suggested as proposed interventions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Coordinated promotion of Town Centre (Including business offer, what’s on, supporting ongoing programmes and events)</li> <li>2. Support initiatives for existing businesses</li> <li>3. Organise footfall generating events and activities</li> <li>4. Invest in transport and infrastructure (foot and cycle)</li> <li>5. Environmental improvements such as lighting and placemaking</li> </ol>

Chair thanked J Hennessey and J Sanderson for their presentation and suggested other towns of a similar nature could be examined to see what they have done in the same area.

J Sanderson advised that small, community or business led, low cost events would be beneficial; noting there is also a desire from the public for larger scale events.

J Hennessey stated that recommendations will not just include events as a whole but a range of actions required to drive footfall. There is life in the town at night but it needs to be sustained and built upon.

Chair noted that events have previously been led by the Council and Chamber. S Mahaffy noted that some clubs do arrange events then apply for funding from the Council.

J Hennessey noted the need for a programme of activities that changes perceptions.

M Cafolla stated that smaller events are not necessarily drivers of footfall, less but bigger events are preferred. The cost to businesses of staffing events can be large. Events need to be well managed and have a focal point. Events such as the run by the cycling club can close the town centre down with road closures.

D Wright noted that Newtownards is full of independent businesses with owners working six day weeks; this can make it harder for them to stretch opening hours. More people living in the town could help but the nights before Christmas can be very quiet in the town.

Chair asked if there was an ideal mix of businesses or gap that could be encouraged to be filled. J Hennessey responded that they do not have a direct answer, but emphasises that there is lots happening in Newtownards in the evening, including community use. Encouraging community groups to use the space could help unlock Conway Square.

M Cafolla enquired if there were any examples of best practice. J Hennessey responded that while lots of bigger cities are doing work on nighttime economy, finding comparable smaller towns has been difficult due to the unique nature of this type of work in Northern Ireland.

Referencing a timeline, it was advised that the report is nearing completion which will include next steps and possible funding streams.

Chair thanked J Hennessey and J Sanderson for their time and efforts.

*J Hennessey and J Sanderson left the meeting 17:02*

<p><b>Item 3</b></p>	<p><b>Christmas in Newtownards Town Centre 2026   ANDBC Events Team</b></p> <p>W Smith delivered a presentation to the group and the following was discussed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The purpose of engaging the Local Action Group to ensure all views and recommendations are considered with a partnership approach.</li> <li>- The statistics from the 2025 Christmas event</li> <li>- The best way forward for 2026 Christmas event, considering the various elements that did/ did not work last year</li> <li>- The proposed objectives of the event (add objectives)</li> <li>- Challenges for programming (add challenges)</li> <li>- Research undertaken by the events team to look at similar events in other comparable towns.</li> <li>- Options for the various types of finales (show, personality or procession)</li> <li>- The positive response to the passport trail with the potential to increase awareness and participation by locating flags outside participating businesses</li> </ul> <p>Chair thanked the events team and noted that the events strategy had been refocused by the council in previous years. A balance is needed between entertaining residents and supporting town centre businesses. Chair noted his support for a procession style event.</p> <p>M Cafolla asked for a breakdown of the costings from last year's event. H Shields advised that wages were a large section of costs and noted the running times were extended from 10am-7pm.</p> <p>W Smith suggested starting the event at 4.00pm to be able to focus the budget, supplemented with business promotions during the day. W Smith advised that a market can cost £29,000 and the total available event budget is £30,000. W Smith noted the need for early decisions to allow time for promotion activities.</p> <p>Chair enquired if there was any other funds that could be utilised to enhance the offering.</p> <p>W Smith noted that new Christmas lights are being installed in Newtownards this year which will help create a welcoming and festive atmosphere. C McMullan added that further information on the proposed lights will be available to the group in the following weeks.</p> <p>D Wright noted the need to create an event that generates trade and also avoids excess road closures. Suggested late afternoon on a Saturday, not a Friday as this previously resulted in anti-social behaviour. D Wright advised of the need to build</p>
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on the strength of the market, noting 2019 event as the most successful in recent years.

Further discussion was held surrounding the Saturday morning market. It was suggested moving the market towards the car parking spaces at south side of Conway Square to allow room to build a stage. The market could be involved in morning with take down effected at lunch time to allow build of event to happen over the afternoon. A Parade locally followed by “wow” switch on.

D Wright noted it would be good to have each Ards Peninsula villages involved and suggested a float for each village – promoting Newtownards as the ‘Gateway to Peninsula’

Discussion was held surrounding health and safety of the event. H Shields advised road closures would not be required to the same extent. It was noted that Eventsec had a very heavy presence last year but relates to minimum numbers required for safe evacuations. It was suggested the community could be involved in managing health and safety aspects, W Smith advised the health and safety is the responsibility of the Council.

Chair enquired if there was a policy in place for the weather. W Smith replied that there would be minimal set up allowing a decision made on the day. Advised that the events team can go away and work out what’s possible now they have direction from the group.

C McMullan noted that Regeneration can bring the suggestion of village floats to Ards Peninsula Village Partnership.

D Wright noted the need for community involvement.

**Agreed:**

1. Saturday market to go ahead but with alteration and Christmas theme
2. Business passport to return as this has been a huge success in previous years
3. A parade/float to lead the event
4. Concluding with a finale or show for the switch on at 5/5.30pm.

**Agreed:** Subcommittee to include Elected Members, Chamber of Trade and relevant council officers for the purposes of the Christmas event. The subcommittee will then develop into a working group for Animation, Events and Marketing with members being added as needed.

**Action: One item agenda meeting to be arranged in May for the events team to present a proposal based on the items agreed.**

**Item 4****Conway Square | Department for Infrastructure**

S Gardiner provided an update to the group on the Dfl plans to address cars being parked in Conway Square – please refer to Appendix 4

- Long term legislation needs to be put in place to allow enforcement but will required a minimum of eight months for legislation to progress through Stormont
- Need to have businesses bought in
- Proposal to install two rows of bollards to prevent access and introduce two loading bays at either side of the south end of Conway Square
- Dfl progressing ownership of land and drafting legislation for enforcement

D Wright noted objections from market traders for loading and unloading while some traders are concerned about emergency vehicle access. D Wright highlighted council vans parked on Square.

S Gardiner advised that several keys can be cut and supplied to emergency services, council and one nominated trader in the town.

Discussion was held on realigning parking bays and loading bays.

It was discussed that 2no. rows of bollards could be installed. One row located outside Carnduff Butchers and one row outside Café Nero,. Some of the bollards would be unlockable to allow entry if required with keys cut and distributed to Dfl, ANDBC and emergency services for access.

It was also discussed that 2no. parking bays could be removed outside Clive's Grocers to be replaced with a marked loading bay. Additionally the space closest to the central build out at the south side of the square could be replaced with a loading bay to allow access to the square for market traders. Additional loading bays could be created through the removal of double yellow lines and marking of loading bays on High Street, parallel to Clive's Grocers and Café Nero.

**Action: The group noted the proposal suggested and it was agreed that S Gardiner would provide detailed plans to Local Action Group for further review when available. D Pearson to engage market traders for their views, and Chamber to engage town centre traders to discuss the proposed plan/ loading bay solution for feedback.**

By way of a general update, S Gardiner advised that 15% of the road network in Ards and North Down was in poor state of repair; however, repairs are being conducted at a much higher standard and the number of pot holes is decreasing. Approximately £140,000 is being spent per month on pot hole repairs.

The gully at parklet outside Mauds Ice Cream to be replaced soon.

	Advertising kiosk at Conway Square planned for removal.
<b>Item 5</b>	<p><b>Town Centre Car Parking   ANDBC Licensing and Regulatory Services Manager</b></p> <p>D Pearson provided an update to the group, please refer to Appendix 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New tariffs have been agreed for car parks with a 50p charge for 2 hours rate</li> <li>- Charging for car parks will be stopped at 5pm</li> <li>- Council propose to write to Dfl to change on street parking regulations to 2 hours instead of 1 hour</li> </ul> <p>D Wright expressed his disappointment that Council did not provide an all-day parking rate for those working in the town, and that he would like to see a pilot scheme of car parks controlled by ANPR. D Wright welcomed lobbying Dfl on the on street 2 hour parking as long as legislation is updated to stop shuffling of cars in the spaces allowing all day parking.</p> <p>D Pearson noted legislative issues with ANPR and not being able to capture in car park problems IE parking outside lines and misuse of blue badge spaces. Also noted line painting is on radar for completion.</p> <p>D Wright asked about alternatives to raising income such as EV charging, D Pearson advised some EV bays were going in under ORCS and there is limited opportunity to raise income.</p> <p>Chair noted the need to incentivise all day car parking at outer car parks in the town. It was proposed that £2.00 would be a reasonable charge for all day parking at outer car parks.</p> <p>D Pearson advised that the “RingGo” app was being changed to a buy time model following complaints that people had forgotten to stop the parking period and were being overcharged. D Pearson also advised that car parks ground maintenance has been budgeted for allowing for two weed scrapes and one hedge cut per year.</p> <p>D Pearson advised that plans were in progress to allow business to locate café furniture in the centre of Conway Square. This would be controlled through the café pavement license system to ensure furniture was tidy and enhancing the area.</p> <p>Discussion was held on parking near Newtownards police station.</p>
<b>Item 6</b>	<p><b>Any Other Business   Chair</b></p> <p><b>1. Sub Working groups</b></p>

To be moved to next agenda.

**2. Masterplan Review Workshop**

C McMullan suggested a focused session to be held with the Local Action Group to review the Town Centre Masterplan and consider projects discussed at the former Advisory Group. Task and Finish/ Sub Working Groups would be identified from this review.

**Action: Regeneration to arrange focused workshop to review Masterplan.**

**3. Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme**

C McMullan advised the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme is multi-layer approach of initiatives aimed at regenerating our high streets. The programme includes the Glow Up Grant, the Empty to Energised Pilot Grant and the new Freshen Up Grant due to launch Friday 01 May 2026.

D Wright enquired details of the Freshen Up Grant. C McMullan advised this is limited to power washing and painting of shopfronts ahead of the summer season, with grant of up to £1,500 available per application with a 10% trader contribution. C McMullan advised the Council are keen to engage the Local Action Group and chamber to promote and support this initiative.

**Action: C McMullan to provide information relating to Freshen Up Grant. Regeneration Officers to provide a presentation at next meeting on the progress and outcomes of the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme.**

**4. Official Launch of the Local Action Groups**

C McMullan advised an official launch of all Local Action Groups will be held in May, it is hoped this launch will raise awareness and profile of the group.

**Action: Regeneration to circulate details of the proposed launch event.**

**Meeting concluded 18:35**

## Appendix 1

### Newtownards at Night

#### A Night Time Study for Newtownards

the **paul hogarth** company

In our recent work to review the town centre masterplan with the Newtownards Local Action Group and Ards and North Down Borough Council it became clear that the evening and nighttime economy of the town centre has room for improvement. Like many town centres in Northern Ireland, footfall drops considerably into the evening, limiting the number of businesses that can operate during these hours. As such, when streets become quiet and underpopulated in the evening, an unhelpful perception can be perpetuated that the town centre is 'not open for business'.

The purpose of this study is to examine the issue in detail and to shape a series of grounded recommendations that will contribute to supporting growth in the evening and nighttime economy of Newtownards. To do so we will have been building on our good understanding of the town centre and in particular, how it is used in the evenings. This has been partly informed by desktop research and evening site visits, but also by engagement with those who know the town centre best – the owners and operators of local businesses, as well as elected members and the general public.

As we are now at a critical point in the study, we look forward to reflecting upon the emerging findings of the study with the Local Action Group and in particular, discussing the following:

- Consultation Findings
- Importance of the evening and nighttime economy to Newtownards
- Emerging Aims and Recommendations
- Next steps for the Study

## **Appendix 2**

### **Christmas in Newtownards 2026**

#### **ANDBC Events Team | Presentation and Discussion**

*'Creating a festive experience for everyone to enjoy'*

ANDBC Events Team will be attending the Newtownards Local Action Group to discuss Christmas 2026. The Council recognises the need for early engagement and therefore encourages members of the group to come prepared for a focused discussion on the key areas outlined below:

#### **Item 1 – Learning and Development**

Reflecting on what we can learn from last year's event and explore ways to improve.

#### **Item 2 – Best Way Forward**

Agreeing our aims and objectives and generating innovative ideas.

#### **Item 3 – Collaborative Approach**

Adopting a collaborative approach – identifying what we can achieve together, along with roles and responsibilities.

#### **Item 4 – Review of the Framework**

Ensuring this supports our goals effectively.

#### **To Note –**

**New** Events, Marketing & Promotion Sub Working Group to be implemented – comprehensive approach to delivery.

### Appendix 3



#### Conway Square Proposal | Department for Infrastructure | Stephen Gardiner

Proposal for Discussion -

- Initially we propose two lines of bollards preventing all vehicular traffic from entering the Square.
- A number of the bollards will be locked and removable to allow for events etc.
- The keys will be held by DfI and bollards only opened upon agreement with DfI office.
- We would also then like to consider removing the 2 parking spaces closest to Clive's and making these loading bays.
- Alternatively (if feasible) we could have dedicated loading at certain times beside Clive's and Café Nero, where the existing double yellow lines are.
- We have also considered moving 2 parking spaces from the southern side of the street to the northern side thus creating a chicane and slowing traffic (again if feasible).

## Appendix 4

### Car Parking Update | Diane Pearson – Licensing & Regulatory Services Manager

On 3 September 2025, a deputation on behalf of Ards and North Down Business Forum (ANDBF) took place at Council's Environment Committee in respect of the draft Ards and North Down Off-Street Parking (Public Car Parks) Order 2025.

As a result, Members requested additional information in respect of the costs of ANDBF's proposals of introducing at 2 hours free parking tariff across the car park estate, the current and proposed tariffs across other Council areas, and the feasibility of implementing Automatic Number Plate Recognition technology.

On 4 February 2026, the Committee considered this further information and agreed to implement the Ards and North Down Off-Street Parking (Public Car Parks) Order 2025.

This implements a 50p for 2 hours parking tariff across the charged car park estate, and Tariff A (£1 per hour thereafter) in the busier / town centre car parks and Tariff B (50p per hour thereafter) in the less busy / peripheral car parks.

It was also agreed that parking charges would end at 5pm across the estate (currently 6.30pm in Newtownards) and a campaign which will help to support the evening and nighttime economy will be launched when the new Order is implemented.

Additional recommendations were made as follows:

- That an officer's report is brought back to the Committee on options around introducing free or reduced price parking during the Christmas period when the new order is implemented, similar to other local Councils.

*Officers are currently gathering information from other local Councils and will bring back a report to Council with options when the new order is implemented.*

- That a parking app which sets a time limit on parking (rather than stop/start) is introduced as soon as possible

*The current RingGo App will move to a "Buy Time" model from 1<sup>st</sup> May 2026. Users choose how long they want to stay upon arrival and pay upfront*

*for their session. This continues to provide flexibility for users by allowing them to extend their parking period without having to return to their car, which is assisted by a timer, and removes the need to remember to stop their session, ensuring users are not paying more than required.*

- That the Chambers of Commerce and city/town advisory groups are consulted on their views on the introduction of 2 hour waiting restrictions (instead of one hour) for Department for Infrastructure managed on street parking spaces, to inform the Committee before the Council lobby the Department on any potential changes.

*Officers have consulted with Ards and North Down Business Forum, who are in support of a 2-hour restriction on on-street parking, and are seeking the views of the LAG. It is proposed that a report is brought back to Council in June 2026 recommending that Council lobby the Department for Infrastructure in respect of 2 hour waiting times for on street parking across AND.*

The current implementation date for the Ards and North Down Off-Street Parking Order 2025 and therefore the new tariff structure is dependent on Department for Infrastructure revoking the existing legislation for Off Street Parking. When this date is available, a full communications plan will be implemented by Officers, including new signage across the estate and the aforementioned campaign.

A review of the 2025 Order will also take place six months and one year after implementation, allowing Council to take into consideration the relevant data and make any changes deemed necessary at that time.

**DOCUMENT END**

<b>Donaghadee Local Action Group Meeting Minutes</b>	
<b>23 April 2026   4.00pm   Donaghadee Community Centre</b>	
<b>Attendees</b>	<p>Alderman Mark Brooks   Ards and North Down Borough Council            Councillor Eddie Thompson   Ards and North Down Borough Council   <b>Chair</b>            Councillor James Cochrane   Ards and North Down Borough Council            Councillor John Hennesey   Ards and North Down Borough Council            Councillor David Chambers   Ards and North Down Borough Council            Carly McMullan   Regeneration Manager   Ards and North Down Borough Council            Pamela Dempster   Regeneration Officer   Ards and North Down Borough Council            Calum Symington   Administration Officer   Ards and North Down Borough Council            Diane Pearson   Licensing and Regulatory Services Manager   Ards and North Down Borough Council            John Caldwell   Donaghadee Community Development Association            Denis Waterworth   Donaghadee Community Development Association            Dean Moore   Donaghadee Youth for Christ            Shirley Cochrane   Donaghadee Historical Society            Stephen Gardiner   Department for Infrastructure</p> <p>Anton Cozzo   Head of Leisure   Ards and North Down Borough Council   In attendance for item 2            Stephen Daye   Head of Parks and Cemeteries   Ards and North Down Borough Council   In attendance for item 2            Eamonn Cavlan   Podd Consulting   In attendance for item 3            Liam McGarry   McGarry Consulting   In attendance for item 4            Ross Blackbourne   McGarry Consulting   In attendance for item 4</p>
<b>Apologies</b>	<p>Councillor Rosaleen Quinn   Ards and North Down Borough Council            Claire McCrea   Ards and North Down Borough Council            Niall McVitty   Department for Communities            Adrian Kerr   Donaghadee Community Development Association</p>
<b>Appendices</b>	<p>Appendix 1 – Dereliction &amp; Vacancy Briefing Paper            Appendix 2 – Town Centre Car Parking Briefing Paper            Appendix 3 – Donaghadee Community Development Association Update</p>
<b>Item 1</b>	<p><b>Welcome and Apologies</b>            Apologies were recorded from the Chair of the Donaghadee Local Action Group, Adrian Kerr.</p>

	<p>Vice Chair, Councillor Eddie Thompson, chaired the meeting in his absence.</p> <p>Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Donaghadee Local Action Group and introductions took place.</p> <p><b>Declarations of Interest</b> No declarations of interest. Any issues arising during the agenda will be addressed accordingly.</p> <p><b>Previous Meeting Minutes and Actions</b> Proposed by Councillor J Cochrane and seconded by Alderman M Brooks as an accurate reflection of the previous meeting. Actions to be addressed through this meeting.</p>
<b>Item 2</b>	<p><b>Donaghadee Sports Hub  </b> Head of Leisure, A Cozzo, and Head of Parks and Cemeteries, S Daye</p> <p>S Daye provided an update to the group on the current position of the Donaghadee Sports Hub Project</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parks and Cemeteries have taken responsibility for outdoor sport since last October following an internal restructure; several queries have been received from the sports clubs involved.</li> <li>- The Crommelin Park project is now proceeding, and a review of the business case will be completed by the end of the fiscal year.</li> <li>- Meetings and discussions have been held with all clubs involved with hopes to progress the business case quickly.</li> <li>- The “Define” stage of the project is complete with “Discovery” stage in progress</li> <li>- Council approval will be required at each stage.</li> <li>- The Business Case will reflect updated costs.</li> <li>-</li> </ul> <p>Councillor J Cochrane asked what is currently in the project pipeline. S Daye advised that the business case needs updated to reflect the new preferred options which will be presented to the Council once complete.</p> <p>Councillor J Hennessey enquired what would be a reasonable timeline for this business case to be completed. S Daye advised that Parks and Cemeteries currently have approximately 20 ongoing business cases. S Daye confirmed the business case will be reviewed by an external consultant for which a budget has recently been agreed, and an officer is currently working on the procurement process.</p> <p>S Daye confirmed the business case will be presented to Council this year.</p>

J Caldwell thanked S Daye and A Cozzo for their attendance, noting that this project has had problems from its inception. J Caldwell stated that there is a need for improved sports facilities in Donaghadee, but it should not just fall to the sports clubs to provide. J Caldwell added that a wider public view is required and should include input from all members of the community and residents. J Caldwell noted the lack of communications to date.

J Caldwell informed that it was previously communicated that Donaghadee was receiving £9.3M in the 2023 Capital Project List – however at present there is no allocation. J Caldwell stated a strategic aim of the Council is provide healthy and active communities and yet Donaghadee is the only town not to have a leisure/sports/gym facility.

J Caldwell advised it is positive that A Cozzo and S Daye are now taking this forward.

A Cozzo advised that through engagement with Sports Clubs in the area it has been determined that each of the Clubs are content with their current location, however work is required to improve each of the facilities. Leisure have been working with the rugby club to update the business case from 2022/23 with the focus of this work being on the economic appraisal aspect of the business case. It is hoped that Leisure will receive a draft business case from the appointed consultant in the next number of weeks. A Cozzo advised that in collaboration with Council colleagues in Lands and other departments the Council is considering how potentially longer lease terms with the Club might enable them to apply for external funding to support the improvement works to Donaldson Park should capital investment from the Council not be feasible.

Discussion was raised on the need for a wider view of sports in the area. S Daye advised that Council is developing a borough wide Sports Facility Strategy and noted that Crommelin Park pitches have had significant investment to ensure the football club have a high standard pitch. It was noted that there is already a lack of football and hockey pitches in the borough.

S Daye advised that sports facilities tended to be male dominated and that women and girls provision needed to be improved within the Borough. S Daye noted that a borough wide strategic approach is vital, highlighting the need to put work into the strategy to allow funding to follow.

J Caldwell enquired as to whether a sports representative had been invited to represent on the Local Action Group. C McMullan advised an invitation was issued on several occasions to the Sports Forum officer, no response has been received to date.

	<p><b>Action: A Cozzo agreed to follow up with AND Sports Forum for a representative to attend the Donaghadee Local Action Group.</b></p> <p><b>J Caldwell requested the following action is agreed by the Local Action Group – to request Council Officers to initiate a full study of all sports and current sporting provision in Donaghadee.</b></p> <p>Chair requested that A Cozzo and S Daye keep the Local Action Group informed of progress with a regular standing agenda item. C McMullan suggested a focused sub-working group which will feed into the Local Action Group.</p> <p><b>Action: Sports Sub Working Group to be developed, proposed by J Caldwell and seconded by S Cochrane. Regeneration to issue email for representatives.</b></p> <p><i>S Daye and A Cozzo left the meeting 16:45</i></p>
<b>Item 3</b>	<p><b>Study to explore the tourism offering in Donaghadee   Podd Consulting</b></p> <p>E Cavlan presented to the group on the recent work Podd Consulting had carried out regarding the tourism offering in Donaghadee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The final draft report is now with Council officers for review</li> <li>- Aims and objectives were how to make Donaghadee more attractive as a coastal destination using an evidence based assessment</li> <li>- Two key priorities were to identify realistic and deliverable opportunities as well as assessing current accommodation needs</li> <li>- A high level of responses to survey had been obtained with additional 1-to-1 sessions, two public sessions and a meeting with DCDA members</li> <li>- An issue for the town is increasing dwell time to increase visitor spend</li> <li>- Easter to Halloween is noted as a positive time for the town with it being much quieter in the opposing times</li> <li>- Several opportunities had been identified through the study without having to focus on a large infrastructure programme</li> <li>- Focus needs to be on concentrating the tourism offering alongside varied accommodation offerings in the town</li> <li>- An event that can build on DCDA successes would be good</li> </ul> <p>Destination Donaghadee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Commons as hub</li> <li>- Overnight motorhomes</li> <li>- Increase dwell time</li> <li>- Events programme</li> <li>- Connectivity and digital</li> </ul>

	<p>Councillor J Hennessey asked where do the group go from this. C McMullan advised that the report will be reviewed internally before being presented to Committee and Council. It is suggested that a sub working group of the Local Action Group would then be set up to drive the actions identified, both small and big wins.</p> <p>J Caldwell thanked E Cavlan and noted that Council are an obstacle to achieving this. J Caldwell noted recent issues with festival funding being reduced due to over subscription to the scheme. Additionally, previously agreed council support for an event had been withdrawn leaving DCDA with increased costs to run the event.</p> <p>S Cochrane noted that the Sir Samuel Kelly project would like to expand but they cannot obtain funding currently as their lease length needs to be increased to allow grant funding.</p> <p>D Waterworth noted a problem with lack of parking for coaches arriving from cruise ships. Additionally, it was noted that Council have requested that picnic benches are removed as they are not movable as per pavement license.</p> <p>Alderman M Brooks enquired what will be the outcome of the report. E Cavlan replied that the plan provided is an action plan that will allow council to secure funding opportunities with the evidence to support this. Alderman M Brooks suggested a request to Council to allocate funding for the delivery of the actions. C McMullan noted the need to be aware of Regenerations resource capacity and re-iterated the need for a council wide approach.</p> <p>Discussion was held on previous funding for Donaghadee Lights Up Festival, advising that this is no longer available.</p> <p>C McMullan noted that some of the actions noted in the report have already began progressing such as the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme, visitor signage and the pump track at the Commons. C McMullan also noted officers are working on developing a motorhome strategy and the regeneration team are preparing a funding application for a public realm refresh.</p> <p><b>Action: Enhance Tourism Offering sub-working group to be set up. Regeneration to issue email for representatives.</b></p> <p><i>E Cavlan left the meeting 17:15</i></p>
<p><b>Item 4</b></p>	<p><b>Dereliction &amp; Vacancy   McGarry Consulting</b></p>

L McGarry presented to the group on the recent work McGarry Consulting had carried out regarding the Dereliction and Vacancy Study conducted in the three towns (Donaghadee, Comber and Holywood) and the 15 villages across the borough (Note – a study was completed for Bangor and Newtownards in 2025)

- It is the first borough wide study in Northern Ireland and it is centred within the red line boundary of each town and village
- A street level assessment was carried out alongside use of the town centre database (Town Centre Database measures dereliction and vacancy through domestic and non-domestic uses as opposed to “commercial” used by McGarry Consulting)
- Maps of the studies have been made available online ([Commercial Dereliction and Vacancy Study, Ards & North Down Borough Council, Northern Ireland — McGarry Consulting](#))
- Donaghadee was noted as having an 11% commercial vacancy rate

J Caldwell asked how 11% compares to the rest of the borough.

L McGarry advised that the average is 22% in NI (18.5% excluding Belfast at 34%).

Positives were noted in that Donaghadee had a 22% vacancy rate pre-covid and had fallen to 17% by October 2024. Northern Ireland was noted as having an above average rate compared to UK and ROI but Donaghadee was heading in the right direction with a lot of positive initiatives taking place borough wide such as Glow Up Grant and Empty to Energised. The study also noted that 64% of vacant premises also have vacant upper floors (average is 60-80%) while long term vacancies made up 45% of vacant premises (over 10 years). The study identified key sites for intervention.

J Caldwell suggested opportunity site 1 (Market House, Donaghadee) could be used as an arts and heritage centre.

L McGarry noted the need to increase dwell time and suggested looking at properties for meanwhile uses.

J Caldwell suggested the bus shelter on New Street needed to be relocated.

L McGarry noted difficulties with moving bus shelters. It was further noted that site 2 (14-16 Bridge Street) had two planning applications submitted which could help bring the buildings back into use. A lot of push back has been seen recently to drive “Town Centre First” thinking.

J Caldwell suggested increasing rates for derelict properties at a recent rates review by Land and Property Services.

L McGarry noted that some villages don’t have any commercial units but they are starting to see more diversity in the commercial units. Donaghadee is a very

	<p>positive town with considerable strengths. Three main points that would help boost Donaghadee to consider are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How Donaghadee has done so well over the last five years</li> <li>- What is the priority building to target</li> <li>- Donaghadee parkrun could bring 250 visitors a week</li> </ul> <p>It was further suggested a business WhatsApp group to track underlying business sentiment in the town.</p> <p><b>Action: The final copy of the Dereliction and Vacancy study to be sent out to all members following committee and council approval.</b></p> <p>J Caldwell noted issues with the DfC town centre “red line” boundary.</p> <p>Chair enquired what the report can be used for. L McGarry replied that it provides an evidence base to help facilitate investment and tie in with animation and activities, it can also help guide council decisions and strategies.</p> <p><i>L McGarry, R Blackbourne and Councillor J Cochrane left the meeting 17:47</i></p>
<b>Item 5</b>	<p><b>Town Centre Car Parking</b>   Licensing and Regulatory Services Manager</p> <p>D Pearson advised that new legislation had been agreed in the “Off Street Car Parking Order 2025” and that the Council were gathering views to lobby DfI to change on street parking from 1 hour to 2 hours if the Local Action Group was supportive. Additionally, the request would include the ban on moving cars slightly in space to gain additional time.</p> <p>D Waterworth advised he would be very happy and would support the changes.</p> <p>Discussion was raised on long term parking at the seafront and the loading bay on New Street.</p> <p>J Caldwell advised of concern re the positioning of the loading bay on XX Street due this being on a sloped slight and an incident taking place. J Caldwell advised this was reported to DfI who informed the Council will need to complete business engagement. J Caldwell has written to the Council and has not received a response to date.</p> <p><b>Action: C McMullan to follow up re location of loading bay and business engagement.</b></p> <p>D Pearson advised that a car parking study had been conducted from January to September 2025 and it determined that there was adequate parking in Donaghadee</p>

	<p>which supports the suggestion that long term parking is the issue. Also noted the rollout of the considerate parking campaign by ANDBC Age Friendly and Disability Forum groups.</p> <p>Chair noted the need to mark out the Marina Car Park properly.</p> <p>J Caldwell enquired how works at Crommelin Car Park were progressing. C McMullan advised the resurfacing works were complete. The lighting and line work cannot be completed until the land ownership query was resolved which the Lands team were progressing.</p> <p>Discussion was raised regarding on street parking and it was agreed that shoreside parking would also be included in the 2 hour parking limit with the potential for residents permits if suitable.</p> <p><b>Action: S Gardiner to pass agreed plans to Dfl traffic teams</b></p> <p><i>Councillor J Hennessey left the meeting 18:05</i></p>
<p><b>Item 6</b></p>	<p><b>Donaghadee Community Development Association Update</b>   John Caldwell</p> <p>J Caldwell provided an update on DCDA activities, highlighting the following items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Disappointment was noted with ANDBC Local Development Plan due to lack of discussion around traffic flows and available parking in Donaghadee with surveys from Dfl being used to inform LDP outcomes</li> <li>- It was also suggested that Education Authority should attend Donaghadee Local Action Group in reference to lack of provisions for teenagers in the town. J Caldwell noted that the lack of teenage facilities was a growing concern.</li> <li>- Suggested that the unused putting green at the Commons be converted to an off leash dog exercise area.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Item 7</b></p>	<p><b>Any Other Business</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Motorhome Strategy – Focused workshop – date to be agreed</b> C McMullan advised work was ongoing internally to prepare for a meeting with relevant stakeholders <b>Agreed: Meeting to be held mid-May, preferable before the 15<sup>th</sup> May</b></li> <li><b>2. Masterplan Review – Focused workshop – date to be agreed</b> <b>Action: Regeneration to circulate a date for agreement</b></li> <li><b>3. Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme – presentation at June meeting</b></li> </ol>

C McMullan advised the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme is a multi-layer approach of initiatives aimed at regenerating our High Streets. The programme includes the Glow Up Grant, the Empty to Energised Pilot Grant Scheme (Bangor and Newtownards) and the new Freshen Up Grant due to launch Friday 01 May 2026.

**Action: C McMullan to provide information relating to the Freshen Up Grant for members to circulate. Regeneration Officers to provide a presentation at next meeting on the progress and outcomes of the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme.**

#### 4. Official Launch of Local Action Groups

C McMullan advised the official launch is being scheduled for the end of May for all five Local Action Groups together.

**Action: Regeneration to issue invitation to the group.**

**Action: Further meeting of the LAG to be held in an alternative room due to the acoustics.**

#### 5. Pump Track, Commons

C McMullan advised the group of a further public information session being held next Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> April 2026 from 4-6pm onsite at the Commons. This will provide a final opportunity for residents to view the plans and ask any questions. It was noted that this is an information session rather than a consultation session.

C McMullan advised works are expected to commence onsite late August. A further update will be provided at the next meeting.

**Action: Copy of ad for upcoming information session to be circulated to members of the group.**

*Meeting ended at 18:20*

## APPENDIX 1

### Dereliction & Vacancy Study Presentation Overview

#### McGarry Consulting

Following on from our 2025 Dereliction & Vacancy Reports into Bangor and Newtownards City/Town Centres, McGarry Consulting undertook a Dereliction & Vacancy Study across 3 towns and 15 villages across the Ards and North Down Borough in 2026. This involved street level assessments of commercial property (as distinct from the broader 'non-domestic' classification) within the town centre (as defined by DfC) and village boundaries (as defined by DAERA).

All commercial properties were counted with this considered potentially vacant for derelict examined more closely. This included estimating how long they'd been vacant, the building condition and whether the upstairs floor were also vacant. Planning history, listed status and whether it was on the market for sale were also recorded. Queen's University of Belfast School of the Natural & Built Environment provided quality assurance and guidance on our mapping.

In addition to mapping, which we believe may be the first such borough wide study in NI, a research and consultation exercise was undertaken. Research involved exploring other case studies and best practice with respect to high street regeneration. Whilst the consultation involved speaking with local community groups, council staff (e.g. parks, tourism, regeneration, rural development), and estate agents. An online public survey was also provided (with over 200 responses) and informal information sessions held in each town.

Initial mapping took place between December 2025 and January 2026, with engagement between January and March 2026. Draft reports are being presented in April 2026, with headline findings being presented back to LAGs in late April. Our presentation will focus on the four maps (commercial property identification and vacancy, building condition, extent upper floor use, and duration of vacant). We will explain how they were determined; what they mean on a street by street basis and town wide perspective. We will then set out key takeaways from the mapping exercise.

We will then set out 2-3 opportunity sites (whilst aware one opportunity site was sold in the last few weeks) and welcome ideas as to how they could be addressed and potentially developed. We will then report feedback and learnings from our research and engagement exercises and highlight key Donaghadee specific survey findings. Based on the findings, we will set out key themes (at Borough and town levels) and draft actions (shorty, medium and long-term), seeking feedback and thoughts.

Finally, we will place Donaghadee in the context of the other 17 towns and villages assessed as well as against NI, UK and Ireland commercial vacancy averages. Our presentation will be mainly visual, and we'll be happy to answer questions at the end.

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Donaghadee Local Action Group – April 2026**

#### **Car Parking Update**

#### **Diane Pearson – Licensing & Regulatory Services Manager**

On 3 September 2025, a deputation on behalf of Ards and North Down Business Forum (ANDBF) took place at Council's Environment Committee in respect of the draft Ards and North Down Off-Street Parking (Public Car Parks) Order 2025.

As a result, Members requested additional information in respect of the costs of ANDBF's proposals of introducing at 2 hours free parking tariff across the car park estate, the current and proposed tariffs across other Council areas, and the feasibility of implementing Automatic Number Plate Recognition technology.

On 4 February 2026, the Committee considered this further information and agreed to implement the Ards and North Down Off-Street Parking (Public Car Parks) Order 2025.

There were no changes made to the current charging arrangements for Donaghadee and parking remains free in all car parks, however, the following additional recommendation was made :

- That the Chambers of Commerce and city/town advisory groups are consulted on their views on the introduction of 2 hour waiting restrictions (instead of one hour) for Department for Infrastructure managed on street parking spaces, to inform the Committee before the Council lobby the Department on any potential changes.

*Officers have consulted with Ards and North Down Business Forum, who are in support of a 2-hour restriction on on-street parking, and are seeking the views of the LAG. It is proposed that a report is brought back to Council in June 2026 recommending that Council lobby the Department for Infrastructure in respect of 2 hour waiting times for on street parking across AND.*

### APPENDIX 3

#### **Donaghadee Local Advisory Group Meeting 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2026 Donaghadee Community Development Association: Progress Report**

1. This report summarises the main activities of Donaghadee Community Development Association from December 2025.
2. Increasing the Profile of Donaghadee
  - 2.1 Christmas festival:- Feedback has been very positive. This year we switched the Santa Parade and Market from a Friday to a Saturday afternoon which brought a huge increase in town centre footfall. The Community Carol Service and the switching on of the Christmas Tree lights by the Mayor took place on the Sunday evening. There were some 15 different organisations involved in the delivery of the programme. Total cost was just under £6k
  - 2.2 St Patricks Day - A series of events were organised during the period 17-22 March to celebrate St Patrick's Day. Just over 600 people attended the events which included music, dance, arts and activities for children. Total cost was just over £5k with funding of £4,300 provided by the Community Relations Council
  - 2.3 Domestic Abuse – DCDA, assisted by Women's Aid and several other organisations organised an event in early March to raise awareness of domestic abuse and the various sources of help and support. Attendance totalled 183 which far exceeded expectations and a bid for funding follow-up actions has been submitted to the Council
  - 2.4 Summer festival – Planning well underway for this year's summer festival which will commence with Lifeboat Day on 20<sup>th</sup> June and run through to early September. The Council's Festival grant programme was over-subscribed with the result that all grant awards have been top-sliced by 40%. This reduction will lead to a scaling back of events. As part of the programme DCDA will be organising a commemoration of the signing of the USA Declaration of Independence by means of a grant from the Ulster Scots Agency.
  - 2.5 The Peoples Friend – Donaghadee was photographed for the front page of the March edition of the Peoples friend and an article in the magazine painted the town in a positive light
3. Our Environment
  - 3.1 Donaghadee in Bloom – One of the Britain in Bloom judges met with us and provided useful feedback on our displays. Plans are now underway for this years display. That aside we are exploring several sites for a Community Build and Grow Hub (AKA Mens Shed)
  - 3.2 Crommelin Wood – Concerns continue regarding the level of ASB in the area
  - 3.3 Hunts Park 150 Trees were purchased and planted by means of funding from the International Tree Foundation

4. Capacity Building

4.1 Information on grant opportunities and other matters of interest continue to be publicised to traders, local community groups and individuals.

5. Key Issues

5.1 Car Parking and Traffic Flows – Concerns that the Technical Supplement prepared by DFI to inform the Local Development Plan makes no mention of Donaghadee

5.2 RAISE – DCDA continues to take part in the RAISE programme organised by the Department of Education to address education under-achievement in Donaghadee and Millisle

5.3 Provision for Youth – DCDA is working with Education Authority and Youth Action to see what can be done to improve provision for teenagers in Donaghadee

5.4 Sports Provision – The delays in improving sports provision in the town is unacceptable and we shall continue to press the Council both formally and informally to address this issue.

5.5 Motorhomes – A paper has been submitted to the Council suggesting a way forward for motorhome provision in the town

5.6 Putting Green – Given the absence of any progress on plans for the putting green DCDA suggested the area be used as an off-lead area for dogs.

5.7 DCDA Website, Social media etc – A group of UU students have been engaged to produce a report recommending improvements in DCDA communications

John Caldwell 21<sup>st</sup> April 2026

<b>Comber Local Action Group Meeting Minutes</b>	
<b>27 April 2026   6.00pm   Comber Leisure Centre</b>	
<b>Attendees</b>	<p>Alderman Trevor Cummings   Ards and North Down Borough Council   <b>Chair</b>  Councillor Libby Douglas   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Councillor Philip Smyth   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Carly McMullan   Regeneration Manager   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Pamela Dempster   Regeneration Officer   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Calum Symington   Administration Officer   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Diane Pearson   Licensing and Regulatory Services Manager   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Stephen Gardiner   Department for Infrastructure  Iris McBride   Comber Chamber of Commerce  Fiona McAlpine   Comber Chamber of Commerce  Joan Cowan   Comber Regeneration Community Partnership  Bobby Hunniford   Comber Rotary Club</p> <p>Ross Blackbourne   McGarry Consulting   In attendance for item 2</p>
<b>Apologies</b>	<p>Councillor Patricia Morgan   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Councillor Rachel Ashe   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Claire McCrea   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Niall McVitty   Department for Communities</p>
<b>Appendices</b>	<p>Appendix 1 – Dereliction &amp; Vacancy Briefing Paper  Appendix 2 – Town Centre Car Parking Briefing Paper</p>
<b>Item 1</b>	<p><b>Welcome and Apologies</b>  Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Comber Local Action Group.</p> <p><b>Declarations of Interest</b>  No declarations of interest.  Any issues arising during the agenda will be addressed accordingly.</p> <p><b>Previous Meeting Minutes and Actions</b>  Actions to be addressed during the meeting.</p>
<b>Item 2</b>	<p><b>Dereliction &amp; Vacancy</b>   McGarry Consulting</p>

R Blackbourne presented to the group on the recent work McGarry Consulting had carried out regarding the Dereliction and Vacancy Study conducted in the three towns (Donaghadee, Comber and Holywood) and the 15 villages across the borough (Note – a study was completed for Bangor and Newtownards in 2025).

- It is the first borough wide study in Northern Ireland and it is centred within the red line boundary of each town and village
- A street level assessment was carried out alongside use of the town centre database (Town Centre Database measures dereliction and vacancy through domestic and non-domestic uses as opposed to “commercial” used by McGarry Consulting)
- Maps of the studies have been made available online ([Commercial Dereliction and Vacancy Study, Ards & North Down Borough Council, Northern Ireland — McGarry Consulting](#))
- Comber was noted as having a 17% commercial vacancy rate however the upper floor vacancy was low
- Opportunity sites were noted at Castle Street Gap Site and a vacant cluster at corner of The Square (noting that The Square site had been listed for sale recently)
- Most responses to the survey were received from Comber
- Public sessions had also been held alongside consulting with council officers and estate agents in the area
- Strategic context had been considered with views being incorporated from ANDBC Big Plan and Corporate Plan
- It was noted that vacancy was perceived as high in Comber with lower rates being suggested highly to combat the issue
- It was noted that survey responders wanted property owners to take the lead with Council support through a property pipeline
- A business support pipeline was also noted to help assist business owners transitioning from a market stall/ pop up shop to renting property and growing their business
- It was noted that vacancy is not solved in a vacuum and the town requires a wider health check to ensure all factors are considered
- A pocket park was suggested as an example of a successful use of a small space for a small budget

Chair thanked R Blackbourne for his presentation.

B Hunniford enquired what age group had provided the most responses. R Blackbourne replied that in person sessions were mostly attended by older age groups with the survey lead by the 40-60 age group but with a wide spread across all age groups.

Councillor P Smyth asked for R Blackbourne’s thoughts in change of use for properties from retail or hospitality. R Blackbourne responded that he was

	<p>supportive, online growth was slowing and Generation Z are more likely to shop in person driving a growth for demand in experience retail. An omni channel approach was suggested similar to small Ikea showrooms which follow by ordering items online.</p> <p>Councillor L Douglas asked who held responsibility for setting the red line boundary.</p> <p>R Blackburne advised it was set by DfC based on the local development plan, but recognised the issues surrounding the marked area while advising that across The Republic of Ireland, a small core town centre first boundary has helped the whole town.</p> <p><i>R Blackburne left the meeting 18:18</i></p>
<p><b>Item 3</b></p>	<p><b>Town Centre Car Parking</b>   Licensing and Regulatory Services Manager</p> <p>D Pearson advised that new legislation had been agreed in the “Off Street Car Parking Order 2025” and that the Council were gathering views to lobby DfI to change on street parking from 1 hour to 2 hours if the Local Action Group was supportive. Additionally, the request would include the ban on moving cars slightly in space to gain additional time.</p> <p>B Hunniford noted issues surrounding parking on footpaths on the Killinchy Road. S Gardiner responded it was a PSNI matter and suggested contacting PSNI each time to ensure a record. Chair noted it had been brought to PSNI attention recently.</p> <p>Discussion was raised on recent pilot programme of a similar nature, D Pearson advised she will follow up on feedback from the pilot.</p> <p>Chair asked for retailers thoughts on the matter. I McBride noted that she would get mentions of it from customers .</p> <p><b>Action: Members to discuss widely and provide feedback on matter in coming weeks.</b></p> <p>D Pearson drew attention to the considerate parking campaign being led by Over 50’s council and disability forum which can target problem areas.</p> <p>I McBride enquired if there were plans for EV charging in Comber. Councillor P Smyth advised there is an issue with the capability of charging infrastructure in Comber.</p> <p><b>Action: D Pearson to follow up regarding EV charging infrastructure in Comber</b></p>

<p><b>Item 4</b></p>	<p><b>Any Other Business</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <p><b>1. Castle Street Site Update</b> C McMullan advised that the Gap Site legal agreement had been signed, materials had been ordered and contractors were being organised to clear and hoard the site. Works onsite is expected to take a couple of weeks, the new hoarding will include the artwork previously approved by the group. The aim is to make the area more attractive and encourage investment. <b>Action: C McMullan to update group when start date is confirmed.</b></p> </li> <li> <p><b>2. Masterplan Review – Focused workshop – date to be agreed</b> C McMullan noted that the key focus of the LAG is to deliver the masterplan and suggested a focused workshop to discuss projects from the Comber masterplan.</p> </li> <li> <p><b>3. Sub-working/Task and Finish Groups</b> C McMullan suggested that the sub-working groups will be identified from the masterplan review.</p> <p>Chair advised he had spoken with James McCalister in NET youth project in the town and he is happy to align with the group where he can feed in.</p> </li> <li> <p><b>4. Official Launch of Local Action Groups</b> C McMullan advised the official launch is being scheduled for the end of May for all five Local Action Groups together. <b>Action: Regeneration to issue invitation to the group.</b></p> </li> <li> <p><b>5. Other items</b> C McMullan advised the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme is a multi-layer approach of initiatives aimed at regenerating our High Streets. The programme includes the Glow Up Grant, the Empty to Energised Pilot Grant Scheme (Bangor and Newtownards) and the new Freshen Up Grant due to launch Friday 01 May 2026.</p> <p>Chair enquired the boundary being used for the scheme. C McMullan replied that the boundary will be the same as Glow Up Grant as this is DfC funding.</p> <p>C McMullan also advised that new lamp post banners are to be installed over the coming days.</p> <p>I McBride noted the recent painting of utility cabinets around the town. C McMullan advised this was a Regeneration project funded by DfC and maintained by Council, across all 4 towns and city with a PR piece to follow.</p> </li> </ol>
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**Ards and  
North Down**  
Borough Council

	<i>Meeting ended at 18:42</i>

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Dereliction & Vacancy Study Presentation Overview**

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## APPENDIX 2

### Comber Local Action Group – April 2026

#### Car Parking Update

#### Diane Pearson – Licensing & Regulatory Services Manager

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There were no changes made to the current charging arrangements for Comber and parking remains free in all car parks, however, the following additional recommendation was made :

- That the Chambers of Commerce and city/town advisory groups are consulted on their views on the introduction of 2 hour waiting restrictions (instead of one hour) for Department for Infrastructure managed on street parking spaces, to inform the Committee before the Council lobby the Department on any potential changes.

*Officers have consulted with Ards and North Down Business Forum, who are in support of a 2-hour restriction on on-street parking, and are seeking the views of the LAG. It is proposed that a report is brought back to Council in June 2026 recommending that Council lobby the Department for Infrastructure in respect of 2 hour waiting times for on street parking across AND.*

<b>Holywood Local Action Group Meeting Minutes</b>	
<b>28 April 2026   5.00pm   Queens Leisure Complex</b>	
<b>Attendees</b>	<p>Alderman Alan Graham   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Alderman Martin McRandal   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Councillor Lauren Kendall   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Councillor Gillian McCollum   Ards and North Down Borough Council   <b>Chair</b>  Carly McMullan   Regeneration Manager   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Calum Symington   Administration Officer   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Diane Pearson   Licensing and Regulatory Services Manager   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Claire McCrea   Marketing and Communications Manager   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Marilyn Toogood   Holywood Street Pastors  Helen Aston   Holywood Chamber of Trade  Lauren DePledge   Holywood and District Community Council  Nadia Dornan   Holywood Family Trust</p> <p>Ross Blackbourne   McGarry Consulting   In attendance for item 2</p>
<b>Apologies</b>	<p>Councillor Stephen Hollywood   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Niall McVitty   Department for Communities  Stephen Gardiner   Department for Infrastructure</p>
<b>Appendices</b>	<p>Appendix 1 – Dereliction &amp; Vacancy Briefing Paper  Appendix 2 – Town Centre Car Parking Briefing Paper</p>
<b>Item 1</b>	<p><b>Welcome and Apologies</b>  Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Holywood Local Action Group and introductions were carried out.</p> <p><b>Declarations of Interest</b>  No declarations of interest.  Any issues arising during the agenda will be addressed accordingly.</p> <p><b>Previous Meeting Minutes and Actions</b>  The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate reflection, proposed by the Chair and seconded by Alderman M McRandal. Actions to be</p>

	<p>addressed through this meeting. Chair requested minutes be made available to the group in good time following each meeting.</p>
<p><b>Item 2</b></p>	<p><b>Dereliction &amp; Vacancy   McGarry Consulting</b></p> <p>R Blackbourne presented to the group on the recent work McGarry Consulting had carried out regarding the Dereliction and Vacancy Study conducted in the three towns (Donaghadee, Comber and Holywood) and the 15 villages across the borough (Note – a study was completed for Bangor and Newtownards in 2025).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It is the first borough wide study in Northern Ireland and it is centred within the red line boundary of each town and village</li> <li>- A street level assessment was carried out alongside the use of the town centre database (Town Centre Database measures dereliction and vacancy through domestic and non-domestic uses as opposed to “commercial” used by McGarry Consulting)</li> <li>- Maps of the studies have been made available online (<a href="#">Commercial Dereliction and Vacancy Study, Ards &amp; North Down Borough Council, Northern Ireland — McGarry Consulting</a>)</li> <li>- Holywood was noted as having an 11% commercial vacancy rate which was advised to be very low while 61% of the vacant units were noted as in good condition</li> <li>- Opportunity sites were noted at 9-11 Church Road and 59-63 Church View with planning permission in place at the Church Road site</li> <li>- Survey responses were low in Holywood but public sessions had been held were very informative alongside consultation with council officers and estate agents in the area</li> <li>- Strategic context had been considered with views being incorporated from ANDBC Big Plan and Corporate Plan</li> <li>- It was noted that vacancy was perceived as low in Holywood</li> <li>- It was noted that survey responders wanted property owners to take the lead with Council support through a property pipeline</li> <li>- A business support pipeline was also noted to help assist business owners moving from a market stall to pop up shop to renting property to grow businesses</li> <li>- It was noted that vacancy is not solved in a vacuum and the town requires a wider health check to ensure all factors are considered.</li> </ul> <p>Chair thanked R Blackbourne for his presentation and enquired if the final report would be passed back to Place and Prosperity committee and how the group makes use of this information going forward.</p> <p>Discussion raised on previous use of Church View site.</p>

	<p>H Aston raised concerns regarding inconsiderate parking on Church Road.</p> <p>Alderman M McRandal asked R Blackbourne if final report would have actions to address some of the issues raised. R Blackbourne advised that the report will suggest some actions.</p> <p>Alderman A Graham suggested that the group needs to find out what can and cannot be done as legislation cannot easily be changed and we have to work within the confines of the legislation we have.</p> <p>H Aston advised that the “Old Flower Room” was also vacant as it was not marked on R Blackbourne’s map. M Toogood noted that it does not present a good image of the town as it is located at one of the entranceways to the town centre.</p> <p>Discussion raised on rates relief for empty residential properties.</p> <p>C McMullan advised the group that McGarry Consulting had completed a Vacancy and Dereliction study for Bangor and Newtownards in 2025 which highlighted the high level of vacancy in the both areas. The Empty to Energised pilot grant scheme is currently being rolled out in these areas. C McMullan advised the council are actively looking at initiatives to tackle dereliction and vacancy.</p> <p>R Blackbourne noted that in Belfast City Council, for every £1 spent on the Vacant to Vibrant scheme, there was a return of £4 in rates alone, not including other benefits achieved.</p> <p>Discussion raised on Glow Up application difficulties and the steps taken to ensure a more user friendly application for the Freshen Up Grant including the requirement for only 1no quotation.</p> <p><b>Action: Dereliction and Vacancy Study presentation to be shared with group for feedback. H Aston confirmed this will be discussed at the next chamber meeting and feedback provided.</b></p> <p><b>Action: Regeneration to provide presentation to group.</b></p> <p><i>R Blackbourne left the meeting 17:41</i></p>
<b>Item 3</b>	<p><b>Town Centre Car Parking</b>   Licensing and Regulatory Services Manager</p> <p>D Pearson advised that new legislation had been agreed in the “Off Street Car Parking Order 2025” and that the Council were gathering views to lobby DfI to change on street parking from 1 hour to 2 hours if the Local Action Group was supportive. Additionally, the request would include the ban on moving cars slightly in space to gain additional time.</p>

	<p>D Pearson also noted that Hibernia North and South car parks would be combined to one car park on the RingGo app. Spafield is included in the parking order to allow enforcement of parking issues but it would not be moving to a paid model at this time. Holywood has a high proportion of app usage when parking so the new “buy time” model would also help reduce instances of overcharging.</p> <p>N Dornan noted her support as clients to her business are attending 1 hour slots so 2 hour parking would be beneficial.</p> <p>M Toogood noted that Dfl had sent out an expression of interest regarding residents parking permits.</p> <p>Alderman A Graham noted his presumptions of the 1 hour parking was to keep turnover moving but thought the change was a good enough idea.</p> <p>Councillor L Kendall asked if a trial period would be possible. D Pearson advised it was a legislative change which would need Dfl support to change and it would not be guaranteed to allow a trial.</p> <p>Alderman M McRandal noted his interest in obtaining retailer views.</p> <p>Chair noted that it would likely be more useful in Bangor and Newtownards.</p> <p><b>Action: H Aston to bring issue to Holywood Chamber of Trade meeting and report feedback to D Pearson.</b></p>
<p><b>Item 4</b></p>	<p><b>Freshen Up Grant</b></p> <p>C McMullan advised the new Freshen Up Grant is due to launch Friday 01 May 2026. The Freshen up grant will provide businesses with the opportunity to powerwash and/or paint their shop front with a 90% grant contribution up to £1,500. Only 1no quotation is required. The scheme is operated on a first come, first served basis.</p>
<p><b>Item 5</b></p>	<p><b>Any Other Business</b></p> <p><b>1. Masterplan Review – Focused workshop – date to be agreed</b></p> <p>C McMullan noted that the key focus of the Local Action Group is to drive the priorities identified in the masterplan and suggested a focused workshop to review current position and priorities going forward. Discussed the possibility to engage Hogarths to lead the workshop as the consultant who led the masterplan. It was agreed to ensure as many representative as possible are available for the meeting.</p>

**3. Sub-working/Task and Finish Groups**

C McMullan suggested that the sub-working groups will come from the masterplan review.

**4. Official Launch of Local Action Groups**

C McMullan advised the official launch is being scheduled for the end of May for all five Local Action Groups together. Date being considered is the morning of the 29<sup>th</sup> May 2026. It was noted this may cause a diary clash for some members. Regeneration to look at options but noted the need to arrange the most suitable date to accommodate all five groups.

**Action: Member Profile sheet to be circulated**

**Action: Dates for launch to be confirmed and circulated (noting early morning is suitable)**

**5. Other items**

H Aston raised concerns surrounding businesses placing items on footpaths causing accessibility issues

**Action: D Pearson to follow up on enforcement of clear footpaths**

*Meeting ended at 18:07*

**APPENDIX 1****Dereliction & Vacancy Study Presentation Overview****McGarry Consulting**

Following on from our 2025 Dereliction & Vacancy Reports into Bangor and Newtownards City/Town Centres, McGarry Consulting undertook a Dereliction & Vacancy Study across 3 towns and 15 villages across the Ards and North Down Borough in 2026. This involved street level assessments of commercial property (as distinct from the broader 'non-domestic' classification) within the town centre (as defined by DfC) and village boundaries (as defined by DAERA).

All commercial properties were counted with this considered potentially vacant for derelict examined more closely. This included estimating how long they'd been vacant, the building condition and whether the upstairs floor were also vacant. Planning history, listed status and whether it was on the market for sale were also recorded. Queen's University of Belfast School of the Natural & Built Environment provided quality assurance and guidance on our mapping.

In addition to mapping, which we believe may be the first such borough wide study in NI, a research and consultation exercise was undertaken. Research involved exploring other case studies and best practice with respect to high street regeneration. Whilst the consultation involved speaking with local community groups, council staff (e.g. parks, tourism, regeneration, rural development), and estate agents. An online public survey was also provided (with over 200 responses) and informal information sessions held in each town.

Initial mapping took place between December 2025 and January 2026, with engagement between January and March 2026. Draft reports are being presented in April 2026, with headline findings being presented back to LAGs in late April. Our presentation will focus on the four maps (commercial property identification and vacancy, building condition, extent upper floor use, and duration of vacant). We will explain how they were determined; what they mean on a street by street basis and town wide perspective. We will then set out key takeaways from the mapping exercise.

We will then set out 2-3 opportunity sites and welcome ideas as to how they could be addressed and potentially developed. We will then report feedback and learnings from our research and engagement exercises and highlight key Holywood specific survey findings. Based on the findings, we will set out key themes (at Borough and town levels) and draft actions (shorty, medium and long-term), seeking feedback and thoughts.

Finally, we will place Holywood in the context of the other 17 towns and villages assessed as well as against NI, UK and Ireland commercial vacancy averages. Our presentation will be mainly visual, and we'll be happy to answer questions at the end.

**APPENDIX 2****Holywood Local Action Group – April 2026****Car Parking Update****Diane Pearson – Licensing & Regulatory Services Manager**

On 3 September 2025, a deputation on behalf of Ards and North Down Business Forum (ANDBF) took place at Council's Environment Committee in respect of the draft Ards and North Down Off-Street Parking (Public Car Parks) Order 2025.

As a result, Members requested additional information in respect of the costs of ANDBF's proposals of introducing a 2 hours free parking tariff across the car park estate, the current and proposed tariffs across other Council areas, and the feasibility of implementing Automatic Number Plate Recognition technology.

On 4 February 2026, the Committee considered this further information and agreed to implement the Ards and North Down Off-Street Parking (Public Car Parks) Order 2025.

There were no changes made to the current charging arrangements for Comber and parking remains free in all car parks, however, the following additional recommendation was made :

- That the Chambers of Commerce and city/town advisory groups are consulted on their views on the introduction of 2 hour waiting restrictions (instead of one hour) for Department for Infrastructure managed on street parking spaces, to inform the Committee before the Council lobby the Department on any potential changes.

*Officers have consulted with Ards and North Down Business Forum, who are in support of a 2-hour restriction on on-street parking, and are seeking the views of the LAG. It is proposed that a report is brought back to Council in June 2026 recommending that Council lobby the Department for Infrastructure in respect of 2 hour waiting times for on street parking across AND.*

<b>Bangor City Local Action Group Meeting Minutes</b>	
<b>30 April 2026   4.00pm   Signal Centre, Innotec Drive, Bangor</b>	
<b>Attendees</b>	<p>Councillor Wesley Irvine   Ards and North Down Borough Council   <b>Chair</b>  Councillor Alistair Cathcart   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Councillor Craig Blaney   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Carly McMullan   Regeneration Manager   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Calum Symington   Administration Officer   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Diane Pearson   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Claire McCrea   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Sharon Mahaffy   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Wendy Smith   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Heather Shields   Ards and North Down Borough Council  Frank Shivers   Bangor Chamber of Commerce  Louise Spence   North Down Community Network  Emma Drury   Seacourt Print Workshop  Trevor Campbell   PSNI  Valerie Goodchild   Over 50's Council</p>
<b>Apologies</b>	<p>Stephen Gardiner   Department for Infrastructure  Niall McVitty   Department for Communities  Alison Blayney   Bangor Chamber of Commerce</p>
<b>Appendix</b>	<p>Appendix 1 – Christmas in Bangor City Centre 2026 Briefing Paper  Appendix 2 – Car Parking Update  Appendix 3 – Freshen Up Grant Briefing Paper</p>
<b>Item 1</b>	<p><b>Welcome and Apologies</b>  C McMullan welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Bangor City Local Action Group and introductions took place.</p> <p><b>Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair</b>  C McMullan invited nominations for the appointment of Chair and Vice Chair. Councillor W Irvine was proposed as chair by Councillor C Blaney, seconded by F Shivers. The group agreed that a Vice Chair would be appointed when the matter arises.</p> <p>Chair welcomed and thanked everyone for attending the meeting.</p>

	<p><b>Declarations of Interest</b> No declarations of interest. Any issues arising during the agenda will be addressed accordingly.</p> <p><b>Previous Meeting Minutes and Actions</b> C McMullan advised previous actions from the Introductory Meeting would be covered within the agenda.</p> <p>L Spence informed this was her first meeting of the Local Action Group and enquired the background and purpose. C McMullan replied a review of the former Town Advisory Group was completed as a recommendation under the Masterplan review. The review looked at the role of the group and the membership, identifying a need for change – to become more action focused. The main role of the group is to drive the delivery of the masterplan, promote positive change, lead on regeneration initiatives and champion our city.</p>
<p><b>Item 2</b></p>	<p><b>Christmas in Bangor City Centre 2026   ANDBC Events Team</b></p> <p>W Smith presented to the group options for the 2026 Christmas Event in Bangor.</p> <p>W Smith acknowledged the challenges arising from last year’s event and explained that the purpose of today’s discussion was to develop options for Christmas 2026, taking stakeholder feedback into account.</p> <p><b>Options Considered</b> The Events Team identified two main options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A free light trail incorporating Marine Gardens, designed to enhance the waterfront area.</li> <li>• A drone show following the Christmas lights switch-on, offering a major spectacle over a shorter period.</li> </ul> <p><b>Key Considerations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The drone show would be short and high-impact, but it would be vulnerable to poor weather.</li> <li>• The light trail would be more reliable and could operate over a longer period.</li> <li>• Indicative costs for a drone show are approximately £30,000–£50,000, depending on the style and duration, with custom or more intricate shows at the upper end of the range.</li> </ul> <p>Councillor A Cathcart advised that events have been cancelled twice previously due to weather but noted that residents had also been asking for the fireworks to return which the drone show could replace.</p>

L Spence advised that she was not in support of the drone show due to the cost for such a short event. Further noted that people do travel to Lisburn for their free light trail.

W Smith agreed with previous comments and added a good Christmas tree is also required.

V Goodchild added her support to the light trail option.

F Shivers stated that with the new event space opening at Marine Gardens, the chamber were in support of continual events to animate the area and that this year would be good for the light trail to encourage people to explore the area. The trail and a lightshow would be ideal if budget could be secured.

Councillor A Cathcart agreed suggesting that there needs to be something to excite attendees.

Several suggestions were put forward to include an ice rink, a Christmas market and laser lightshow. These were rejected due to either practicality, availability, or budget reasons.

W Smith advised that funfair rides had also been examined as an option alongside the light trail to further animate the area.

Discussion was raised on gathering commercial sponsorship to enhance the budget.

Further discussion followed on the length of time the trail would be in place for with H Shields advising that costs will be determined per week and worked backwards from Christmas to allow the most amount of operation time.

H Shields noted that people do want a “switch on moment” but ongoing costs need considered.

W Smith added that she would like to see the city come together to animate the whole area with lights. Additionally, the Business Passport is returning with 15 businesses signed up for Sea Bangor event with a hope to expand for Christmas. Feedback from the group suggested the Business Passport did not necessarily support business sales but did encourage footfall.

F Shivers asked if the event can be programmed into the rates setting process to commit to delivery for following years. S Mahaffy advised that she would be happy to commit to the long term option if council agree but it can be explored by officers. H Shields added that contracts for delivery of the light trail are usually 5 years.

Councillor A Cathcart noted that it was an attractive option, noting that the Walled Garden is also an asset which could be used cost neutral as it is enclosed and would allow charging to enter.

F Shivers noted that with Marine Gardens being handed back to council in October, Councillors need to step up and request more budget from council to deliver this event alongside business sponsorship.

Councillor A Cathcart agreed that commercialisation is definitely an option to be considered.

Discussion was raised on engaging with residents for their view but was dismissed as it would impact delivery timelines.

F Shivers advised that he was happy to commit to try and raise £20,000 - £30,000 from the business community in Bangor to fund the drone show if it included recognition of the sponsor. H Shields re-iterated costs for the drone show of £30,000-£50,000.

W Smith noted drones could be programmed to do count down to light switch on which could be cheaper option.

V Goodchild suggested having an overall theme for event similar to easter egg hunt completed recently in Donaghadee. W Smith agreed noting it would be easier to market one overall theme between council and businesses.

Discussions were raised on the broader council programme of events and the erosion of budgets to allow large scale events in Bangor. E Drury suggested smaller events that increase dwell times would be a better use of resources. F Shivers suggested that businesses would open more if they thought they would get the footfall.

Councillor C Blaney suggested that this will be the home of the Christmas tree in the borough and the correct tone needs set so the event needs to be as big as possible.

S Mahaffy advised that the events team can design the trail, stage and funfair element then bring back to group for approval.

E Drury advised her thoughts that this event was more important for people, not businesses.

F Shivers re-iterated his earlier comment that councillors need to go back to council and request more funding. Councillor C Blaney asked if more staffing or

	<p>more budget was needed to deliver larger event. W Smith replied that budget was the constraining factor.</p> <p>Comparisons were brought regarding Lisburn's Light trail with it noted that LCC Council focus on Christmas with an estimated budget of £200,000 - £250,000.</p> <p>Further discussions were raised on increasing dwell time through the use of stage and bringing a personality or music artists including school choirs to perform and give people something to enjoy throughout the switch on day.</p> <p>Chair thanked the events team for their efforts and presentation. It was felt that focus would be on light trail in Marine Gardens area but with a "big bang" switch on to include schools and other groups performing.</p> <p><b>Action: Events Team to consider the feedback provided and bring back a detailed and costed proposal for consideration. A special one item agenda meeting to be arranged.</b></p>
<p><b>Item 3</b></p>	<p><b>Town Centre Car Parking</b>   ANDBC Licensing and Regulatory Services Manager</p> <p>D Pearson advised that new legislation had been agreed in the "Off Street Car Parking Order 2025" and that the Council were gathering views to lobby DfI to change on street parking from 1 hour to 2 hours if the Local Action Group was supportive. Additionally, the request would include the ban on moving cars slightly in space to gain additional time. D Pearson also advised that the RingGo parking app will be moving to a buy time model to ensure users are not being overcharged for forgetting to stop their parking session.</p> <p>V Goodchild asked if a cash payment option would remain. D Pearson confirmed that a cash payment option will always be available.</p> <p>F Shivers asked if a promotional tariff could be created for Christmas shopping. D Pearson replied that it is possible and asked what the groups opinion is on increasing on street parking to 2 hours. F Shivers advised that a similar change in Ballymena had increased dwell time of customers. D Pearson agreed stating that the car parking strategy noted most people stay about 2 hours in town/city centres</p> <p>The group agreed to support the change to 2 hours free on street car parking It was also agreed to stagger the changes to on street and off street car parking tariffs to avoid confusion to users.</p> <p>D Pearson advised that enforcement is starting in ANDBC free car parks to ensure users are parking in correct bays and within lines</p>

<p><b>Item 4</b></p>	<p><b>Freshen Up Grant   ANDBC Regeneration Manager</b></p> <p>C McMullan advised that the new Freshen Up Grant will open on Friday 01 May 2026 and close at 12 noon on Friday 29 May 2026. The grant will support businesses to power-wash and/or paint their shopfronts, with funding covering 90% of eligible costs up to £1,500 and a minimum 10% trader contribution required.</p> <p>C McMullan further advised that applicants will be required to submit one quotation only, and that awards will be made on a first-come, first-served basis. Businesses that previously received support through the Glow Up Grant may apply again, provided the application is for different works. In addition, a call-off list of painters is being prepared to help applicants obtain quotations.</p> <p>F Shivers asked whether the funding could be used for other projects.</p> <p>C McMullan explained that the Freshen Up Grant had been created following an underspend in the Glow Up Grant. Officers had sought approval to carry forward the underspend into the next financial year, which the Department for Communities supported. However, the funding could only be used to deliver an initiative that aligned with the original business case.</p> <p>C McMullan added that officers hope to provide an update on the future of the Shaping Sustainable Places Programme in the coming months.</p> <p>Councillor C Blaney suggested offsetting parking spaces along Queen's Parade to allow more parking. Councillor A Cathcart suggested that it was a good time to raise it due to works ongoing works in the area. Discussion was raised regarding extending the public realm paving along Queen's Parade to match the paving to the rest of the city centre. C McMullan reminded of the application for funding currently being developed by officers to upgrade/ enhance the existing public realm. It was agreed to discuss further at the next meeting when proposals for each urban area have been identified.</p> <p><b>Action: Public realm upgrade/ enhancement to be added to next meeting agenda.</b></p> <p>L Spence and E Drury left the meeting 17:40</p> <p>C McMullan raised issue of in ground lighting in Bangor. F shivers and Councillor A Cathcart suggested to remove it and replace with matching paving slab.</p>
<p><b>Item 5</b></p>	<p><b>Any Other Business   Chair</b></p> <p><b>1. Masterplan Review Workshop</b></p>

C McMullan suggested a focused session to be held with the Local Action Group to review the Masterplan.

Discussion was raised on recent NI Water issues when bringing empty buildings back into use.

C McMullan advised that ANDBC Strategic Development Team will be in attendance at the next meeting to update on the Empty to Energised Scheme as part of the wider Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme update.

Further discussion followed on the possibility of residential properties being developed above retail units similar to Belfast City Council “Living Over The Shops” scheme.

**Action: Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme to be presented at the next meeting.**

## **2. Official Launch of the Local Action Groups**

C McMullan advised an official launch of all Local Action Groups will be held in May, (expected breakfast time 29<sup>th</sup> May) it is hoped this launch will raise awareness and profile of the group.

**Action: Regeneration to circulate details of the proposed launch event.**

## **3. Lamp Post Banners**

C McMullan advised the lamp post banners had been erected in each city and town with apologies that the design was not brought to the group in advance but due to limited timescales this had to be sent direct to print.

F Shivers asked if they could be used to advertise businesses. C McMullan advised this is something that could be considered for future campaigns but noted that advertising consents will be required.

## **4. Other items**

F Shivers suggested if members do not attend three consecutive meetings they should be removed from the group.

Proposed by Councillor A Cathcart, seconded by Councillor Craig Blaney

V Goodchild raised issues with car parking at Queens Parade, suggesting using parking at Bregenz House as an alternative. Councillor A Cathcart replied that it was considered but it is under a sperate development via Belfast Region City Deal.

**Meeting concluded 18:05**



**Ards and  
North Down**  
Borough Council



**APPENDIX 1**

## **Bangor City Local Action Group – April 2026**

### **Christmas in Bangor 2026**

#### **ANDBC Events Team**

*‘Creating a festive experience for everyone to enjoy’*

ANDBC Events Team will be attending the Bangor City Local Action Group to discuss Christmas 2026. The Council recognises the need for early engagement and therefore encourages members of the group to come prepared for a focused discussion on the key areas outlined below:

#### **Item 1 – Learning and Development**

Reflecting on what we can learn from last year’s event and explore ways to improve.

#### **Item 2 – Best Way Forward**

Agreeing our aims and objectives and generating innovative ideas.

#### **Item 3 – Collaborative Approach**

Adopting a collaborative approach – identifying what we can achieve together, along with roles and responsibilities.

#### **Item 4 – Review of the Framework**

Ensuring this supports our goals effectively.

## **APPENDIX 2**

**Car Parking Update****Diane Pearson – Licensing & Regulatory Services Manager**

On 3 September 2025, a deputation on behalf of Ards and North Down Business Forum (ANDBF) took place at Council's Environment Committee in respect of the draft Ards and North Down Off-Street Parking (Public Car Parks) Order 2025.

As a result, Members requested additional information in respect of the costs of ANDBF's proposals of introducing at 2 hours free parking tariff across the car park estate, the current and proposed tariffs across other Council areas, and the feasibility of implementing Automatic Number Plate Recognition technology.

On 4 February 2026, the Committee considered this further information and agreed to implement the Ards and North Down Off-Street Parking (Public Car Parks) Order 2025.

This implements a 50p for 2 hours parking tariff across the charged car park estate, and Tariff A (£1 per hour thereafter) in the busier / town centre car parks and Tariff B (50p per hour thereafter) in the less busy / peripheral car parks.

It was also agreed that parking charges would end at 5pm across the estate (currently 6pm in Bangor) and a campaign which will help to support the evening and nighttime economy will be launched when the new Order is implemented.

Additional recommendations were made as follows:

- That an officer's report is brought back to the Committee on options around introducing free or reduced price parking during the Christmas period when the new order is implemented, similar to other local Councils.

*Officers are currently gathering information from other local Councils and will bring back a report to Council with options when the new order is implemented.*

- That a parking app which sets a time limit on parking (rather than stop/start) is introduced as soon as possible

*The current RingGo App will move to a “Buy Time” model from 1<sup>st</sup> May 2026. Users choose how long they want to stay upon arrival and pay upfront for their session. This continues to provide flexibility for users by allowing them to extend their parking period without having to return to their car, which is assisted by a timer, and removes the need to remember to stop their session, ensuring users are not paying more than required.*

- That the Chambers of Commerce and city/town advisory groups are consulted on their views on the introduction of 2 hour waiting restrictions (instead of one hour) for Department for Infrastructure managed on street parking spaces, to inform the Committee before the Council lobby the Department on any potential changes.

*Officers have consulted with Ards and North Down Business Forum, who are in support of a 2-hour restriction on on-street parking, and are seeking the views of the LAG. It is proposed that a report is brought back to Council in June 2026 recommending that Council lobby the Department for Infrastructure in respect of 2 hour waiting times for on street parking across AND.*

The current implementation date for the Ards and North Down Off-Street Parking Order 2025 and therefore the new tariff structure is dependent on Department for Infrastructure revoking the existing legislation for Off Street Parking. When this date is available, a full communications plan will be implemented by Officers, including new signage across the estate and the aforementioned campaign.

A review of the 2025 Order will also take place six months and one year after implementation, allowing Council to take into consideration the relevant data and make any changes deemed necessary at that time.

## **Bangor City Local Action Group – April 2026**

### **Freshen Up Grant**

Following the success of the Glow Up Grant, the Freshen Up Grant will be launched Friday 01 May 2026.

The grant seeks to support 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 will provide 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.

The Freshen Up Grant is funded by the Department for Communities and Ards and North Down Borough Council.

Launch – Friday 01 May 2026

## Newtownards Local Action Group Meeting Minutes

### ONE-ITEM AGENDA FOCUSED ON CHRISTMAS 2026

12 May 2026 | 4.00pm | Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex

#### Attendees

Councillor Richard Smart | Ards and North Down Borough Council  
 Councillor Victoria Moore | Ards and North Down Borough Council  
 Councillor Steven Irvine | Ards and North Down Borough Council  
 Alderman Stephen McIlveen | Ards and North Down Borough Council  
 Derek Wright | Newtownards Chamber of Trade  
 Michael Cafolla | Newtownards Chamber of Trade  
 Carly McMullan | Regeneration Manager | Ards and North Down Borough Council  
 Calum Symington | Administration Officer | Ards and North Down Borough Council  
 Claire McCrea | Ards and North Down Borough Council  
 Sharon Mahaffy | Ards and North Down Borough Council  
 Wendy Smith | Ards and North Down Borough Council  
 Heather Shields | Ards and North Down Borough Council

#### Apologies

Pam Williamson | Ards and North Down Street Pastors  
 Rebecca Freel | Education Authority Youth Service

#### Welcome

C McMullan welcomed everyone to the special one-item agenda meeting of the Newtownards Local Action Group to discuss Christmas 2026 event

#### Christmas 2026

W Smith provided background to the group and recalled the last meeting where suggestions were given by the group and it was agreed that the events team would further scope out the parade option for the Christmas event.

H Shields reiterated what had been discussed and agreed at the previous meeting –

- The regular Saturday market would occur as normal
- The business passport would operate from 9am – 3pm
- The main event programming would include the parade beginning at 4:30pm, finishing with the finale at 5:30pm

- The regular market will have a modified layout, pulled forward to allow multimedia set up

W Smith advised that the “Wow” moment of the event will be the floats and performers.

H Shields advised that community involvement is wanted to help support town centre footfall. Proposals for the event will include a mix of floats, performers and community covered under the “Newtownards – Gateway to the Peninsula” branding. Budget includes 4 or 5 bespoke floats. Route will leave from ABMWLC lasting approximately 45 minutes and total budget is approximately £31,150 which will need to go out through tender process.

M Cafolla asked if the floats are being bought or rented. H Shields replied that they will be rented but custom finished.

W Smith advised that they hope to incorporate the local schools through costumes in the parade. Also advised that Diane Pearson, Licensing and Regulatory Services Manager, had communicated with the market regarding need to rearrange the space.

Councillor R Smart thanked the events team noting that the plan looks great, adding that it was noted by committee that costs are increasing. Councillor R Smart asked if there was an opportunity for local businesses to sell in the Square. W Smith advised that there was no uptake last year when it was offered.

D Wright noted that most important thing was to get footfall into the town, the Christmas event is needed for bricks and mortar stores.

Discussion was raised on involvement of traders along parade route, schools and community groups.

**Action: Events team to look at what further can be achieved through leverage of community groups.**

Discussion was raised on the timing of the parade.

M Cafolla enquired if food trucks and extra stalls were being organised due to need to keep visitors serviced.

W Smith noted that events were asking traders to “festive up” their stalls.

Alderman S McIlveen enquired if road closures were planned for the event. H Shields replied that the roads will not be closed per se but a rolling road closure will surround the parade with the hope that people line the streets for the parade.

Discussion was raised on the inclusion and location of food trucks including locations

- Beside Assisi charity shop

- Clive's Courtyard
- South Street
- Lower Mary Street
- Streaton Church (noted as very keen to be involved)

**Action: Events team to make determination on best location(s).**

S Mahaffy summarised the meeting with the following agreed -

- Float parade with community involvement ending in Conway Square
- Space for food trucks
- Saturday market relocated to allow stage/multimedia set up
- Concluding with light switch on

**Meeting concluded 16:41**

## Comber Local Action Group | Christmas Lighting

As members will be aware the Council secured funding from the Department for Communities to upgrade the Christmas lighting in each of the towns. This is welcomed investment that will help to create a festive atmosphere and provide an excellent opportunity for the town to attract residents and visitors during the busy season.

The enhanced Christmas lighting will include the upgrade of 41no motifs for the lighting columns.

In addition to the new motifs, the town will welcome an interactive Christmas feature. This will offer residents and visitors an engaging and festive experience. The bauble will serve as a photo opportunity where people can capture and share their moments on various social platforms, helping to generate momentum whilst raising awareness of the town and its offerings.

The design for the motif has been selected to compliment the Christmas feature.



### Donaghadee Local Action Group | Christmas Lighting

As members will be aware the Council secured funding from the Department for Communities to upgrade the Christmas lighting in each of the towns. This is welcomed investment that will help to create a festive atmosphere and provide an excellent opportunity for the town to attract residents and visitors during the busy season.

The enhanced Christmas lighting will include the upgrade of 42no motifs for the lighting columns.

Projecting Christmas lighting will also be provided. This will add a festive touch to iconic landmarks such as the Lighthouse, to create a vibrant, celebratory atmosphere in the town centre during the holiday season.

The design of the motif has been selected to compliment the projecting lighting.



## Hollywood Local Action Group | Christmas Lighting

As members will be aware the Council secured funding from the Department for Communities to upgrade the Christmas lighting in each of the towns. This is welcomed investment that will help to create a festive atmosphere and provide an excellent opportunity for the town to attract residents and visitors during the busy season.

The enhanced Christmas lighting will include the upgrade of 56no motifs for the lighting columns. The design for the motif has been selected to compliment the Christmas trees.

In addition to the new motifs, an interactive Christmas feature will be provided. This will offer residents and visitors an engaging and festive experience. The bauble will serve as a photo opportunity where people can capture and share their moments on various social platforms, helping to generate momentum whilst raising awareness of the town and its offerings (*the location of the bauble will be discussed at the next LAG meeting*)



## Newtownards Local Action Group | Christmas Lighting

As members will be aware the Council secured funding from the Department for Communities to upgrade the Christmas lighting in each of the towns. This is welcomed investment that will help to create a festive atmosphere and provide an excellent opportunity for the town to attract residents and visitors during the busy season.

The enhanced Christmas lighting will include the upgrade of 94no motifs for the lighting columns. The design for the motif has been selected to compliment the townscape character.

In addition to the new motifs, catenary lighting will also be provided. 2no catenary lighting displays will be suspended mid-air to create illuminated streets, enhancing the visual appeal, vibrancy and festive atmosphere of the town.



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	11 June 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Economic Growth (vacant)
Report title	Economic Growth Half Yearly Performance Report
Attachments	Economic Development Annual Performance Report H2 2025-2026 Regeneration Annual Performance Report H2 2025-2026
File Reference (if applicable)	160127
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	Budget and Staffing Narrative: Delivery of agreed plans
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 1. An engaged Borough with citizens and businesses who have opportunities to influence the delivery of services, plans and investment  If multiple: 3. A thriving and sustainable economy.

## Background

Members will be aware that Council is required, under the Local Government Act 2014, to have in place arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions. To fulfil this requirement Council has in place a Performance Management Policy and Handbook. The Performance Management Handbook outlines the approach to the Performance Planning and Management process as:

- Community Plan – published every 10-15 years
- Corporate Plan – published every 4 years (Corporate Plan 2024-2028)
- Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) – published annually in September
- Service Plan – developed annually (approved annually in March)

The Council's 16 Service Plans outline how each respective Service will contribute to the achievement of the Corporate objectives, including, but not limited to, any relevant actions identified in the PIP.

## Reporting Approach

The Service Plans will be reported to relevant Committees on a half-yearly basis as undernoted:

Reference	Period	Reporting Month
Half Year (H1)	April – September	December
Half Year (H2)	October – March	June

The report for Half Year (H2) October to March 2026 is attached.

## Corporate Plan 2024-2028

In line with the Corporate Plan 2024-2028, our service has contributed to two outcomes as follows:

### **Outcome 1**

*An engaged Borough with citizens and businesses who have opportunities to influence the delivery of services, plans and investments*

### **Key Achievements:**

- City/Town Advisory Groups reconstituted to Local Action Groups  
New Local Action Groups have been established for each urban area (Bangor, Comber, Donaghadee, Holywood and Newtownards). Membership has been agreed for each group and includes representation from a range of sectors such as youth, faith, sport, commerce, culture, historical and others. A Terms of Reference has been agreed which clearly defines the vision, principles and purpose. An introductory meeting of each group has been held within this reporting period, and an official launch will be held in June 2026.

### **Outcome 3**

## **A Thriving and Sustainable Economy**

#### **Key Achievements:**

- Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme  
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.  
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 recently the next strand of support the 'Freshen Up' Grant Scheme is being developed for release on the 01st May 2026. The various initiatives will result on over £1million of investment to our town and city high streets.
- Chamber Programme of Grant Support  
Business plans were delivered by each of the five Chambers of Commerce, utilising the grant allocation to deliver a series of initiatives aimed at supporting local businesses and chamber activity.
- Regeneration Project Development 'working up'  
Vacancy and Dereliction studies were completed for 15 villages and 3 town centres (Comber, Donaghadee, Holywood), a study to enhance the night-time economy in Newtownards, and a study to enhance the tourism offering in Donaghadee were delivered within this reporting period. Directly linked to Masterplan outcomes and Corporate Plan priority of a thriving and sustainable economy.
- Go Succeed  
The target for job creation through the Engage and Foundation pillars of the service was 123, and has been exceeded to reach 178. (this figure is subject to monitoring and evaluation from the PMO and will be confirmed when the year is fully closed)
- Labour Market Partnership (LMP)  
The LMP has delivered a full suite of interventions that have had an immediate positive impact on individuals needing support to get into employment. It has also attracted its full budget rather than the reduced budget originally allocated by DfC.
- Mini Digi Hub  
The Mini Digi Hub project has progressed according to plans. Phase 1 of the IoT project has been successfully procured and ready for delivery with the procurement for the architect scheduled for May 2026.
- Innovation Hub  
The original site ceased to be a viable option and a new site was sourced and approved by Council.

## Key Issues

As part of the commitment to continuous improvement the annual Service Plan is reviewed on a monthly basis. The Service Risk Register has also been reviewed to identify emerging key issues and agree any actions required as detailed below:

- Organisation Redesign

As part of an ongoing organisational redesign within the Council, the Regeneration and Economic Development Services merged to form the Economic Growth Service. Since January, the Head of Economic Growth post has remained vacant, and the recruitment of other vacant posts has been paused during this period. This transition, together with vacancies at Head of Service and officer level, has had an impact on service delivery.
- Labour Market Partnership

The Department for Communities has not yet confirmed the budget allocation for the LMP 2026/27, although it has been confirmed that 25% of the budget could be used to support the LMP until the end of June 2026, no letter of offer has been received to date. This presents a challenge in terms of planning and delivery of support.
- Go Succeed

The Go Succeed service has been cut by 64% as the allocation under the Local Growth Fund has placed an emphasis on capital rather than resources. Despite the Council lobbying the Department for Economy for additional support and increasing its own match funding, the service will see a 20% reduction and may not meet its statutory targets.
- Bangor Harbour and Marina

Bangor Harbour and Marina was brought back to Council after negotiations on the maintenance, operations and liabilities failed to reach an agreement between the proposed deliver agent and the council.

### Actions to be taken:

- Appoint the Head of Service post and progress the restructuring of the Economic Growth Service to ensure all required posts are filled.
- Pressure from all 11 councils must be maintained to secure funding for the Labour Market Partnership.
- Collective action by all 11 councils, led by Belfast City Council, must continue to obtain additional funds from DfE to support the transitional year of the Go Succeed Service. The Council must also continue to lobby the Department for support in developing the new Entrepreneurship Programme which is to start in 2028.

Identified KPI at Risk	Reasons as to why KPI has not been met	Action to be taken	Designated Officer	Date for Review
To develop a master plan and outline business case for the delivery	Unsuccessful procurement exercise to secure an Integrated Consultancy Team to	Proceed with a Development Brief to secure a development partner to support	Strategic Development Manager	2026/2027

<p>of a business park at the former NIE site on the Balloo Road, Bangor</p>	<p>produce a masterplan for the Former NIE site</p>	<p>the development of the site into a potential Business Park. This will be delivered in 2026-2027.</p>		
<p>To deliver a minimum of 3 capital projects aligned to the town/city Masterplans and deliver 3 capital projects aligned to the Village Plans</p>	<p>This was achieved for the town/city areas under the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme and the rollout of a capital grant scheme across the five urban areas.</p> <p>The Village Plans for the rural areas have been delayed due to resource constraints.</p> <p>It should be noted that 3 capital projects under the Small Settlements Programme were delivered within the rural areas during this reporting period in Ballygowan, Greyabbey and Kircubbin.</p>	<p>It is expected that funding under the proposed Shaping Sustainable Places Programme will provide significant financial support to deliver capital projects over the coming years in both the urban and rural areas. Officers are also looking at options to deliver a similar initiative of the grant scheme to rural areas within the next financial year.</p> <p>The Village Plans will be completed by Summer 2026.</p>	<p>Regeneration Manager</p>	<p>2026/2027</p>
<p>Completion and evaluation of the Covid Recovery Small Settlements Programme</p>	<p>Contract for Funding extended to March 2027 to allow for the delivery of an additional project to utilise underspend. Evaluation can only be completed once all projects are fully delivered.</p> <p>It should be noted all capital projects within the agreed action plan have been completed.</p>	<p>Delivery of additional project no later than March 2027 with evaluation to follow six months post completion.</p>	<p>Regeneration Manager</p>	<p>2026/2027</p>
<p>Development of a Motorhomes Strategy</p>	<p>Resource constraints. Initially led by Urban Designer – post now vacant.</p>	<p>Proceed with a temporary restructure of the regeneration service (pending</p>	<p>Regeneration Manager</p>	<p>2026/2027</p>

		the wider restructure) to ensure service delivery. Internal working group to be formed to ensure wider organisational support and resource.		
Completed employee appraisals	1no employee appraisal remains outstanding due to period of absence.	To be completed following return to work.	Regeneration Manager	August 2026
To commence Phase 1 of the development works to Marine Gardens and the McKee Clock Arena in keeping with the agreed Quality Specification as part of the Queen's Parade redevelopment scheme – completion March 2026	Phase 1 of the development works have commenced and continue to progress. Expected completion October 2026 to coincide with the Public Art.	Continued engagement with Bangor Marine, Dept for Communities, Artist and wider project team to ensure project timeline is achieved with stage 1 of Phase 1a being open to the public by November 2026.	Head of Economic Growth	December 2026
To develop the Bangor Art and Animation Placemaking Strategy	Resource constraints	Appointment of dedicated officer - Marine Gardens Animation Officer – process commenced.	Head of Economic Growth/ Regeneration Manager	2026/2027

## RECOMMENDATION

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

### Economic Growth - Performance Indicator Summary

Generated on: 05 May 2026

Last Update H1 2025/26

Performance Data Traffic Light Icon	PI Short Name	Performance Data Current Value	Performance Data Current Target
	% spend against budget	92.46%	100%

Last Update H2 2025/26

Performance Data Traffic Light Icon	PI Short Name	Performance Data Current Value	Performance Data Current Target
	Number of Jobs created through the Go Succeed Service	178	123
	Number of people benefitting from the Health and Wellbeing Initiative	41	24
	Number of research assignments	112	75
	Number of surveys to identify needs and values of the ED and business support services	1	1
	% draw down of Seal Sanctuary claim from DAERA	100%	100%
	To develop Bangor Marina and Harbour to ICT stage as part of BRCD project	100%	100%
	To develop Pickie Funpark and Harbour to ICT stage as part of BRCD project	100%	100%
	Innovation Hub – To develop the project to procure an operator.	100%	100%

Performance Data Traffic Light Icon	PI Short Name	Performance Data Current Value	Performance Data Current Target
	Number of businesses supported through the Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF) programme	11	18
	PEACE Plus– Implementation of the Digi Hubs project at Comber Community Centre	100%	100%
	Development of an LEP action plan	100%	100%
	% staff attendance	92.97%	95%
	% of completed Employee Appraisals in the period April 2025 to March 2026	100%	100%
	Number of projects delivered in LMP Action Plan	16	12














## Regeneration - Performance Indicator Summary

Generated on: 01 June 2026

Last Update H1 2025/26

Performance Data Traffic Light Icon	PI Short Name	Performance Data Current Value	Performance Data Current Target
	% spend against budget	89.19%	100%
	% staff attendance	99.37%	94.5%

Last Update H2 2025/26

Performance Data Traffic Light Icon	PI Short Name	Performance Data Current Value	Performance Data Current Target
	To create new Town/City Advisory Groups following the review that was undertaken	5	5
	To develop a master plan and outline business case for the delivery of a business park at the former NIE site on the Balloo Road, Bangor	20%	100%
	To commence Phase One of the development works to Marine Gardens and the McKee Clock Arena in keeping with the agreed Quality Specification as part of the Queens Parade redevelopment scheme – completion March 2026	1	2
	To deliver a minimum of 3 capital projects aligned to the City/Town Masterplans and a minimum of 3 capital projects Aligned to the Village Plans 2025 - 2035	3	6
	To develop a strategy to secure new private sector commercial investment in the Bangor Waterfront area	100%	100%
	To assess and report on the outputs from each of the 5 annual Chamber Business Plans and grant award. 6 monthly progress reporting followed by completion evaluation report.	5	5
	Develop the Bangor 2026 Art and Animation Placemaking Strategy (name TBC)	0%	100%
	To develop and launch a capital grant scheme for vacant or derelict properties, aimed at transforming vacant properties into vibrant spaces, fostering redevelopment, boosting the local economy and increasing the non-domestic rate base	100%	100%
Performance Data Traffic Light Icon	PI Short Name	Performance Data Current Value	Performance Data Current Target
	To develop/work up a minimum of 5 projects aligned to the City/Town Masterplans and a minimum of 5 projects aligned to the Village Plans 2025 - 2035	10	10
	Completion and evaluation of the Covid Recovery Small Settlements Programme to include 5 capital schemes, 2 working-up schemes, and 2 grant schemes.	9	9
	Development of a Motorhomes strategy	25%	100%
	% of completed Employee Appraisals in the period April 2025 to March 2026	83%	100%
	To oversee the design and commissioning processes of 3 art pieces for the Bangor waterfront area	100%	100%

Unclassified

## ITEM 10

## Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	11 June 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Economic Growth
Report title	Economic Development Annual Activity 2025-26
Attachments	Appendix 1 - ED Annual activity Summary Report 2025-26
File Reference (if applicable)	ED55
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	Budget
	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	Choose an item. 3. A thriving and sustainable economy If multiple:

## Background

The role of the Economic Development (ED) Service Unit is to promote and encourage local economic growth and to work to develop a pipeline of support from enterprise awareness, business start and business growth, employability and skills and sector development.

To encourage skills development, enterprise, growth and innovation, ED provides a suite of support, projects, interventions, and collaborations. Local businesses and entrepreneurs benefit from 1:1 confidential business advice, a business intelligence service, signposting to other support agencies, workshops, advice sessions, networking opportunities and mentoring programmes.

This year, the ED Section has continued to support and deliver the Enterprise Support Service, Go Succeed. In addition to this it has also managed the delivery and outworkings of the Labour Market Partnership Action Plan. The team has worked in conjunction with colleagues across other internal Council service units, alongside the other 11 Councils, to provide timely, crucial advice and support to assist businesses in navigating emerging issues.

This annual report, as in previous years, provides a summary overview of the elements of the support services provided to local businesses between April 2025 - March 2026.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Council notes this report.

**Appendix 1: Economic Development Annual Activity Summary Report 2025-26****CONTENT**

<b>2025.26 KPIs</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Actual</b>
One-to-One business Advice	55	76
Number of Research Assignments	75	112
Number of Jobs created through GFI/NIESS Service Start Up (engage and foundation)	123	178
Number of jobs created through the GO Succeed Service including Growth	141	201
Number of Business Employees registered for Health and Wellbeing initiatives	24	41
Number of Surveys to identify needs and value of ED and Business support services	1	1
Number of Projects delivered in the LMP Action Plan	12	16

**1. BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICES - START-UP and GROWTH**

- 1.1 Business Advice Service
- 1.2 Business Research Service
- 1.3 Business Support Services – Information & Communication
- 1.4 Annual Business Survey

**OTHER SUPPORT PROGRAMMES, SERVICES AND EVENTS**

1. Go Succeed
2. Cybersecurity Business Support Programme
3. Entrepreneurship Business Support Programme
4. DTFF Pipeline Programme
5. Food and Drink Business Support Programme
6. Sustainable Adaptation Programme
7. NI Apprenticeship Week 2026
8. Mind Body Business 2025-26
9. Ards and North Down Labour Market Partnership

**1 Business Support Services****1.1 Business Advice 2025-2026**

The business advice service take up is as shown in the table below.

<b>Service</b>	<b>№ Clients / Projects Apr 25 - Mar 26</b>	<b>Target</b>
<b>1-1 Business Advice sessions</b>	76	55

## 1.2 Business Research Service 2025-2026

The Business Research Service responded to a wide range of enquiries, relating to market intelligence and consumer trends, commercial property searches and searches for potential sources of funding.

A number of different platforms are used as sources of information to assist in carrying out business research. The platforms include:

- **GrantFinder (Ilox Group)** - sources of grant and loan funding database for businesses, local communities and charitable organisations.
- **Cobra (Cobweb Information Ltd)** - Business Information Factsheets and Business Opportunity Profiles database
- **Beauhurst Impact** - Business database containing information on both public and private companies across the UK.
- **IBIS World** – wide range of UK Industry reports which include key statistics, market trends, operating conditions, current and forecast industry performance.
- **Statista** – Statistics, facts, industry and market insight reports across 170 industries database.
- **Open source data (free)** - e.g. Office National Statistics (ONS), Northern Ireland Statistical Research Agency (NISRA).

Frequent types of research requested from local businesses include the following:

- Assistance to identify sources of funding to start or grow the business.
- Business listings – identification of potential suppliers and customers (B2B).
- General business guidance (particularly for start-up businesses).
- Assistance to identify suitable commercial property and to encourage investment in the borough. The AND Business website includes a webpage dedicated to investment opportunities, which was updated to include a downloadable brochure detailing current investment and development opportunities in the Ards and North Down Borough.

The Business Research Unit assists with each enquiry however when more information is required the business is sign-posted as required.

The business research service take up is shown in the table below:

Service	No Clients / Projects Apr 25 - Mar 26	Target
<b>Business Research Service</b>	112	75

## 1.3 Business Support Services – Information & Communication 2025-2026

In addition to the Business Advice and Business Research Service, the team supports businesses by keeping them updated on a variety of areas including business support programmes, marketing and development opportunities, changes to legislation, and opportunities for grant funding and assistance.

<b>Information Service</b>	<b>2025-2026 No.</b>
General Business Newsletters	24 issued
Thematic Business Ezines	4 issued
Go Succeed Business Ezines	31 issued
AND Business Website <a href="https://www.andbusiness.co.uk/">https://www.andbusiness.co.uk/</a>	32,546 total views from 01/04/2025 – 31/03/2026

As of 31 March 2026, there are 1,333 subscribers on the online newsletters and emails. Registration to the ezine is encouraged when the ED team interacts with businesses and all events are also used to promote such registrations. The number of subscribers is subject to small variations around the 1,300 mark.

#### **1.4 Annual Business Survey**

The Economic Development Team conducts an Annual Business Survey, to gain insight and views of the local business community on current trading conditions and business needs, and what interventions the Council might implement to support them. The survey was open from 24 November 2025 until 30 March 2026 and was promoted through a number of channels including the email business newsletters. The headline findings from the survey results were as follows:

- **Important focus areas for organisational development**
  - Strategic planning
  - Marketing – knowing and attracting customers
  - Digital Transformation
  - Developing a USP for a product or service.
- **Preferred delivery methods for business support**
  - One-to-one advice and mentoring.
  - Financial support (e.g. grants).

## Support Programmes and Events

### 1. Go Succeed – NI Enterprise Support Service



Go Succeed (1 March 2025 – 31 March 2026) calculated over a 12-month period

- **Engage:** Have a business idea and thinking about starting a business
- **Foundation:** A developed business idea, asset ready and capable of achieving VAT threshold within 12 months
- **Growth:** Existing trading businesses with less than 50 employees
- **Scaling:** Existing trading business with export potential and sales potential of £1M within 3 years

#### Go Succeed Participation

By post code	Engage	Foundation	Grow	Scaling
BT18 Holywood	39	5	21	1
BT19 Bangor (Outside Ring Road)	96	12	32	
BT20 Bangor (Inside Ring Road)	80	14	25	
BT21 Donaghadee	20	5	8	
BT22 Millisle, Greyabbey, Portaferry	48	10	21	
BT23 N'ards, Ballygowan, Comber	126	24	51	2
<b>Total Participation</b>	<b>409</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Target</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>2</b>

#### Go Succeed Job Creation

Number of jobs created (FTE) following support through all pillars' interventions.

	Engage	Foundation	Grow	TOTAL
Jobs Created	148	30	23	201
<b>Target</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>141</b>

The statutory target (123 Jobs) for Ards and North Down job creation was calculated by combining the number of business plans and enterprise action plans signed off under the Engage and Foundation pillars. The statutory target was achieved but this final figure is subject to mentoring and verification, and the confirmation of this figure will be available in late June.

The number of jobs created (FTE) against DFE Statutory target is as follow and subject to monitoring and verification:

	Statutory Target	(estimated)
DFE Jobs Created	123	178

### Go Succeed Grants

	Target	Actual
Average number of grants	57	56
Total value of Letter of Offers issued	£138,576.42	£125,594.90
Total value of Grants Administration costs	£15,160.38	£13,740.19

### Go Succeed Masterclasses

To support entrepreneurial intentions through one-to-one many Core masterclasses and optional masterclasses.

No. of participants	Target (attendees)	Actual (attendees)
Engage	86	138 attendees
Foundation	16	20 attendees
Growth	42	110 attendees
<b>Total</b>	144	268

### Go Succeed Community Outreach

Number of individuals reached through a range of Community Outreach activities both locally and regionally with entrepreneurial intentions targeted at engage pillar.

Local Community Outreach	Target (participants)	Actual
Go Succeed and partner events*	1175	54 Events 1686 participants
Go Succeed events	607	9 Events 120 participants
Regional Community Outreach	Target (participants)	Actual
Ultimate Pitch	45	26
Activate Enterprise	24	32
FE Entrepreneurship Hub	318	166
Females in High Growth	7	6

\*events held with Go Succeed participation and engagement at partner events; LMP, 5 Chambers of Commerce and Tourism Development

### Go Succeed Peer Support Network

Peer Support Network provided an inclusive, practical, and inspiring environment for business owners to connect, share experiences, a strong focus on collaboration, business growth, and accessible learning.

Peer Support Networks	Target	Actual
The Reinventors Network	1	1
<b>Total</b>	1	1

## 2. Cybersecurity Business Support Programme

The CyberWise programme delivered targeted cyber security support to 10 small and micro businesses across the Ards and North Down Borough, helping them identify risks, implement practical controls and build a foundation for improved cyber resilience.

The programme combined one-to-one mentoring, online workshops and a final in-person event, providing each business with a structured Cyber Security Action Plan aligned to National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) guidance and the Cyber Essentials framework.

Key Deliverables	Target	Outputs
Recruitment and Marketing	Recruitment and marketing plan implemented to capture businesses throughout the borough.	Recruitment was delivered through a multi-channel campaign including targeted emails, phone outreach, social media, and partner networks across Ards and North Down Borough.
Business Recruitment	10 businesses with between 1 and 250 employees, located within the ANDBC area, to be recruited onto the programme	10 eligible companies were successfully recruited on to the programme
Mentoring	10 businesses, each to receive up to 15 mentoring hours, on cybersecurity business support	10 business each received 15 hours of 1:1 mentoring on cyber security business support.
Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes (KSA)	Identification of potential cyber security risks and how to mitigate these, based on an initial baseline assessment.	100% Multi Factor Authentication Adoption, 80% reviewed back up processes, 80% developed incident response plans, 70% created assets registers, 60% preparing for certification. 100% completed cyber security action plans.
Themed Workshops / Networking	3 workshops to cover cyber security topics. 2 online workshops and 1 in person event. Topics to be pitched at the level necessary for participating businesses	2 online workshops delivered which enabled accessibility and consistent attendance. One in-person event was delivered which supported peer learning and knowledge sharing. The staggered cohort model ensured mentoring remained tailored and avoided a one-size-fits-all approach.
Reporting & Governance	Progress reports and monthly meetings with Council. Final report and Action plans produced	Bi-weekly update meetings were held. Final report and copies of each Action plan produced were received March 2026
State Aid / Minimal Financial Assistance Forms	Complete relevant State Aid / Minimal Financial Assistance forms.	4 State Aid/Minimal Financial Assistance forms were completed by businesses enrolled from 1 <sup>st</sup> January 2026 as part of the application.

### 3. Entrepreneurship Business Support Programme

The Entrepreneurship Business Support Programme supported newly established businesses and sole traders operating across the Borough. Participating businesses benefited from a structured programme of diagnostics, workshops, mentoring, and action plans aimed at strengthening business capability, building entrepreneurial confidence, and supporting sustainable growth.

The programme supported a total of 20 businesses, each of whom received tailored one-to-one mentoring support alongside participation in a series of themed workshops. Each participating business completed a Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes (KSA) Competency Assessment at the start and end of the programme and developed a tailored Growth Action Plan aligned to their individual needs.

The key results of the ANDBC Entrepreneurship Business Support Programme are summarised as follows:

Key Deliverables	Target	Outputs
Recruitment and Marketing	Recruitment and marketing plan implemented	Recruitment was delivered through a multi-channel campaign including targeted emails, phone outreach, social media, and partner networks across Ards and North Down Borough.
Business Recruitment	20 eligible entrepreneurs and/or sole traders recruited onto the programme	20 businesses were successfully recruited onto the programme
Mentoring	Minimum 200 mentoring hours undertaken (up to 10 hours per company, hybrid online/face-to-face)	20 companies received one-to-one mentoring. A total of 200 hours was delivered (against a target of 200 hours). This equated to 10 hours per company and provided in hybrid approach to accommodate client preferences.
Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes (KSA)	Strengthen sustainability in participating businesses increasing their capacity and capability to continually grow.	An average improvement of 0.9 points (18%) was achieved in KSA survey results.
Themed Workshops / Networking	Deliver 3 themed workshops in person covering entrepreneurship topics; clients attend at least 2 workshops each.	Three workshops were delivered during the programme with participant attendance monitored through our online tracker and sign in sheets for each event.
Development of Business Action Plans	20 action plans created based on individual business needs for each participating business.	20 companies have created individual Growth Action Plans, developed collaboratively between the client and mentor during the final meetings of the programme.
Signposting to Support	Signpost at least 20 businesses to other support providers.	All 20 companies have been signposted for support. Further details are provided in Section 5.0 of this report.

Reporting & Governance	Progress reports and monthly meetings with council representative.	A contract initiation meeting was held on 17 <sup>th</sup> November. Monitoring for the programme was held securely on SharePoint allowing the Council to have live reporting on participant engagement, mentoring hours, workshops, and other activities associated with delivery. Management meetings were held on 17th December, 28th January, 26th February, and 31st March.
State Aid / Minimal Financial Assistance Forms	Complete 20 State Aid / Minimal Financial Assistance forms.	20 State Aid/Minimal Financial Assistance forms were completed as part of the application and signed during the initial mentoring meeting/workshop 1.

#### 4. DTFF Digital Transformation Flexible Fund Pipeline Programme

The DTFF Mentoring Programme was delivered between January and March 2026 to support eligible businesses within the Ards and North Down Borough Council area in developing applications to the Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF) The Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF) is a demand led grant scheme aimed at establishing a Northern Ireland wide fund to stimulate digital innovation. It seeks to address the financial barriers to the adoption of advanced digital technologies as a means to achieve business transformation amongst small and micro businesses

Key Deliverables	Target	Outputs
Recruitment and Marketing	Recruitment and marketing plan implemented to capture businesses throughout the borough.	Recruitment was delivered through a multi-channel campaign including targeted emails, phone outreach, social media, and partner networks across Ards and North Down Borough.
Business Recruitment	10 businesses with between located within the ANDBC area, to be recruited onto the programme	11 eligible companies were successfully recruited on to the programme, one extra to facilitate potential drop out. Diverse cohort across multiple sectors.
Mentoring	10 businesses, each to receive up to 21 mentoring hours for the purposes of supporting the businesses through the DTFF application process by Friday 20 March 2026. Successful diagnostics proceed to application development	10 business each received 21 hours of 1:1 mentoring focusing on strengthening transformation narrative, develop credible economic cases and improve clarity, structure and consistency.
Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes (KSA)	Diagnostic assessment to assess digital maturity, project feasibility, alignment	1 client deemed ineligible due to updated DTFF criteria, one withdrew

	with DTFF objectives and risks and constraints	following diagnostic stage, one project was at risk due to fire on premises, one onboarded as a replacement participant.
Reporting & Governance	Provide council with a full report detailing delivery of the project on completion by Friday 27 March 2026. The report should include details relating to the businesses engaged, services delivered, referrals, details on DTFF potential project, contact details and feedback from participants	Bi weekly updates received and summary report received. 8 applications submitted to DTFF fund.
State Aid / Minimal Financial Assistance Forms	Complete relevant State Aid / Minimal Financial Assistance forms.	11 State Aid/Minimal Financial Assistance forms were completed.

## 5. Food and Drink Business Support Programme

The Food and Drink Business Support Programme was designed to support micro-businesses and SMEs operating within the food and drink sector across the Borough. Participating businesses benefited from a structured programme of mentoring, workshops, and practical business support aimed at strengthening business capability, improving competitiveness, and supporting sustainable growth.

The programme supported a total of 10 food and drink businesses, each of whom received tailored mentoring support alongside participation in a series of themed workshops and networking opportunities. In addition, participants engaged in a familiarisation visit to a food and drink development site, providing exposure to best practice and sectoral innovation.

The key results of the ANDBC Food and Drink Business Support Programme are summarised as follows:

Key Deliverables	Target	Outputs
Recruitment and Marketing	Recruitment and marketing plan implemented	A multichannel recruitment plan was implemented and included. These activities included email outreach, phone calls, social media platforms such as (LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram). 14 Applications were received in total. A Selection Matrix was used to determine and agree which 10 companies would be eligible and successful for the programme.
Business Recruitment	10 eligible Food and Drink micro-business/SME enterprises recruited onto the programme	10 eligible companies were successfully recruited on to the programme.

Mentoring	Minimum 100 mentoring hours undertaken (hybrid online/face-to-face to meet client needs)	10 companies received one-to-one mentoring. *A total of 120 hours were delivered (against a target of 120 hours).
Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes (KSA)	Strengthen sustainability in participating businesses increasing their capacity and capability to continually grow.	An average improvement of 19.5% was achieved in KSA survey results from the start of the programme, to programme close.
Themed Workshops / Networking	Deliver 5 themed workshops/networking opportunities in person covering food and drink topics; clients attend at least 3 workshops each	All 5 Workshops were delivered during the programme, however it should be noted that 1 workshop was delivered online due to adverse weather conditions limiting ability of participants and trainers to travel safely.
Development of Business Action Plans	10 action plans created based on individual business needs for each participating business.	9 companies have worked with their mentors to create a 6-month action plan for their business (one business, following a review of business trading conditions, made the decision to close the business during the period of the programme as is no longer commercially viable).
Familiarisation Trip	One familiarisation trip to a food and drink development site.	Familiarisation trip was delivered in partnership with CAFRE and Long Meadow Cider on 17th February.
Signposting to Support	Signpost at least 10 businesses to other support providers	All 10 companies have been signposted for support. Further details are provided in Section 5.0 of this report.
Reporting & Governance	Progress reports and monthly meetings with council representative.	Initiation meeting was held on 13th November. Following this Core Growth kept an update to date SharePoint folder for the council to be able to review live progress reporting on all programme activities. Further to this, management meetings were held on 17th December, 28th January 26th February, and 31st March
State Aid / Minimal Financial Assistance Forms	Complete 10 State Aid / Minimal Financial Assistance forms.	10 State Aid/ Minimal Financial assistance forms have been signed and provided to ANDBC.
Job Creation	Create at least 5 jobs (best endeavours) as a result of the programme, assessed in final evaluation report 12 months from start	This metric is to be assessed at the 6-month follow-up review in September 2026, however as part of their final action plans, participants have indicated an anticipated increase of up to 7 FTE

		jobs to be created within the next 6 months.
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\*As an added value element of the programme, participants received 2 hours of Opportunity-Led Research per participating business, totalling 20 hours across the cohort. This research was designed to move businesses from theoretical growth planning to the identification of real, actionable commercial opportunities specific to their business

## 6. Sustainable Adaptation Programme

The Sustainable Adaptation Business Programme (SAP), aimed to emphasise the importance of sustainability and the need for local businesses to gain a deep understanding of sustainability and adopt sustainable practices with a view to help reduce the impact of climate change within the borough and make a formal public commitment to reaching Net Zero by 2050, and develop documented, costed roadmaps for carbon and cost reduction.

Key Deliverables	Target	Outputs
Recruitment and Marketing	Recruitment and marketing plan implemented to capture businesses throughout the borough.	Recruitment was delivered through a multi-channel campaign including targeted emails, phone outreach, social media, and partner networks across Ards and North Down Borough.
Business Recruitment	10 businesses with between 1 and 50 employees, located within the ANDBC area, to be recruited onto the programme	10 eligible companies were successfully recruited on to the programme
Mentoring	10 businesses, each to receive up to 21 mentoring hours, to identify areas for sustainable improvement.	10 business each received 21 hours of 1:1 mentoring on sustainable improvements business support.
Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes (KSA)	A baseline audit to identify current sustainability status of each business and a sustainability Action plan and tailored funding action plan created for each participant	100% of participants received a tailored carbon reduction and funding action plan.
Themed Workshops / Networking	3 workshops to be pitched at the level necessary for participating businesses and 1 in person best practice and networking event to close.	Three structured webinars were delivered virtually, with recordings and resource documents shared for flexible, self-paced completion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carbon Literacy &amp; Emissions Data (January 2026)</li> <li>• Energy Efficiency Solutions (9 February 2026)</li> <li>• Sustainable Supply Chain Management (13 February 2026. A best practice and networking event was held on 25 March 2026 featuring</li> </ul>

		programme highlights, business case studies, and networking.
Reporting & Governance	Progress reports and monthly meetings with Council. Final report and Action plans produced.	Monthly update meetings were held. Final report and copies of each Action plan produced were received.
State Aid / Minimal Financial Assistance Forms	Complete relevant State Aid / Minimal Financial Assistance forms.	10 State Aid/Minimal Financial Assistance forms were completed by businesses enrolled from 1 <sup>st</sup> January 2026 as part of the application.

## 7. NI Apprenticeship Week

Following Northern Ireland Apprenticeship Week (February 2026), Ards and North Down Borough Council delivered a multi-channel marketing and promotional campaign to raise the profile of apprenticeships across the borough, inform residents, employers and young people about available opportunities and supports, and encourage participation through success stories and career pathway messaging. Working with South Eastern Regional College, the campaign highlighted Higher Level Apprenticeship examples at the Culloden Hotel and Dunluce Health Centre. Awareness was driven through outdoor and print activity - including two large billboards in Newtownards and Bangor, three Adshel panels in Comber, Holywood and Bangor and quarter-page newspaper adverts in the Spectator and Chronicle - supported by a digital communications plan across social media and business platforms, weekly business e-zines (including a 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2026 issue with a 38.30% open rate and 96 total clicks) and content on the NI Business Info website, creating a strong borough wide presence promoting apprenticeship value.

## 8. Mind Body Business 2025-2026

Mind Body Business (MBB) is a joint initiative by the Public Health Agency and Ards and North Down Borough Council that aims to benefit business owners and their employees, by providing initiatives that encourage employers to put 'health' at the centre of their business agenda.

The following programme of support was provided to businesses based in the Borough:

- A small grant of financial support for businesses to complete a workplace health and wellbeing initiative for their employees under the Take 5 Approach to Wellbeing This resulted in 16 businesses participated who represented 292 employees.
- A free one-day First Aid Training course was held in Donaghadee with 8 businesses represented and 9 attendees.
- Free Health Checks were offered for employees. These checks were run over 2 separate days at venues across the Borough (Ards & Bangor) with 17 businesses represented and 47 Health Checks being undertaken.

## 9. Ards and North Down Labour Market Partnership

Ards and North Down Labour Market Partnership (LMP) was established on 17 August 2021. The 2025-2026 Action Plan was developed following the achievements and successes of the 2021-23, 2023-24 and 2024-2025 Action Plans.

The 2025-2026 Action Plan was approved by Council and the Department for Communities. Council provides the secretariat to the LMP.

The Letter of Offer for the 2025-2026 Action Plan was received on the 15<sup>th</sup> May 2025. On the 12<sup>th</sup> November 2025 the LMP received additional funding from DfC to uplift the 2025-2026 Action Plan.

### Update on the work of the LMP

#### **Structure:**

#### **LMP Members and Sub-committees**

Membership of the LMP consists of around 23 members from sectoral bodies, voluntary and community organisations and Council representatives.

The two subcommittees relate to the themes within the 2025-2026 Action Plan. The four themes are as follows:

- **Theme 1** – Economic inactivity
- **Theme 2** – Unemployment (all ages)
- **Theme 3** – Disability
- **Theme 4** – Skill and labour supply

The subcommittees report back to the full LMP.

#### **Information sessions for LMP Members:**

Information sessions were organised for Board members, and these were delivered at the beginning of each of the Partnership Board meetings to ensure better participation and engagement. The following information sessions have been delivered:

- March 2025- The Equality Commission
- May 2025 - Universal Credit presentation
- June 2025- NIACRO
- Sept 2025- The NOW Group
- Nov 2025- The King's Trust
- Jan 2026- Living Wage NI
- March 2026- Condition Management

Also in March 2026 Partnership members underwent in-person training in Governance, Managing a Board and Conflict Transformation.

#### **AND Labour Market Partnership 2025-2026 Action Plan**

#### **GIS Mapping Exercise:**

The outcomes from all the academies and events from 2021-22, 2022-2023, 2023-24, 2024-25 and 2025-2026 have been uploaded onto a GIS Mapping portal to visually show the impact of the academies and where the participants were located within the Borough. It is hoped that, with redacted data, this may be made available to the public.

### **Thematic Group 1 – Economic inactivity**

#### **Classroom Assistant Employability Academy:**

This academy is now complete. The first cohort started mid-August with training undertaken at the end of August. 12 were recruited and nine have moved into employment. The second cohort recruitment closed early December with almost 60 applications for only 13 places. From the second cohort 12 have moved into employment giving an overall total of 21 participants moving into employment. All progress, jobs and outcomes will continue to be monitored

#### **Catering Academy:**

Recruitment for this academy is still ongoing. The first cohort started at the end of November, however only six turned up, nevertheless all six have completed and five have moved into employment. Another cohort was recruited for in April. This academy has been extended until the end of June 26.

### **Thematic Group 2 – Unemployment (all ages)**

#### **SIA Academy:**

The delivery agent for this academy was appointed and training took place from the 16<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> March, with 10 participants registered. One participant had to defer completing the course until the end of April, from the remaining nine participants seven have passed with one requiring more assistance with the English language and the other only needing to re-sit one element. Upon completion the licence takes around 12 weeks to be processed.

The training element of this academy is now complete, however, it has been extended until the end of June to allow for re-sits, licences and job outcomes to be achieved.

#### **Health and Social Care Academy:**

Recruitment for this academy is still ongoing. Training started on the 26<sup>th</sup> January with 12 participants, of which two have currently moved into employment. Another cohort was recruited for in April. This academy has been extended until the end of June. Jobs and outcomes will continue to be monitored

### **Thematic Group 3 – Disability**

#### **Academy for People with Disabilities:**

The tender for this academy was extended to the current provider for another year. This academy was uplifted with the additional funding from DfC by 15 participants taking it to 45 participants. All 45 participants were recruited with the initial cohort of 30 is now complete. The second cohort should be completed by the end of April/ start of May.

Academies that have been undertaken are:

- Customer Service
- Employability
- Catering and Hospitality

Currently 11 participants have moved into employment.

This academy has been extended until the end of June. Jobs and outcomes will continue to be monitored.

#### **Thematic Group 4 – Skilled Labour Supply:**

##### **Greentech Academy:**

This was awarded to SERC. This academy was targeted at qualified electricians looking to upskill in Green Technology. Participants were able to do one part, two or all three parts of the academy, the course offered were: Electrical Energy Storage Systems, Electric Vehicle Charging Equipment and Small-Scale Solar Photovoltaic Systems. In total 28 participants completed 49 qualifications.

This academy has not been extended and was completed at the end of March. Employment enhancement and outcomes will continue to be monitored.

##### **Transport Academy:**

The tender for this academy was extended with the current provider for another year.

All 34 participants for the HGV/ Coach element and 10 participants for the driving licence element of the academy have been recruited.

28 have already completed the HGV element and 27 have moved into employment. From the driving licence element 9 out of 10 have passed their theory test and one has completed and passed their driving test and gained employment which they could not have got without their licence.

This academy was uplifted with the additional funding from DfC by another 22 participants, taking it to 66 participants. This uplift was for the HGV/ Coach driving element of the academy only. These additional participants are currently undertaking their training and 12 have already completed and all 12 have moved into employment. This academy has been extended until the end of September. Jobs and outcomes will continue to be monitored.

##### **Employer Led Upskilling Programme:**

This programme opened on the 8<sup>th</sup> September and closed on the 17<sup>th</sup> October, the panel assessed the applications on the 23<sup>rd</sup> October. The budget for this was £20,000, in total £20,073.90 was awarded. 23 out of the 25 companies who applied were awarded a grant, covering a total of 61 employees.

Upon assessment 19 companies out of 23 completed the training covering 53 employees gaining 57 qualifications.

An additional £3,000 was allocated to this budget with the uplift from DfC in November.

Additional certified training covering the following was arranged:

- Level 2 Food Safety Training.
- Level 3 Award in Emergency First Aid at Work.
- Level 2 Health and Safety Training.
- Level 2 Award in Fire Safety.

This academy has not been extended and was completed at the end of March

### **Taxi Academy:**

With the additional funding from DfC in November the need for a Taxi Academy was identified.

This was awarded to Workforce Training Services. All 22 participants were recruited and training for this academy has started, already 5 participants have passed their theory test, the remainder have their tests booked over the next few weeks.

This academy has been extended until the end of June. Jobs and outcomes will continue to be monitored.

### **Additional Academies:**

#### **Childcare Upskilling Academy:**

Additional budget in March was allocated to AND LMP from the Department of Education to recruit and upskill 8 participants currently working in the childcare sector to gain their level 2 qualification. Recruitment is currently underway.

This academy will continue until the end of December 2026. Jobs and outcomes will continue to be monitored.

#### **ADR Training:**

AND LMP was successful in applying for an easement bid to facilitate the upskilling of 10 HGV participants to undertake ADR\* Training. This would further enhance their job prospects and the outcome is enhanced employment. AND LMP are working with the Transport Academy delivery agent to identify those eligible participants. The training is planned for June 2026.

\*ADR training refers to a specialist qualification for drivers and personnel involved in the international carriage of dangerous goods by road. The acronym ADR stands for "**Accord relatif au transport international des marchandises Dangereuses par Route**" (the European Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road)

### **Theme – Increased Awareness:**

#### **Jobs, Support and Training Fair with a dedicated Health and Social Care area:**

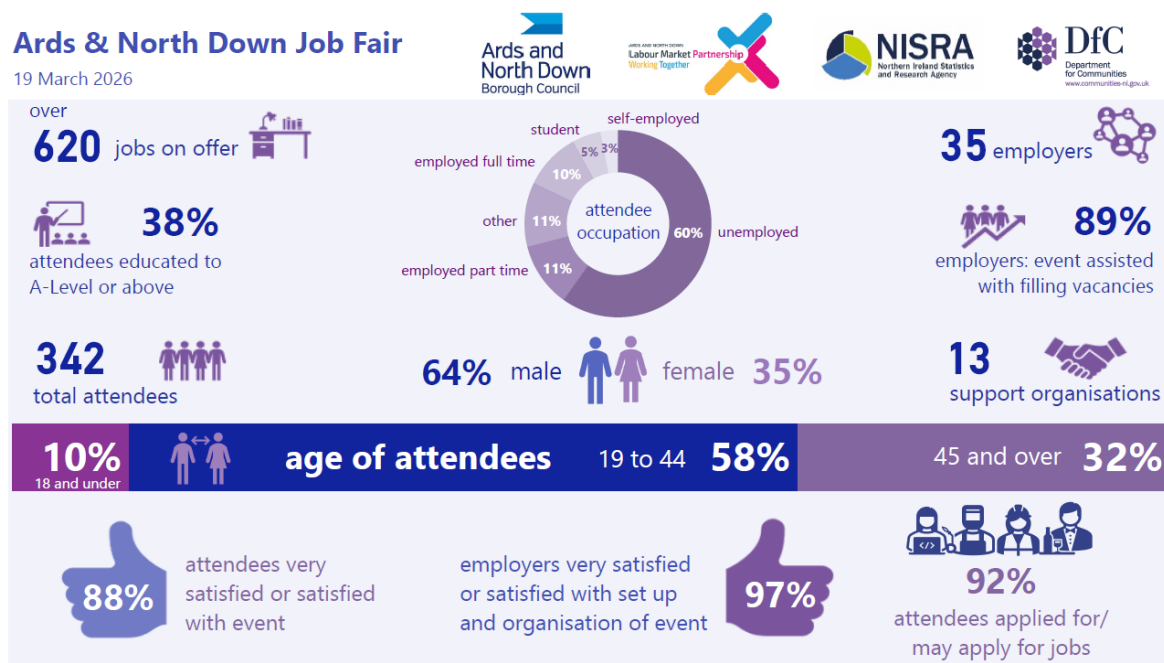
The Jobs, Support and Training Fair with a dedicated Health and Social Care area was held in Aurora Aquatic and Leisure Complex on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2026 10am-2pm. There were 53 exhibitors and 122 people attended. Feedback from the people who attended was very good.

- 96% of Attendees reported satisfaction with the event

- 94% of Employers reported satisfaction with the event
- 93% of Support Organisations reported satisfaction with the event.

**Job Fair:**

The Job Fair was held on 19th March 2026 in Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex, the outcomes are in the infographic below:



The target for both Job Fairs was 270 attendees, 40 Employers and 20 Support Organisations. In total at both events the targets were exceeded with 464 attendees, 69 Employers and 29 Support Organisations attending the events.

**Employer Info Sessions:**

In partnership with NIHE and Radius Housing on the 20<sup>th</sup> November a Supplier Sourcing Event was hosted, promoting the LMP, Go Succeed, Job Start and the grants approved work in Ards and North Down. This was targeted specifically at contractors, plumbers, electricians and architects due to the level of grant work available with very limited supply of contractors.

32 attended plus speakers and on the day nine companies signed up to be suppliers with Radius Housing/ NIHE.

**Apprenticeship Career Fair:**

From the increased budget from DfC in November an Apprenticeship Careers Fair was organised in Aurora on the 19<sup>th</sup> February from 4pm-7pm. In total there were 33 exhibitors and 320 people attended, feedback from the exhibitors showed that 144 signed up to apprenticeships at the event.

**Signposting Employability and Skills Registers:**

Two registers have been created one for Employers and one for Individuals and are available on the Councils website for downloading and have been distributed at recent events. We currently have had the following number of downloads for the 2025-2026 financial year (as of 19 March 2026):

Register	Number downloaded
Employer	74
Participant	112

The following number of registers have been distributed at events:

Name of event	Number handed out
Entrepreneur Road Show- Employer Guide	1
West Winds- Skills and Employment Support Clinic	1
Donaghadee - Skills and Employment Support Clinic	5
Millisle- Skills and Employment Support Clinic	3
Disability Employment and Support Day – 25 <sup>th</sup> Nov '25	6
Job Fair- Aurora 5 <sup>th</sup> Feb '26	70
Disability Employment and Support Day – 26 <sup>th</sup> Feb '26	40
Apprenticeship Careers Fair- 19 <sup>th</sup> Feb '26	120
Total	246

A total of 432 Employability and Skills Registers have been given out/ downloaded in 2025-2026. Since it was launched on 12 September 2024 an overall total of 909 registers have been downloaded and given out.

### Skills and Employment Support Clinics:

The target on this year's Action Plan was for two clinics to be hosted however three were actually held:

Location	No. of Exhibitors	Participants attended
West Winds PS	19	6
Donaghadee PS	17	39
Millisle PS	13	9

The schools' halls differed in sizes hence the variation in the number of exhibitors.

At West Winds although only 6 attended, one signed up with an agency and four signed up to training programmes.

At Donaghadee, 39 attended of which 11 signed up to programmes. Belfast Works Connect (BWC) made contact with a community worker, who attended, who worked with economically inactive women and had arranged to call out the following week to do a talk to 15 plus women about their available programmes, at the Millisle event BWC updated LMP that this number had risen to 20 women.

At Millisle, nine attended, one signed up to an agency and four signed up to programmes. BWC also made contact with another community rep who has asked them to meet three groups within the area, a Hen's Shed, a Men's Shed and a Youth Group (depending on the age of the youth group they may need to be signposted to other organisations).

### **Disability Employment and Support Days:**

Two Disability and Employment Support Days were held 6 people attended on 25 November 2025 in Portavogie Community Centre. There were 17 exhibitors attended.

At the Disability Employment and Support Day on 26 February 2026 at Aurora Aquatic and Leisure Complex, 60 people attended. There were 15 exhibitors on the day.

From the exhibitors' feedback forms 35 signed up to available programmes.

### **PR Campaign:**

The current PR Campaign ran in March 2026. Following the March campaign, 72 expression of interests were received, with the AND LMP website receiving 2,481 views. For the full year April 2025- March 2026 the LMP website has received 6,104 views.

From the stats provided by Meta (Facebook and Instagram) the campaign delivered strong online visibility and traffic, generating 650.5K impressions and 5,469 clicks overall.

Engagement levels were solid, achieving a click-through rate (CTR) of 0.84%, which is above the industry benchmark.



## LMP Awareness Campaign – March/April 2026

Channel	Timing
Promotional roll up banners for leisure and community centres	March/April
Digital campaign (management and placement, Meta, Google Search and Display)	March/April
Press advert ½ page advert Spec and Chron over 2 weeks	March/April
Out Of Home Across Bangor and Ards  Adshels Live - coverage across Bangor, Ards, Comber and Holywood	March/April



## Digital Impact – LMP Awareness

Meta delivered strong results with 650K impressions and 5.5K clicks, achieving an above-benchmark CTR (0.84%) and low CPC (£0.18).

Employer and job seeker audiences drove most engagement



Static 2 was the top-performing creative, generating the majority of traffic across key audiences.



Ards and North Down Borough Council  
www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk



## Digital Impact – LMP Awareness

### Strong coverage across key ANDBC locations



Bangor

**250,000**  
FORTNIGHTLY IMPRESSIONS



Newtownards

**488,000**  
FORTNIGHTLY IMPRESSIONS

As part of the PR Campaign Pop ups with a QR code promoting the academies were printed and have been placed in local foodbanks, the Warehouse community hub, Council community centres x five, leisure centres and NIHE reception areas.

A Celebration event with the Mayor is planned on the 7<sup>th</sup> May offering previous participants, delivery agents, funding representatives, LMP secretariat and the LMP Partnership the opportunity to celebrate the outcomes and achievements of AND LMP.

### RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes this report.

Unclassified

**ITEM 11****Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	11 June 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Tourism, Arts and Heritage
Report title	Tourism, Arts and Heritage Half Yearly Performance Report 25/26
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	Priority 1: Economic 4. A vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors  If multiple: 3 and 5

**Background**

If multiple:

Members will be aware that Council is required, under the Local Government Act 2014, to have in place arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions. To fulfil this requirement Council has in place a Performance Management Policy and Handbook. The Performance Management Handbook outlines the approach to the Performance Planning and Management process as:

- Community Plan – published every 10-15 years
- Corporate Plan – published every 4 years (Corporate Plan 2024-2028)
- Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) – published annually in September
- Service Plan – developed annually (approved annually in March)

The Council's 16 Service Plans outline how each respective Service will contribute to the achievement of the Corporate objectives including, but not limited to, any relevant actions identified in the PIP.

### Reporting Approach

The Service Plans will be reported to relevant Committees on a half-yearly basis as undernoted:

Reference	Period	Reporting Month
Half Year (H1)	April – September	December
Half Year (H2)	October – March	June

The report for H2 is attached. End of year budget or attendance was not available at the time of writing the report.

### Corporate Plan 2024-2028

In line with the Corporate Plan 2024-2028, our service has contributed to five outcomes as follows:

#### **Outcome 1**

*An engaged Borough with citizens and businesses who have opportunities to influence the delivery of services, plans and investment*

#### **Key achievements:**

- Food and drink network provides local sector trade the opportunity throughout the year to assist in the development of activity delivered by Council e.g. training needs programmes etc.

#### **Outcome 2**

*An environmentally sustainable and resilient Council and Borough meeting our net zero carbon targets*

#### **Key achievements:**

Tourism Events maintained zero contamination at Events Recycling Stations throughout 2025 season.

If multiple:

#### **Outcome 4**

*A vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors*

##### **Key achievements:**

- Tourism officers have continued to attend trade shows, meet the buyer shows and facilitate familiarisation visits in relation to tourism and food and drink development, promoting the borough to tourism trade for incoming visits, and also food and drink sector businesses, to attend shows where direct sales to buyers and public are possible.
- Destination awareness continues to be proactively grown, with digital -led marketing generating a high growth rate of 26% across social media channels, 49 editorial features generated across NI, and RoI and with an engaged growing ezine audience with an average open rate of 41% (compared to a Tourism industry average of 15-25%).
- Tourism is a key part of the Council's development of a sustainable destination. Both through the community led working group e.g. recent launch of the Good Visitor Promise and the support provided to the Loughs and Legends sustainable tourism group.

#### **Outcome 5**

*Safe, welcoming and inclusive communities that are flourishing*

##### **Key achievements:**

- Age Friendly Creatives Arts for Older People Programme. ANDBC received an award of £8,500 from ACNI for Age Friendly Creatives, a creative workshops programme with older people in partnership with County Down Rural Community Network. A series of creative workshops were offered to older people's groups within borough. 14 groups were offered 8 x hours of creative workshops each. 240 participants engaged and a total of 128 hrs of facilitation by local artists.

#### **Outcome 6**

*Opportunities for people to be active and healthy*

##### **Key achievements:**

- Tourism deliver a number of experiences, walks and tours throughout the year enabling attendees to participate in physical and active interests.

##### **Key issues**

If multiple:

As part of the commitment to continuous improvement the annual Service Plan is reviewed on a monthly basis. The Service Risk register has also been reviewed to identify emerging key issues and agree any actions required as detailed below:

- Staffing, levels of sickness resulting in front facing operations being impacted and closure of information centres. This also impacted the completion of appraisals.

### Next Steps

Identified KPI at Risk	Reasons as to why KPI has not been met	Action to be taken	Designated Officer	Date for Review
Appraisals	Sick leave impacted ability to conduct with staff.	To be completed ASAP on return of staff	VIS TD and Co-ordinator	Sept 2026
Customer Satisfaction at events	Satisfaction ratings were lower for Christmas events	Review of Christmas events and engagement with LAGs	Events Manager	June 2026
Average spend per person at events	This was narrowly missed but cost of living consideration	Monitoring in 26/27	Events Manager	Jan 2027

### Summary

The Tourism service will complete appraisals in line with the schedule agreed for 26/27.

## RECOMMENDATION

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

If multiple:





## Tourism - Performance Indicator Summary

Generated on: 26 May 2026













Last Update H1 2025/26

Performance Data Traffic Light Icon	PI Short Name	Performance Data Current Value	Performance Data Current Target
	% spend against budget	104.44%	100%
	% staff attendance	95.09%	94.5%

Last Update H2 2025/26

Performance Data Traffic Light Icon	PI Short Name	Performance Data Current Value	Performance Data Current Target
	Build capacity of the tourism/food and drink/events sectors (no. of training sessions)	21	10
	Development of Sustainable Transport at Events Delivery Plan	100%	100%
	Attendance at trade focused shows, tourism and food and drink	7	7
	Attendance at consumer-focused shows - tourism and food and drink	5	4
	No. of sites/events supported by visitor servicing outreach	22	22
	% of Out of Borough (OoB) ticket sales– experiences and walks and tours	55%	50%
	% increase in followers to Visit AND social media against previous year	26%	25%

If multiple:

Performance Data Traffic Light Icon	PI Short Name	Performance Data Current Value	Performance Data Current Target
	No. of targeted destination awareness AND PR articles – two themes to NI and ROI markets	49	20
	% engagement rate of ezines to tourism trade and consumer database	41%	35%
	% increase in followers to VisitStrangford social media against previous year	12%	5%
	Number of attendees at Tourism events	101,808	90,000
	% customer satisfaction at events	80.3%	85%
	% attendees from OoB at Tourism Events	27%	26%
	Average spend per attendee at Tourism Events	£14.06	£15.00
	Number of attendees /participants at Tourism grant-aided events	109,729	109,000
	Neighbourhood Tourism Development 2025/26 - groups assisted in development (No.1 service improvement)	8	4
	Number of engagements with North Down Museum Adult SEND Programme. 3 Groups	4	3
	4 no. community arts-based projects that help address areas of social need delivered in partnership	4	4
	% of completed Employee Appraisals in the period April 2025 to March 2026	80%	100%

Unclassified

**ITEM 12****Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	11 June 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Tourism, Arts and Heritage
Report title	Visitor Information Centre Review 2025/26
Attachments	Appendix 1 VIC Summary 2025/26
File Reference (if applicable)	TO/VIC4
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

The Tourism unit manages two permanent Visitor Information Centres (VICs) located in Bangor City centre (Tower House and the Market House – pilot site 2025) and Newtownards town centre. Open daily, Monday to Saturday, they service visitors (pre and during visit) and locals, by facilitating enquiries, encouraging longer dwell time and spend in the Borough, alongside providing a retail offering and ticketing service.

The service also operates a seasonal centre at Cockle Row Cottages, Groomsport, The Moat, visitor site at Donaghadee, plus facilitates a Local Information Visitor Information Office (LVIO) provision, through a Service Level Agreement at Exploris Aquarium, Portaferry.

This report provides an overview of the activity at Bangor and Newtownards Visitor Information Centres from April 2025 – March 2026 along with detail on both Cockle Row, The Moat and Exploris sites.

## Visitors and Enquiries

Within the VICs, the profile of visitors continued to be dominated by the ‘Staycation’ and ‘Day trip’ market.

The VIC’s are a primary point of contact for tourist information on the region and wider NI, as well as offering local ticket sales both for internal ANDBC activity and third parties.

88% of VIC customers were in person centre visits, highlighting the continued value of a face-to-face provision and the associated ambassadorial function.

Excluding self-service visitors or “browsers”, a total of 19,861 customers were serviced via direct engagement at the counter, telephone, or by post and email, overall, a slight decrease of 5% on the previous year. These enquiries cover a wide range of local topics from what’s on in the area, where to stay or eat, directions, local history, activities, attractions, ticket sales and wider NI information.

Bangor and Newtownards VIC’s	April 25 - March 26
Total footfall to the Centres*	21,478
<b>ENQUIRY TYPE</b>	
Face to face enquiries	16,910
Self-service visitors/browsers	4,568
Enquiries Post/Email	634
Enquiries Phone	2,317
<b>TOTAL SERVICED</b>	<b>24,429</b>

\*Combination of face to face and self-service visitors/browsers within centres.

Enquiries by origin (where known)	April 25 – March 26 % of total
NI	85%
GB & ROI	9%
Rest of the World	6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>

Origin of visitor remains largely on par with the previous year. NI increased by 2%, GB and ROI remain the same and the Rest of the World saw a small drop of 1%. Footfall was similar to last year (21,530).

**Income**

Whilst visitor information provision is the core function of the VICs, both permanent centres provide a retail space, comprising mainly of locally produced/sourced gifts, souvenirs and books, as per customer demand. Both VICs encourage sales via special promotions for residents which are advertised in local press, for example Christmas, Mother’s Day and Valentine’s Day, with themed displays, and regular “merchandising” to attract both new and repeat customers. Overall, the VIC’s combined brought more than £33,000 in income.

The VICs actively advertise a box office service allowing third parties e.g. drama/musical productions to be bookable online and via the Visit AND website. In 25/26 new and existing clients have made use of this service with continued positive feedback. The Box Office service generated an income of over £2,000 commission, an increase of 14% year on year.

Retail sales proved challenging, with continued higher costs of living a likely factor on “non-essential” purchases. Ards VIC spend per head was £2.02 (up from £1.79 the previous year) with Bangor VIC’s spend per head £1.86 down from £2.07.

Income type	April 25 - March 26
Retail sales	£31,438
Ticket sales commission	£2,037
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£33,475</b>

**VIC Performance Summary**

Overall, this year saw a slight decrease of 5% in level of enquiries (1,237 enquiries) with these customers likely serviced by the increasing traffic on the Visit AND website and social channels. Telephone calls and email queries rose by 32% but postal correspondence was almost zero.

The VIC team continued to engage with local tourism businesses developing effective ‘client’ relationships through trade ezine, phone calls and when staffing allows site visits.

The team actively support the wider Tourism section with ‘call outs’ to trade for campaigns, experiences and food and events programming, and the ticketing of the walks, tours, and experiences.

The centres also participated in seasonal activity with both Ards Chamber of Trade at Hallowe’en and Easter, and Bangor Chamber of Commerce at Christmas.

**Bangor VIC (Market House pilot 2025)**

Approved by Council in December 2025, Bangor VIC is located from April through September 2026 to the Market House, Main Street, following the successful pilot in 2025.

**Portaferry Local Visitor Information Office – Exploris Aquarium**

Located in reception it offers visitor servicing 10am – 5pm daily, seven days per week, all year (except for limited Christmas closure). In spring and summer, a prominent advertisement was installed on the slipway bus shelter and in The Square, highlighting the LVIO. With a high footfall of visitors to Exploris throughout the year, the exposure to visitors is significant. A new SLA has been developed with Exploris in 2026/27 as the previous three-year SLA had completed.

The provision consists of visitor literature, alongside an interactive touch screen highlighting what to explore in the Borough. Exploris staff are trained by ANDBC on the local tourism product and FAQs to address visitor enquiries directly.

In 2025, the Council provided additional visitor servicing support with availability of staff during July, August. Over 4,000 customers were serviced with visitor information at this site – enabling them to explore more of the region.

<b>Exploris LVIO</b>	
<b>ENQUIRY TYPE:</b>	
Exploris Face-To-Face Enquiries	2,819
ENQUIRIES supported by ANDBC Staff	1,418
<b>TOTAL SERVICED</b>	<b>4,237</b>

**Cockle Row Cottages, Groomsport**

The Cottages operate as a seasonal attraction and information centre with a small gift shop and heritage centre. Open daily June through to mid-September (Thursday–Sunday -11am–5pm) with free family weekend entertainment, between 2–4pm. Additional key dates of activity include Easter and Hallowe'en and support to the Groomsport Community Fun day in May by opening the Cottages.

The team also worked with local group, Discover Groomsport, and the Ulster-Scots Association to deliver activity across the 2025 season. Educational visits also returned with three visits totalling 96 pupils and one private group tour. Like last year the Cottages were featured on the small screen, this time for the BBC'1s popular daytime police drama series "Hope Street".

The Cottages attracted over 7,800 visitors, an increase of 17% on the previous season and generated almost £2,000 income. In 2026, a debit/credit card facility is to be installed to manage contactless payment which is hoped will increase sales.

### **The Moat Donaghadee**

In 2025 the management of the Moat and Camera Obscura in Donaghadee transferred from Regeneration to the Tourism Visitor Servicing team.

The site opens May-September, operating Saturdays and Sundays 10am – 4pm. During the 2025 season staff welcomed 1,585 visitors to the historic building – with 16% from GB, 4% ROI and 12% Rest of World.

### **Outreach Activity**

An additional 5,212 visitor enquiries were serviced at manned pop-up information stands throughout the season over 20 key dates. These ranged from Council tourism events to trade shows and “honeypot” sites such as Castle Espie. Regular outreach also happened at Bangor Castle Walled Garden and Pickie Fun Park when the weather was favourable and where staffing allowed.

### **Literature**

The Tourism service produces Visit AND literature e.g. visitor guide and map, with distribution via VIC staff to external sites. Outlets include Visit Belfast, Bangor Translink Station, Pickie Fun Park, Exploris, Pier 36 and other key tourism sites. Within AND almost 20,000 pieces of literature were distributed, highlighting continued demand for print. The VIC's also provide bedroom packs for the accommodation sector including hotels such as The Premier Inn, The Nines and Strangford Arms Hotel.

### **Online Activity**

Digital communication continues to grow as a source of information for the visitor. This is a trend continuing to grow with the inclusion of AI and therefore a crucial part of visitor messaging.

In relation to “Visit AND” channels (visitardsandnorthdown.com, Facebook and Instagram), VIC staff work with the Tourism Marketing Service to create content. For example, website content creation e.g. blogs. The team members also review the site for required updates along with contacting trade on a regular basis to encourage them to upload events/activity to our site.

*NB\* Figures in relation to user stats are currently reported to Place and Prosperity Committee as part of Service Unit KPI's*

Independently, Ards VIC continued to manage the Visit Strangford Lough Facebook page daily throughout the year. Through engaging posts, the page has a following of 11,000 followers (an organic increase with no paid promotion of 12% on the previous year) with positive interactions from users. Due to audit requirements the content is transitioning onto Visit AND and Newry Mourne and Down District Council facebook channels respectively. ANDBC users will be encouraged to sign up to the VisitAND page which will continue to promote Strangford Lough as part of its messaging.

### **Key Issues**

Consumer trends are likely to see a continuation of a move away from direct VIC visits for information provision. The service recognises the need for face to face provision but equally changing times regarding how visitors access information. Currently team members are moving to ‘visitors’ where possible e.g. sites where there will be large

footfall, provision of visitor literature at more sites away from VIC's and content provision for online activity such as social media.

Staffing has also been challenging with a change in workforce patterns and recent recruitment drives in the marketplace demonstrate fewer applicants are wishing to work as "casual" staff. Therefore, cover for seasonal additionality is beginning to prove difficult and on occasions restricting the ability to deliver the full service. This will be assessed during the incoming season and any changes in service provision will be brought back to the Council for consideration.

### **Summary**

Whilst new technology has improved accessibility to information, consumers still cite the value of face-to-face interaction with, 'welcome and hospitality'\*, rated highly among all aspects of a trip by consumers who had recently visited NI. The quality-of-service provision at the VIC and other sites providing the personal experience sought by visitors. The VIC statistics demonstrate that visitors seek the 'trusted' and 'personalised' service offered at VICs with face-to-face enquiries dominant at the centres. \*Tourism NI's Consumer Sentiment research 2025.

The Council's VICs continually engage with visitors promoting the Ards and North Down offering and have engaged with almost 40,000 customers, via its permanent VICs, Cockle Row, The Moat, Outreach and LVIO, and showcasing the region's tourism offering for holidays, short breaks, day trips and events.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

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

## VIC Summary 2025/26

### Ards VIC

2025/2026 saw a dramatic rise in online and telephone enquiries with the year seeing large events such as Armed Forces Day in the town. There was a small drop of 5% of in person visitors to the centre, with enquiries down -2% overall, however retail sales increased 8% alongside the average spend per visitor. (NB: due to staffing constraints the centre was unable to open on 3 days.)

NEWTOWNARDS VIC	25/26	24/25	COMPARISON
<b>ENQUIRIES TYPE</b>			
ELECTRONIC EYE	14,417	15,116	-5%
COUNTER	11,967	12,600	-5%
NON-ENQUIRIES	2,450	2,516	-3%
CORRESPONDENCE (post, email)	350	253	38%
PHONE	950	628	51%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>15,717</b>	<b>15,997</b>	<b>-2%</b>
<b>INCOME £</b>			
RETAIL SALES	£23,699.32	£22,131.84	7%
TICKET SALES COMMISSION	£572.22	£376.64	52%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£24,271.54.32</b>	<b>£22,508.48</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>AVERAGE SPEND PER VISITOR</b>	<b>£2.02</b>	<b>£1.79</b>	

### Bangor VIC

It should be noted that Bangor VICs relocation during summer months will have impacted these figures both in relation to overall increased enquiries and reduced retail spend. Enquiries were up overall 12%, however with the reduced retail space in the Market House there was an expected drop in retail sales. NB In 2026 the location within the Market House is an area that facilitates a larger retail space to aid sales.

BANGOR VIC	25/26	24/25	COMPARISON
<b>ENQUIRIES TYPE</b>			
ELECTRONIC EYE	7,061	6,414	10%
COUNTER	4,943	6,261	-21%
NON-ENQUIRIES	2,118	153	1284%
CORRESPONDENCE (post, email)	284	150	89%
PHONE	1,367	1,206	13%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8712</b>	<b>7,770</b>	<b>12%</b>
<b>INCOME £</b>			
RETAIL SALES	£7,739.09	£11,532.56	-33%
TICKET SALES COMMISSION	£1,465.55	£1,400.79	5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£9,204.64</b>	<b>£12,933.35</b>	<b>-29%</b>
<b>AVERAGE SPEND PER VISITOR</b>	<b>£1.86</b>	<b>£ 2.07</b>	

Unclassified

## ITEM 13

## Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	11 June 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Strategic Capital Development
Report title	Strategic Capital Development Half Yearly Performance Report
Attachments	Appendix 1 Strategic Capital Development Performance Report H2 2025-2026 - see page 6
File Reference (if applicable)	
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	None Narrative: Resources in place to deliver draft Service Plan.
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: Economic, Social and Environmental

## Background

Members will be aware that Council is required, under the Local Government Act 2014, to have in place arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions. To fulfil this requirement Council has in place a Performance Management Policy and Handbook. The Performance Management Handbook outlines the approach to the Performance Planning and Management process as:

- Community Plan – published every 10-15 years
- Corporate Plan – published every 4 years (Corporate Plan 2024 - 2028 in operation)
- Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) – published annually
- Service Plan – developed annually

The Council's 16 Service Plans outline how each respective Service will contribute to the achievement of the corporate objectives including, but not limited to, any relevant actions identified in the PIP.

## Reporting Approach

The Service Plans will be reported to relevant Committees on a half-yearly basis as undernoted:

Reference	Period	Reporting Month
Half Year (H1)	April – September	December
Half Year (H2)	October – March	June

The report for H2 is attached. End of year budget or attendance was not available at the time of writing the report.

## Corporate Plan 2024-2028

In line with the Corporate Plan 2024-2028, our service has contributed to 7 outcomes as follows: -

### Outcome 1

*An engaged Borough with citizens and businesses who have opportunities to influence the delivery of services, plans and investment*

#### Key achievements:

- Successfully led inclusive stakeholder engagement as part of the planning process for the BYC Water Sport Centre, Pickie Fun Park Redevelopment, involving a wide range of stakeholders including operational partners, local residents, youth voice and disability forum on resulting in a strong and positive response to the proposed developments.

### Outcome 2

*An environmentally sustainable and resilient Council and Borough meeting our net zero carbon targets*

**Key achievements:**

- Embedded BREEAM Excellent standards within all capital projects procurement processes, ensuring alignment with the Council's net zero ambitions and promoting high levels of environmental performance.

**Outcome 3**

*A thriving and sustainable economy*

**Key achievements:**

- Successfully delivered the Newtownards to Green Road Greenway on budget, securing 93% co-funding from DfI and LUF while embedding low maintenance bridge design solutions, finishing material and street furniture to ensure long-term economic sustainability and reduced lifecycle costs.
- Delivered over 840 Social Value Points against the required 420 points through the Newtownards to Green Road Greenway project by boosting local economy activity, supporting job creation, providing high quality inclusive infrastructure which promotes active travel, improves public health outcomes and strengthens community connectivity.

**Outcome 4**

*A vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors*

**Key achievements:**

- Successfully completed a programme of greenways, enhancing connectivity, accessibility, and the overall attractiveness of the Borough.
- Agreed a maintenance plan with internal stakeholders to enable a Handover of the Portaferry public realm back to DfI.
- Advanced the Bangor Waterfront Redevelopment Programme through significant progress in design development, supporting future regeneration and investment opportunities.

**Outcome 5**

*Safe, welcoming and inclusive communities that are flourishing*

**Key achievements:**

- Delivered greenways and the Portaferry public realm, creating safer, more inclusive, and accessible spaces which support community wellbeing and active lifestyles.

**Outcome 6**

*Opportunities for people to be active and healthy*

**Key achievements:**

- Completed a programme of greenways, providing accessible and safe active travel routes which encourage physical activity and healthier lifestyles.
- Identified and embedded a range of active living opportunities through the design development of the Bangor Waterfront Redevelopment Programme,

including BYC Bangor Water sports and enhanced active travel connections via the Urban Waterfront Public Realm.

- Enabled future sports provision by securing planning permission (valid until 2030) for the Portavogie 3G Pitch and Pavilion.

**Outcome 7**

*Ards and North Down Borough Council is a high performing organisation*

**Key achievements:**

- Implemented a new Electronic Document Management System, including the full migration of our SharePoint files, improving information management, accessibility and organisational efficiency.

**Key Issues**

As part of the commitment to continuous improvement, the annual Service Plan is reviewed on a monthly basis. The Service Risk register has also been reviewed to identify key issues and agree an actions required as detailed below: -

**Next Steps**

Identified KPI at Risk	Reasons as to why KPI has not been met	Action to be taken	Designated Officer	Date for Review
Seek planning permission for the development of Greenway A21 connection to Comber Greenway	DfI provided their permission to proceed with lodging the A21 application on 11 May 2026, i.e. outside this reporting period.	Officers are now seeking an updated quotation from their consultants to lodge an application. This should be a smooth application given that DfI and PSNI gave the design their approval in principle. Officers to ensure no delay for securing other statutory consultees feedback or approvals.	Graeme Bannister	H1 2026-27
Business case to increase cemetery provision within the Borough	This KPI should sit with the Senior Responsible Owner /Designated Officer remit. Delayed due to land acquisition issues.	Ongoing engagement with a landowner to secure a land at Ballymacormick Road.	Graeme Bannister	H1 2026-27
Support the delivery of the Capital Projects Portfolio	Navigated significant resource constraints from October 2025	Prioritise Phase 2 re-structuring in collaboration with the new Head of Section.	Brian Dorrian	H1 2026-27

Identified KPI at Risk	Reasons as to why KPI has not been met	Action to be taken	Designated Officer	Date for Review
	to May 2026, with two senior SUMs stepping up to sustain delivery of the capital projects portfolio under increased operational pressure.	<p>Ensure 1-2-1 appraisals are scheduled and completed in a timely manner to support staff wellbeing and performance.</p> <p>Progress timely recruitment of two Corporate Project Officers to replace existing vacancies (one resignation and one upcoming retirement).</p> <p>Retaining a reserve list to aid future recruitment.</p>		

**Summary**

The Strategic Capital Development service will complete appraisals in line with the schedule agreed for 2026-27 and will progress timely recruitment of two Corporate Project Officers to replace existing vacancies.

**RECOMMENDATION**

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

## Appendix 1 Strategic Capital Development Annual Performance Report H2 2025-2026

Gauge	Value	Target	Last Update	Next Update Due
✓	<a href="#">EC.03.CD.01 Support the delivery of the Capital Projects Portfolio</a>		100%	100%
✓	<a href="#">EC.03.CD.02 Implement Social Value in Council Procurement Policy by 31st March 2026 to consider how the services we commission and procure can improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the area.</a>		100%	100%
●	<a href="#">EC.03.CD.03 Seek planning permission for the development of Greenway A21 connection to Comber Greenway</a> (100% completed on 11 May 2026)		0%	100%
✓	<a href="#">EC.03.CD.05 Develop the Belfast Regeneration City Deal Waterfront development projects to Integrated Design Team stage.</a>		100%	100%
✓	<a href="#">EC.03.CD.09 Ward Park Redevelopment £5m appoint contractor</a>		100%	100%
●	<a href="#">EC.03.CD.11 Business case completed by 31st March 2026 to increase cemetery provision within the borough</a>		50%	100%
	<a href="#">EC.07.CD.01 % spend against budget</a>		TBC	100%
▲	<a href="#">EC.07.CD.02 % staff attendance</a>		93.42%	95%
✓	<a href="#">EC.07.CD.03 % of completed Employee Appraisals in the period April 2025 to March 2026</a>		100%	100%
✓	<a href="#">EC.07.CD.04 Professional development and accreditation</a>		140	140
✓	<a href="#">EC.07.CD.05 Enhancing Sustainability</a>		100%	100%
✓	<a href="#">SO.06.CD.02 Develop 5.4km Greenway - Floodgates to Green Road Project.</a>		100%	100%