

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

26 August 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 3 September 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

Deputation

3. Deputation from Bangor Chamber of Commerce regarding the proposal to establish a Business Improvement District (BID) for Bangor.

Reports for Approval

4. Bangor Business Awards 2026 (report attached)
5. Ards and North Down Economic Growth Conference 2027 – ‘Growth AND Confidence’ (report attached)
6. Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme (report attached)

Reports for Noting

7. Newtownards Christmas Switch On – Update Report 2026 (report attached)
8. Conway Square, Newtownards – Chess and Draughts Pilot (report attached)
9. Queen’s Parade Update Report (report attached)
10. Bangor Art Project: Proposed Location of The Crab Sculpture (report attached)
11. Local Action Group Meeting Minutes - Quarter 2 (report attached)

11.1 Bangor City LAG Minutes - 9 June 2026

11.2 Newtownards LAG Minutes -17 June 2026

11.3 Donaghadee LAG Minutes - 23 June 2026

11.4 Comber LAG Minutes - 29 June 2026

11.5 Holywood LAG Minutes - 30 June 2026

11.6 Bangor City LAG Special Meeting Minutes - 6 August 2026

12. Marine Gardens, Bangor: Update, Opening and Christmas 2026 (report attached)

13. Go Succeed Activity Update – Quarter 1 2026/27 (report attached)

14. Labour Market Partnership Quarterly Update Report (report attached)

15. Notices of Motion

15.1 Notice of Motion 726 referred to Committee by Council submitted by Alderman Smith and Councillor Chambers, that Council writes to the Department for Communities requesting a review of their current policy that stops businesses located outside of town centre core boundaries from applying for grant support.

15.2 Notice of Motion 729 referred to Committee by Council submitted by Councillor Cathcart and Councillor McClean, that this Council recognises that our city, towns and villages in our Borough are summer destinations for many. Therefore, the Council agrees to bring an officers' report back on reviving the annual 'Dressing the Town' budget which was previously provided for banners and bunting and other decorative measures during the summer months. The aim of such a budget would be to provide visitors and residents with a summer welcome to our Borough, especially our seaside destinations.

16. Any Other Notified Business

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

Reports for Approval (In Confidence)

17. Retrospective Single Tender Action – Marine Gardens Christmas Tree (report attached)

18. Belfast Region City Deal Annual Report 2025/26 (report attached)

MEMBERSHIP OF PLACE AND PROSPERITY COMMITTEE (16 MEMBERS)

Alderman Adair	Councillor Hollywood
Alderman Armstrong-Cotter	Councillor Kennedy
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 4

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	03 September 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Economic Growth
Report title	Bangor Business Awards 2026
Attachments	
File Reference (if applicable)	160094
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	Budget
	Narrative: Existing budget
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

Following the success of Bangor Business Awards held in 2025, Bangor Chamber of Commerce has planned to host the annual business awards ceremony 2026 to celebrate the achievements and successes of our local business community.

The Bangor Business Awards ceremony will take place on 5 November 2026 in the Clandeboye Lodge, Bangor.

The Bangor Business Awards will launch on 1 September, with entries closing on 29 September 2026. The finalists will be announced on 8 October 2026 following the judging.

For the 2026 awards, the Council will be a supporting sponsor of the Bangor Business Awards and sponsor of the Professional Business Services Company of the Year category at a cost of £3,000, which is covered within this year's Economic Growth revenue budget allocation. As part of the package, six complimentary tickets are being made available to the Council. Two of these tickets have been allocated to the Mayor and the Chief Executive as guests of the Chamber.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council Approves support for the Bangor Business Awards and nominates a maximum of four Members to attend the Awards Ceremony on 5 November 2026 at Clandeboye Lodge, Bangor.

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	03 September 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Economic Growth
Report title	Ards and North Down Economic Growth Conference 2027 - 'Growth AND Confidence'
Attachments	
File Reference (if applicable)	
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	Budget and Staffing Narrative: Budget and staffing can be met from existing.
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	Priority 1: Economic 4. A vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors If multiple:

Background

Members will be aware that the Economic Growth Service has recently been established following the organisational restructure. The Service brings together Regeneration, Strategic Development, Economic Development and Development Projects, creating a stronger platform to align economic activity, regeneration priorities and investment opportunities across the Borough.

The Economic Development section has previously delivered a bi-annual Economic Development Conference. The most recent conference, held in 2024 under the theme of “Transformation”, focused on digital, social and climate transformation and was aimed at local business owners, senior managers, business support representatives and future business leaders.

Members will also be aware that new Local Action Groups have been established for the Borough’s urban areas. Their agreed Terms of Reference include provision for an annual conference focused on regeneration and placemaking, to support the ongoing positioning, vibrancy and development of Bangor City and the Borough’s town centres.

Officers consider that there is a timely opportunity to integrate these separate conference commitments into one distinctive Borough wide Economic Growth Business Conference. This would reduce duplication, make best use of officer, partner and business input, and create a higher profile platform to promote the Borough’s economic ambition, investment potential, regeneration priorities and business support offer.

A budget for this was agreed as part of the rate setting process last year.

The purpose of this report is to seek Members’ approval to progress the development and delivery of a new Borough wide Economic Growth Business Conference, themed **Growth AND Confidence**.

The proposed event would replace the former bi-annual Economic Development Conference and the proposed annual Local Action Group conference, creating one integrated, partnership-led conference programme for businesses, investors, stakeholders, communities and partners across both urban and rural areas of Ards and North Down.

Strategic Rationale

The proposed conference aligns with the Integrated Tourism, Regeneration and Economic Development Strategy by connecting economic growth, visitor economy, regeneration, investment and place improvement within one strategic platform. It would provide a practical mechanism to communicate the Borough’s proposition, showcase delivery, and strengthen confidence in future opportunities.

The proposal supports the Council’s economic priorities outlined in the Corporate Plan, including the delivery of a thriving and sustainable economy; a vibrant, attractive and sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors; and an engaged Borough where citizens, businesses and stakeholders have opportunities to influence services, plans and investment.

The conference would be unique in bringing together the full remit of the new Economic Growth Service within one shared conversation. It would demonstrate the clear interrelationship between business growth, regeneration, investment, skills, infrastructure, innovation, town centre vitality, rural enterprise and placemaking.

Proposed Conference

It is proposed that the new conference is delivered as the Ards and North Down Economic Growth Business Conference, with the overarching theme of Growth AND Confidence.

The conference would be designed to build confidence in Ards and North Down as a place to start, grow, locate, invest and collaborate, while providing a clear and positive statement of intent about the Borough's economic future.

The event would bring together local businesses, start-ups, investors, potential investors, developers, funders, anchor organisations, community stakeholders, civic partners and elected members. It would provide a single platform to showcase the Borough's ambition and momentum, promote practical opportunities for growth, and encourage stronger connections between those who influence, invest in and deliver economic outcomes.

The conference will cover both urban and rural areas of the Borough. It would position Bangor City and the Borough's towns as important centres of urban economic growth, while also recognising the contribution of rural businesses, villages, the Ards Peninsula, coastal communities and the wider rural economy as essential parts of the Borough's distinctive growth story.

Indicative Format and Content

The duration and final format of the conference will be determined in consultation with partners. It is anticipated that the programme will include keynote speakers, panel discussions, local and regional case studies, breakout sessions, networking opportunities and sponsorship or exhibition space.

Indicative themes may include business growth, investment readiness, barriers to growth, access to finance, regeneration-led growth, town and city centre vitality, rural enterprise, innovation, skills, infrastructure, collaboration and future prosperity.

The programme would be developed to ensure practical value for attendees, with a strong focus on improved confidence in the Borough's economic direction. It will showcase credible examples from within and beyond the Borough, highlight where investment and business opportunities are emerging, and provide attendees with clearer next steps and a stronger understanding of Ards and North Down as a place where business can start, stay, scale and succeed.

Expected Outcomes

The conference is intended to deliver a range of practical outcomes which extend beyond the day itself. It will provide a visible and positive platform to demonstrate confidence in the Borough's economic future, while creating opportunities for businesses, investors, partners and communities to connect around shared priorities for growth.

- Improved business confidence through a stronger understanding of the Borough's growth ambitions, investment opportunities and support available to local businesses.
- Greater visibility for Ards and North Down as a place to start, stay, scale, invest and collaborate, with a clear proposition for both urban and rural growth.
- Stronger connections between businesses, investors, developers, funders, Chambers of Commerce, Local Action Groups, community representatives and public sector partners.
- Increased awareness of regeneration priorities, town and city centre opportunities, rural enterprise potential and wider economic development activity across the Borough.
- Identification of practical follow-up actions, including potential business leads, partnership opportunities, sponsorship relationships, investor engagement and future collaboration.
- A strengthened evidence base from delegate feedback, partner input and post-event evaluation to inform future Economic Growth Service planning, policy development and programme delivery.

These outcomes will support the Council's objective of creating a more confident, connected and ambitious business environment, while ensuring that future economic growth activity is informed by local need, visible opportunities and meaningful partnership engagement.

Partnership Approach

The conference would be developed and delivered through a partnership approach. Officers have commenced initial engagement and will continue to work with key partners, including the Ards and North Down Business Forum, Chambers of Commerce, relevant Council services and wider public, private and community partners. This will ensure the conference is shaped by business need, reflects local priorities and benefits from the credibility, reach and expertise of partners.

This partnership-led model is central to the proposed conference. It will help ensure that the event is not positioned solely as a Council initiative, but as a shared Borough wide platform for economic confidence, collaboration and delivery. It also provides an opportunity to strengthen relationships with business representative organisations, encourage sponsorship and partner contributions, and build a sustained network of support beyond the conference itself.

Next Steps

Detailed budget, venue, sponsorship, partnership and delivery requirements will be developed as part of the next stage of planning. Officers will explore opportunities to align existing service budgets with sponsorship income, partner support and in-kind contributions.

A detailed project plan will be prepared, including programme development, speaker engagement, venue and logistics, marketing and communications, sponsorship, stakeholder engagement and post-event evaluation.

The Council will consider the implications of the proposal under Section 75, Rural Needs, Data Protection, Climate and Sustainability requirements as planning progresses. The inclusive Borough wide focus of the conference will ensure that both urban and rural needs are considered, and that the programme is designed to be accessible, relevant and beneficial to a wide range of businesses, communities and stakeholders.

Summary

The proposed Ards and North Down Economic Growth Business Conference represents a timely opportunity to create one distinctive, Borough wide platform for economic confidence, collaboration and inclusive growth.

By bringing together the former Economic Development Conference and the proposed Local Action Group conference, the event would reduce duplication, strengthen partnership working and provide a more coherent way to showcase the Borough's investment proposition, regeneration priorities, business support offer and urban and rural growth opportunities.

Under the theme of Growth AND Confidence, the conference would provide practical value for businesses, investors, communities and partners by improving awareness, strengthening connections, encouraging follow-up actions and building confidence in Ards and North Down as a place to start, stay, scale, invest and collaborate. The partnership-led approach, involving the Business Forum, Chambers of Commerce, and wider stakeholders, will be central to ensuring the conference is relevant, credible and outcome-focused.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council **Approves** officers to progress the development of a new borough wide Ards and North Down Economic Growth Conference, themed Growth AND Confidence. The conference will replace the former Economic Development Conference and the proposed Local Action Group conference, creating one distinctive, outcome-focused and partnership-led platform to showcase the Borough's economic ambition.

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	03 September 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Economic Growth
Report title	Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme
Attachments	
File Reference (if applicable)	
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	Staffing
	Narrative: Resource to deliver new funding streams.
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 Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme was launched in 2025 as a coordinated package of support aimed at revitalising and regenerating the Borough's high streets. The programme provides practical, visible and place-based interventions that are already supporting existing businesses, stimulating private sector investment, addressing vacancy and dereliction, improving the appearance of commercial premises, and strengthening the overall competitiveness and appeal of city and town centres.

The programme directly contributes to the Council's Corporate Plan outcomes by supporting a thriving and sustainable economy and helping to create a vibrant, attractive and sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors. It also aligns with city and town centre masterplan priorities by translating strategic regeneration ambitions into visible delivery on the ground, with investment focused on place, premises and public realm.

Programme Overview

The Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme has been designed as a multi-layered programme of support, with each strand responding to a specific high street challenge. The programme includes support for active businesses seeking shopfront improvements, owners of vacant or derelict premises seeking to bring units back into use, smaller-scale shopfront refresh works, and wider public realm and environmental improvements. Collectively, these strands provide a coherent package of regeneration support that is delivering visible improvements, improving business confidence, enhancing streetscapes, increasing the attractiveness of town centre locations, and helping to create the conditions for increased footfall, dwell time and further private sector investment.

To date, three strands of support have been launched:

- Glow Up Grant Scheme
- Empty to Energised Pilot Grant Scheme
- Freshen Up Grant Scheme

In addition, two funding applications have been submitted to further support the programme: the Clean City and Tidy Towns Scheme and a further Vacancy and Dereliction Scheme.

Glow Up Grant Scheme Update

The Glow Up Grant was the first strand of support launched under the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme. The scheme provided capital grant assistance of up to a maximum of £2,500 to active businesses to support shopfront improvement works. It has enabled businesses to invest directly in their premises, deliver highly visible street-facing improvements, and contribute to a stronger, more attractive and more commercially appealing high street environment.

The scheme is now complete and all claims have been processed.

A total of 146 businesses were supported to improve their shop frontage: 69 in Bangor, 22 in Comber, 12 in Donaghadee, 10 in Holywood, and 33 in Newtownards.

In total, £404,427.93 has been invested in capital works to upgrade shopfronts, with £285,178.46 awarded through the scheme.

The scheme has demonstrated strong business engagement and has delivered a measurable regeneration impact by improving 146 shopfronts, leveraging wider capital investment, encouraging business pride in premises, and creating a more consistent and positive visual impression across key city and town centre locations.

It should also be highlighted that the scheme received runner up in the category ‘Best Business Support Scheme’ at the 2026 Association of Town and City Management Awards. The awards recognise the very best in urban place management across the UK.

Empty to Energised Pilot Grant Scheme Update

The Empty to Energised Pilot Grant Scheme was launched in early 2026 to support owners of vacant and/or derelict properties in Bangor and Newtownards to undertake transformation works that will assist in bringing premises back into active commercial use. The scheme responds directly to vacancy and dereliction challenges within high streets and seeks to convert underused and visually negative properties into productive commercial assets that support footfall, business activity and town centre vitality.

The scheme is being delivered as a targeted intervention and will provide a valuable evidence base for future regeneration activity. By supporting property owners to invest in vacant premises, the scheme is helping to reduce blight, improve the appearance of key streets, unlock premises for occupation, create opportunities for new business activity, and strengthen the long-term resilience of city and town centres.

The pilot received 19 applications, with 12 Offers in Principle issued. This represents £271,456 in grant commitments and anticipated total investment of £500,283.67.

Bangor Current Position		
Outcome	Number	Location Breakdown
Applications received	10	6 High Street; 2 Abbey Street; 1 Hamilton Road; 1 Bloomfield Road South
Passed assessment and received Offer in Principle	7	4 High Street; 2 Abbey Street; 1 Hamilton Road
Applications with permission to start to date	5	3 High Street, 1 Hamilton Road, 1 Abbey Street

Bangor received 10 applications, seven of which received Offers in Principle. Five projects have permission to start, with £48,427.20 grant released upfront. Two projects are at midpoint review and are expected to near completion by the end of summer.

Newtownards Current Position		
Outcome	Number	Location Breakdown
Applications received	9	3 South Street; 2 North Street; 3 Frances Street; 1 Bangor Road
Passed assessment and received Offer in Principle	5	1 South Street; 1 North Street; 2 Frances Street; 1 Bangor Road
Applications with permission to start to date	2	1 Frances Street; 1 Bangor Road
Completed project	1	10b Frances Street

Newtownards received nine applications, five of which received Offers in Principle. Two projects have permission to start, with £12,285.60 grant released upfront. One project, at 10b Frances Street, is complete with a tenant in place.

Officers will continue to support delivery, monitor progress, and capture learning from the pilot to inform future programme development, including opportunities to scale interventions that demonstrate clear outcomes in reducing vacancy, attracting tenants and improving the commercial environment.

Freshen Up Grant Scheme Update

The Freshen Up Grant is the most recent strand of support launched under the programme. It is aimed at supporting smaller-scale improvements, specifically painting and power washing of shopfronts, to help businesses improve the presentation of their premises, protect previous investment, and contribute to cleaner, brighter and more welcoming streetscapes. Eligible applicants can apply for grant up to £1,500 with a minimum 10% trader contribution.

The grant provides a practical, accessible form of support that enables businesses to make quick, visible improvements. This helps maintain momentum following the Glow Up Grant Scheme, supports business confidence, improves the customer experience, and reinforces the overall quality and presentation of the high street environment.

To date, a total of 117 Letters of Offer have been issued: 48 in Bangor, 26 in Comber, 7 in Donaghadee, 7 in Holywood, and 29 in Newtownards. This represents a total capital works value of £174,378.80, of which £143,389.62 has been allocated as grant award.

Clean City and Tidy Towns Scheme – Funding Application

An application has been submitted to the Department for Communities for funding to deliver the Clean City and Tidy Towns scheme as a further strand of the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme. The proposed scheme is intended to improve and enhance the public realm across the five urban centres of Bangor, Comber, Donaghadee, Holywood and Newtownards.

The proposed scheme seeks to protect previous investment in the public realm, address areas of wear and tear, improve the appearance, safety and functionality of

high streets, support business confidence, and create more welcoming, accessible and attractive places for residents, visitors and investors. In doing so, it will help ensure that investment in individual premises is matched by improvements to the wider setting in which businesses operate.

Delivering the Clean City and Tidy Towns scheme following the Glow Up Grant Scheme will create a stronger cumulative impact. While shopfront improvements enhance individual premises and support business pride, improvements to the wider public realm will strengthen the overall setting in which those businesses operate. The combined approach will improve the pedestrian experience, safety, accessibility and visual appeal, helping to encourage increased footfall, longer dwell time and greater confidence in the high street. This integrated package will maximise the value of public and private investment already made and reinforce the Borough's city and town centres as attractive places to visit, trade, invest and spend time.

An application has been prepared, seeking £900,000 from the Department for Communities. The application includes a minimum Council contribution of 10% (£90,000).

The budget will be split over two financial years, as detailed below:

Year 1: 2026/27 | Department for Communities: £600,000 | Council: £60,000

Year 2: 2027/28 | Department for Communities: £300,000 | Council: £30,000

The proposed works will focus on targeted public realm enhancements, including cleaning, repair, replacement and enhancement of street furniture, planters, bins, signage, lighting features, paving, minor infrastructure, CCTV infrastructure, placemaking initiatives to dress towns and enhance local identity, and other visible elements of the public realm, subject to local need, statutory approvals and procurement requirements. Priority will be given to interventions that are deliverable within the funding period, provide a strong visual impact, improve safety and accessibility, support community reassurance, and complement existing and planned regeneration activity.

Local Growth Fund – Vacancy and Dereliction Scheme – Funding Application

An opportunity has become available for the Council to apply to the Department for Communities for funding to deliver a new vacancy and dereliction scheme under the Local Growth Fund. An application is currently being prepared, requesting £300,000, which would be matched by a 10% Council contribution and a minimum 20% applicant contribution.

The Department has identified delivery timescales as a key risk. Funding is likely to be confirmed in September 2026, with all projects required to be completed by 31 March 2027. Given the short delivery timeframe, it is proposed that only projects with planning permission in place, or written evidence confirming that planning permission is not required, will be eligible to apply.

The proposed scheme would build on the objectives of the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme by providing a further targeted intervention to address vacancy, support property improvement and encourage the productive re-use of underused premises. This will help increase the supply of occupiable commercial space, support

new and growing businesses to access suitable premises, and reduce the visual and economic impact of long-term vacancy within town centre locations.

The scheme will provide targeted capital grant assistance to owners of vacant and/or derelict properties to renovate premises and bring them back into active commercial use for rental purposes. The scheme will be made available across the five urban areas of Bangor, Comber, Donaghadee, Holywood and Newtownards (within the town centre boundary).

The proposed scheme is currently being developed alongside existing and emerging funding streams focused on vacancy and dereliction. These include Council funding for the Empty to Energised Scheme and Department for Finance funding linked to the Local Economic Partnership. Officers are working to coordinate these strands of support to create a more comprehensive vacancy and dereliction programme, capable of responding to a wider range of opportunities across the Borough.

Should the application be successful, approval is sought for officers to accept the funding, enter into any necessary funding agreement subject to normal governance requirements, and proceed to develop and deliver a Vacancy and Dereliction Scheme in coordination with existing and emerging funding streams focused on vacancy and dereliction.

Summary

The Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme has provided a coordinated, visible and outcome-focused package of support for high streets across Ards and North Down.

The Glow Up Grant, Empty to Energised Pilot Grant and Freshen Up Grant have each responded to specific regeneration challenges and have supported businesses and property owners to invest in their premises. Together, these schemes are improving the appearance of high streets, leveraging additional capital investment, reducing the negative impact of vacancy, supporting business confidence, and helping to create more attractive, active and commercially resilient city and town centres.

The Clean City and Tidy Towns application and the new Vacancy and Dereliction funding will provide further opportunities to build on this momentum, protect previous investment, address vacancy, and improve the overall quality, attractiveness and economic performance of the Borough's city and town centres.

The programme was originally intended to provide £1 million of support to the Borough's high streets; however, the combined value of the various programme strands and funding applications has now more than doubled this initial level of investment. This demonstrates the programme's success in building momentum, attracting additional resources, and positioning high street regeneration as a key delivery mechanism for economic growth, placemaking and town centre renewal.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council **Notes** the overview and progress update on the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme, including the Glow Up Grant, the Empty to Energised Pilot Grant, the Freshen Up Grant and the Clean City & Tidy Towns funding application.

It is recommended that Council **Approves** officers to accept an offer of funding from the Department for Communities for a Vacancy and Dereliction Scheme should the application be successful.

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	03 September 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Tourism, Arts and Heritage
Report title	Newtownards Christmas Switch On 2026 - Update Report
Attachments	n/a
File Reference (if applicable)	
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	Budget and Contractual Narrative: Budget as allocated and contracts for delivery
Screening Requirements	<i>The Council will commit to consider the implication of all reports under the categories of Section 75, Rural Needs, Data Protection, Climate and Sustainability:</i> Screening of report not required
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Priority 3: Social 4. A vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors If multiple: Safe, welcoming and inclusive communities that are flourishing

Background

In November 2025, the Place and Prosperity Committee received an update on the 2025 Christmas Switch On programming for Bangor and Newtownards. The report outlined plans for future Elected Member engagement in the Christmas Switch On planning cycle for 2026. It was agreed by the Council that once the Local Action Groups (LAGs) were reconstituted, Officers would attend meetings to allow the Events Team to present programming ideas at the early stages. The minutes of these meetings would be reported to the Place and Prosperity Committee, whereby all Elected Members would have the opportunity to be informed.

Elected Members have been nominated onto each of the LAGs along with other representatives from each of the areas.

To date, in 2026, the Events team attended the below Newtownards LAG meetings:

Newtownards Local Action Group, 21 April 2026

Newtownards Local Action Group, 12 May 2026 (Special meeting to discuss Christmas).

The minutes and associated papers specific to Christmas Switch Ons were presented to the Place and Prosperity Committee on 12 June 2026. The minutes of the Newtownards LAG on 12 May 2026 outlined an agreed approach by the LAG members for the Newtownards Switch On programme.

A request for a further update on Newtownards programming was made at the Place and Prosperity Committee on 11 June 2026. The LAG has received an update directly in recent weeks.

Christmas Switch On, Newtownards town centre and Conway Square – 28 November 2026

- Approximate times – 4.30pm - 6pm (tbc)
- Theme – ‘Light’
- Procession – 4.30pm leaves Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex (tbc)
- Switch On – 5.30pm (tbc) includes the arrival of procession, followed by a short performance by the lead band from the procession and Mayoral Switch On.
- Budget £30,000

The Procession

The procurement of this element of the event is in progress with appointment to be complete by the start of September. Content remains indicative until the process is complete, however, the procurement document outlines potential provision of bands, performers, themed floats, liaison with schools and/or other community groups and organisations.

The route is still in planning but is intended to take in as much of the town centre as possible and will be finalised with the appointed supplier of the procession. It will

culminate at Conway Square with static performances, followed by a short performance by the lead band, and a countdown ceremony with the Mayor and other Newtownards representatives.

Additional Activity

The usual Saturday market will continue as normal, with some reconfiguration of the layout to incorporate some of the parking bays nearest the road. This will allow space for the stage/performance area to be set up in advance. Officers will encourage the traders to adopt a Christmas theme to distinguish the market as part of a special day. Officers have and will continue to liaise with Market representatives on this aspect, who have greeted this favourably to date. The 'Passport' will be developed by officers with interested businesses. Businesses in Newtownards benefit from this initiative and their creativity and commitment have resulted in over 1000 passports being given out in previous years.

Officers were asked by the LAG members to explore different sites which may be suitable for some additional food trucks to accommodate the number of visitors to the town centre. Officers have concluded that the Mill Street car park is the most suitable given its size and location. It will be able to accommodate food trucks, the necessary queuing requirements and is within close proximity of Conway Square.

The Square will be set up during the event morning to accommodate a small stage and suitable walkway while the traditional market is taking place.

Summary

The engagement process via the LAG has assisted with programming for the Newtownards event. The minutes of all LAG meetings will be presented to the Place and Prosperity Committee to inform Elected Members of relevant Event programming decisions going forward.

RECOMMENDATION

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

Unclassified

ITEM 8

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	03 September 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Tourism Arts and Heritage
Report title	Conway Square, Newtownards – Chess and Draughts Pilot
Attachments	N/A
File Reference (if applicable)	ART 07/ 09 26
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	None
	Narrative: Minimal Impact on existing budget and operating arrangement
Screening Requirements	<i>The Council will commit to consider the implication of all reports under the categories of Section 75, Rural Needs, Data Protection, Climate and Sustainability:</i> Screening of report not required
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Priority 3: Social 6. Opportunities for people to be active and healthy If multiple:

Background

In August 2026, the Arts and Heritage Manager was contacted by an Elected Member regarding the 'Chess' tables in Conway Square. The request was to consider facilitating a 'deposit and return' system for the use of chess or draught sets for the tables previously installed by the Regeneration Service (now Economic Growth) in 2024. The Elected Member had noted that the tables were not being used to play chess as intended.

Next Steps

The Arts Service has considered the request and will run a pilot test during the period (remainder of) August-October 2026 and April-October 2027. The game pieces have been purchased using a minimal allocation of existing budget from the Arts Service.

Officers have purchased three chess sets and three draughts sets. These will be available for customer use by a 'deposit and return' basis. The deposit will be £10. The service will be available during Arts Centre Office opening hours and promoted via the Arts and Tourism service's normal digital channels and posters will be displayed in the Town Hall and Visitor Information Centre.

The pilot will allow officers to test the demand and monitor the use of the service.

RECOMMENDATION

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

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	03 September 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	
Report title	Queen's Parade Update Report
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Bangor Marine Phase 1A April 2026 Appendix 2 - Bangor Marine Phase 1A August 2026
File Reference (if applicable)	RDP 63
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	Choose an item. Narrative: None
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

At the meeting of the Council held on 29 April 2026 Bangor Marine gave a detailed report on the progress of phase 1 of the Queen's Parade Development Project. This included the works at Marine Gardens and the McKee Clock Arena. Also detailed in the report were several new proposals including a much enlarged and fully accessible play park, the relocation of the westerly pavilion and the creation of an 80-space car park. The Council agreed to the proposals subject to planning permission being obtained. Consent from the Crown Estate is also required. The necessary planning application has now been submitted and discussions with the Crown Estate are ongoing.

As part of the update report, it was advised by Bangor Marine that they anticipated having the area shown as phase 1a on the map attached at appendix 1 completed by late October. This would mean that the area would be handed back to the Council and the large sculpture could be installed and launched and a substantial Christmas programme undertaken as well as other animation activities. However, at a recent Queen's Parade Project Board Meeting, Bangor Marine has now advised that the completion of this area will not be possible due to a number of reasons, but especially due to it being one of the wettest periods during 2026 which resulted in the concrete areas not being able to be laid and also some of the materials, specially from China, not being delivered on time.

Bangor Marine has confirmed that the area shown on the map at appendix 2 will be completed and handed over by the start of November.

The out workings of this now means that the Christmas programme as initially planned will have to be revised and a separate report on this is on the agenda. Also, a reduced animation programme will only be possible until the remainder of the site is completed.

It also means that the large hands art piece cannot be erected and launched in the Autumn. In discussions with the artist, it has been agreed that due to this it would now be more appropriate to store the three art pieces when completed and erect and launch all three in the Spring when it is expected that the remaining sections of Marine Gardens, except for those parts subject to the planning application, will be finished and returned to the Council.

Summary

It is disappointing that due to a number of factors Bangor Marine will not have progressed the scheme as much as anticipated. However, the McKee Clock arena will be returned to the Council and the main Christmas "switch on" and other activities will take place there and some animation can be programmed. It is also now felt that the storing of the 3 art pieces, once completed and then all launched together in Spring 2027, may have more of an impact.

RECOMMENDATION

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



PHASE 1A

PHASE 1B

Anticipated Location of Voyager Sculpture

Colin Davidson's Sculpture

Pastie Man Sculpture

Area Subject to Further Development

Christmas Tree location

Sub. Station

Proposed Trees

Band Stand

DJ Table

Location of Parking Availability Signage

Drinking Fountain

Table Foot Volleyball

Picnic Table

Picnic Table

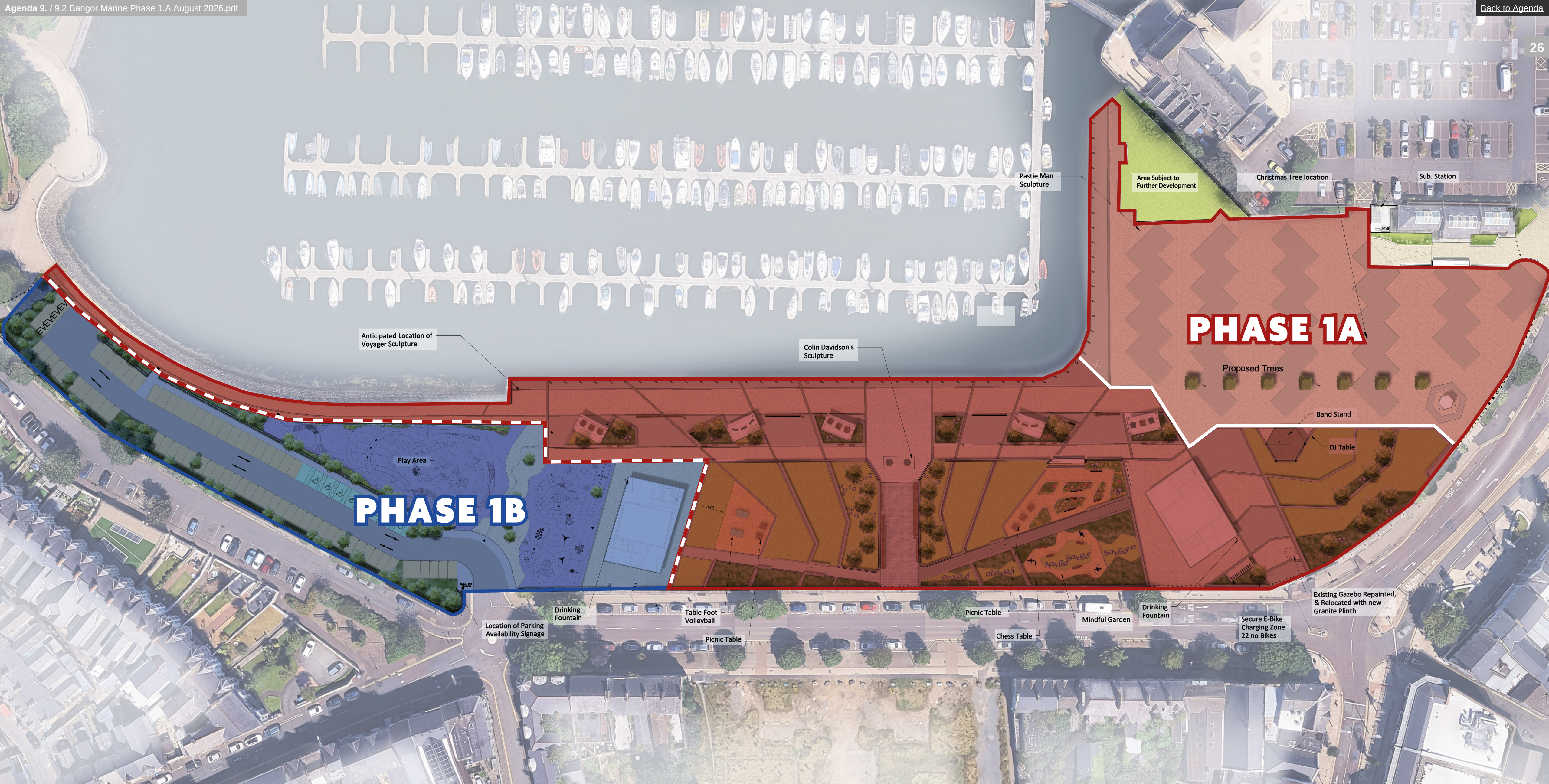
Chess Table

Mindful Garden

Drinking Fountain

Secure E-Bike Charging Zone
22 no Bikes

Existing Gazebo Repainted,
& Relocated with new
Granite Plinth



PHASE 1A

PHASE 1B

Anticipated Location of Voyager Sculpture

Colin Davidson's Sculpture

Pastie Man Sculpture

Area Subject to Further Development

Christmas Tree location

Sub. Station

Proposed Trees

Band Stand

DJ Table

Play Area

Location of Parking Availability Signage

Drinking Fountain

Table Foot Volleyball

Picnic Table

Picnic Table

Chess Table

Mindful Garden

Drinking Fountain

Secure E-Bike Charging Zone
22 no Bikes

Existing Gazebo Repainted,
& Relocated with new
Granite Plinth

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	03 September 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Economic Growth
Report title	Bangor Art Project: Proposed Location of The Crab Sculpture
Attachments	Appendix 1 – Proposed Location and Layout of The Crab Sculpture
File Reference (if applicable)	
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	Budget and Staffing
	Narrative: The project is jointly funded by DfC and Council. No additional budget provision is required.
Screening Requirements	<i>The Council will commit to consider the implication of all reports under the categories of Section 75, Rural Needs, Data Protection, Climate and Sustainability:</i>
	Screening of report not required
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Priority 1: Economic
	Multiple If multiple: 1. An engaged Borough with citizens and businesses who have opportunities to influence the delivery of services, plans and investment

If multiple:

	4. A vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors 5. Safe, welcoming and inclusive communities that are flourishing
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Background

At the Place and Prosperity Committee meeting in September 2025, members considered an update on the Bangor Art Sculptures project. During discussion, members were advised that concerns had been raised through the Council's Disability Forum regarding the proposed location of *The Crab* sculpture on Eisenhower Pier. The main concern was in relation to accessibility and potential health and safety implications. Members were further advised that additional engagement would take place with the Disability Forum and other relevant stakeholders before the proposal progressed.

Key Issues

A comprehensive consultation process was undertaken to inform the proposed location of *The Crab* sculpture. The primary stakeholder engagement was undertaken through the Council's Disability Forum, which requested further discussion and a site visit to review the proposed location at Eisenhower Pier. Forum representatives highlighted the importance of accessibility and suggested that additional stakeholders, including the RNLI, Harbour Authorities and Coastguard, should be involved in the assessment process.

Council officers worked closely with the Disability Forum between January and March 2026 to facilitate engagement and arrange site-based discussions. This culminated in a site meeting on 6 March 2026 involving Disability Forum representatives, project consultants and Council officers.

To support an informed discussion, the project team arranged for the proposed sculpture footprint to be physically marked out on site. Supporting drawings and plans were also made available to attendees, enabling stakeholders to consider the scale, positioning and operational implications of the proposal in its intended location. The proposed location and layout of the sculpture are shown in Appendix 1.

Next Steps

The consultation process has informed the final proposal, which has now been submitted as a formal planning application and is currently being considered through the statutory planning process. Officers will continue to liaise with relevant stakeholders as the planning process progresses and will ensure that accessibility, safety and inclusivity considerations continue to be reflected in the delivery of the project.

Summary

Following concerns raised through the Council's Disability Forum, further consultation and a site assessment were undertaken on the proposed location of *The Crab* sculpture. The feedback received informed the final proposal, which has now been submitted for consideration through the statutory planning process.

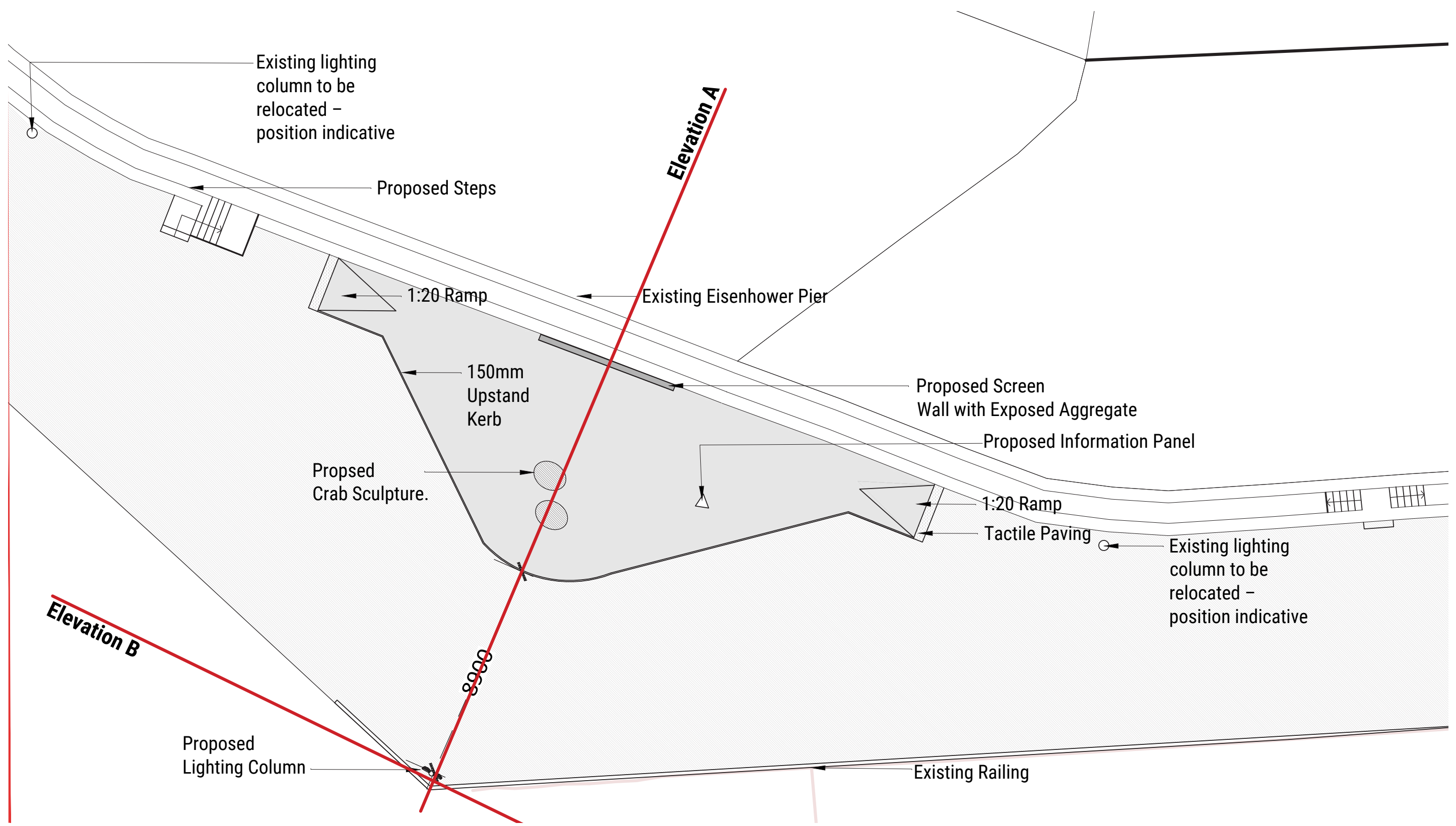
RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council Notes the consultation undertaken in relation to the proposed location of *The Crab* sculpture and notes that the sculpture is now subject to the statutory planning process.

Location Plan - Crab Sculpture



Note: Drawing NTS



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	03 September 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Economic Growth
Report title	Local Action Group Meeting Minutes - Quarter 2
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Bangor City LAG Minutes 09 June 2026 Appendix 2 - Newtownards LAG Minutes 17 June 2026 Appendix 3 - Donaghadee LAG Minutes 23 June 2026 Appendix 4 - Comber LAG Minutes 29 June 2026 Appendix 5 - Holywood LAG Minutes 30 June 2026 Appendix 6 - Bangor City LAG Special Meeting Minutes 06 August 2026
File Reference (if applicable)	
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	Budget and Staffing Narrative: Previously agreed
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

If multiple:

Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Priority 1: Economic 4. A vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors If multiple:
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Background

The Local Action Groups provide an important mechanism for ongoing engagement with local stakeholders across the city and towns. They bring together representatives from business, community and wider stakeholder interests to help identify local priorities, consider emerging issues, and support the delivery of regeneration activity in line with agreed priorities and town/city centre objectives.

Through regular meetings, the Groups provide a forum for discussion on local opportunities, challenges and project ideas, while also supporting collaboration between Council and local partners. This engagement helps ensure that regeneration activity remains informed by local knowledge and responsive to the needs of each town.

Members will be aware that the Local Action Groups meet on a quarterly basis. The minutes of the Quarter 2 meetings are attached for Members’ consideration. In addition, a special meeting of the Bangor Local Action Group was held, and the minutes of this meeting are also attached.

Next Steps

Members should note that a series of workshops have been arranged with the Local Action Groups to review Masterplan priorities and develop project ideas for delivery during 2026/27. The purpose of the workshops is to provide a focused opportunity for each Group to consider the relevant Masterplan priorities for their area.

The workshops will also help to establish a clearer understanding of stakeholder priorities, potential resource requirements, delivery considerations and opportunities for partnership working. This will assist officers in developing a more structured programme of potential projects for consideration as part of future work planning and budget discussions.

- Comber | 25 August 2026
- Bangor | 27 August 2026
- Donaghadee | 01 September 2026
- Newtownards | 02 September 2026
- Holywood | 03 September 2026

The outcomes from these workshops will be reported to the October Committee meeting.

Members should also note that a special meeting of the Holywood Local Action Group took place on 24 August 2026. The purpose of the meeting is to present information about the following:

1. Innovation Hub
2. Community Provision

Brian Dorrian, Director of Place and Prosperity, and Adele Faulkner, Director of Active and Healthy Communities, were in attendance.

The Quarter 3 LAG meetings are scheduled to take place on the following dates:

- Comber | 10 September 2026
- Newtownards | 15 September 2026
- Donaghadee | 17 September 2026
- Bangor | 24 September 2026
- Holywood | 29 September 2026

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council **Notes** the minutes of the Local Action Group Quarter 2 meetings and the dates of the upcoming workshops and Quarter 3 meetings.

Bangor City Local Action Group Meeting Minutes	
09 July 2026 4.00pm Signal Centre, Innotec Drive, Bangor	
Attendees	Councillor Wesley Irvine Ards and North Down Borough Council Chair Councillor Alistair Cathcart Ards and North Down Borough Council Councillor Tom Brady 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 Jacqui Harte Communications Manager Ards and North Down Borough Council Steven Ferguson Head of Economic Growth Ards and North Down Borough Council Annabelle Kraly Administrative Officer Ards and North Down Borough Council Diane Pearson Ards and North Down Borough Council Frank Shivers Bangor Chamber of Commerce David Jebb Over 50's Council Alison Blayney Bangor Chamber of Commerce
Apologies	Calum Symington Administrative Officer Ards and North Down Borough Council Stephen Gardiner Department for Infrastructure Councillor Christopher McCracken Ards and North Down Borough Council Mayor Councillor Craig Blaney Ards and North Down Borough Council
Appendix	Appendix 1 – Bangor City Local Action Group Meeting Minutes 30 April 2026 Appendix 2 – Bangor Masterplan Review September 2023
<u>Item 1</u>	Welcome and Apologies The Chair welcomed everyone to the Bangor City Local Action Group meeting, and introductions were made. S Ferguson introduced himself as the new Head of Economic Growth. Declarations of Interest No declarations of interest were received. Any issues arising during the agenda would be addressed as required. Previous Meeting Minutes and Actions C McMullan advised that previous actions would be covered within the agenda.

	C McMullan noted that a special meeting would be held in August to provide updates on the Queen's Parade Redevelopment, the animation of Marine Gardens and the Bangor Christmas switch-on 2026. C McMullan expressed her thanks to all who attended the official launch of the Local Action Groups.
Item 2	Christmas Car Parking ANDBC Licensing and Regulatory Services Manager D Pearson informed the group that the new tariff structure for Bangor car parks had been deferred from October 2026 to April 2027. D Pearson provided details of parking initiatives offered by other Northern Ireland councils during the Christmas period and invited feedback on whether Bangor should consider a similar approach. It was noted that some members did not feel the Council should offer free parking, as this may primarily benefit people working in the area rather than visitors. It was also noted that, as tariff changes are scheduled for April 2027, two tariff changes in quick succession would not be advisable. F Shivers reminded the group that Bloomfield Shopping Centre provides free parking and suggested that the city centre should consider measures to attract customers, including free parking on Saturdays. Councillor A Cathcart agreed, noting that this would limit use by people parking for free before travelling out of Bangor by train during the working week. D Pearson made the group aware that parking is free on Sundays already. A Blayney advised revisiting this matter for every December. It was suggested that free Saturday parking could commence from the Christmas Lights switch-on, scheduled for Saturday 21st November 2026, providing seven free Saturdays. Councillor A Cathcart recommended that Christmas car parking tariffs should also be considered for Holywood and Newtownards. He also requested that surveys be undertaken to monitor usage, noting that there may be no other way to measure impact. D Pearson agreed that surveys could be undertaken but noted that results can be inaccurate depending on the time of day. F Shivers suggested that the free parking could be tied in with local business discounts offered by members of the Chamber of Commerce.

	Councillor A Cathcart noted he would rather pay a small amount for parking but get a space than have free parking with no spaces available. Action: D Pearson to bring a report to the Environment Committee in September, reflecting the feedback received.
Item 3	Bangor Waterfront Update Communications Manager – Bangor Regeneration J Harte provided an update on the Urban Waterfront and Public Realm project, which forms part of the wider Bangor Waterfront Redevelopment and covers the 2.2-mile stretch from Skippingstone to Ballyholme. J Harte advised that the appointment of the Integrated Consultant Team (ICT) was imminent, following a competitive public tender process. Once the contract is signed, the ICT will develop proposals for a visually engaging section of the waterfront. The redevelopment and refresh of Pickie Fun Park aims to create additional activities for users, broaden the age range, increase footfall and encourage longer dwell time. Previous consultation sessions received positive feedback on the plan to modernise the park while retaining its family-friendly offer. Concerns were raised regarding the proposed race coaster, as well as ticketed access to the play park. As a result, a new entrance area was developed, including a hatch kiosk located on the path, with the ticketing booth and seating positioned outside the park. Given concerns about the race coaster in relation to height, noise and lighting, alternative attractions are being proposed for the site and will be subject to the necessary planning process. Updates for Pickie include a new zorbing pool and an updated route for the Pickie Puffer, including an accessible carriage. The train will also travel through an immersive tunnel with screens providing digital imagery, which can be adapted seasonally or for specific themes. The area to the rear of Pickie, where the toilet blocks are located, will be used as a nature area with sensory facilities, facilitating seasonal events such as pumpkin patch trails and a Christmas grotto. The mini golf offer will also be revamped, with Northern Ireland landmarks used as the theme for each hole to appeal to the whole family. The Ballyholme Yacht Club water sports centre is planned to be redeveloped with a new facility closer to the roadside, including a front-facing café that will be open to non-members. A concern was raised about the price to customers of Pickie Fun Park. J Harte reassured the group that the use of the café and the toilets will be free, only the attractions will incur a cost.

	Councillor A Cathcart asked about the proposed Pirate Ship, noting that it would be located within an established entertainment area and that local residents may object to most proposals. J Harte advised that the Pirate Ship still needs to go through the planning process and represented a compromise between the Council, residents and the operator. A Blayney expressed concern that the Council may be giving too much weight to residents' objections, noting that the play park is at a lower level than nearby houses. S Ferguson stated that residents' concerns had been considered and that noise impact assessments had been undertaken; however, objections may delay the overall project through the planning process. Councillor A Cathcart was pleased to say that Pickie Fun Park used to be a cost to the Council but now it'll be an income generator. In response to a question regarding the removal of former water attractions, including fountains, splash pads and the splash pool, J Harte advised that the Swan Boats and zorbing would remain available. She explained that the former water attractions were prone to breakdowns and costly repairs. S Ferguson added that the potential for a wet play activity zone would be considered as the design proposals for the 2.2-mile waterfront stretch are developed. Councillor A Cathcart welcomed the improvements but asked if they will be protected from anti-social behaviour. S Ferguson confirmed that Pickie Fun Park will be fully enclosed and locked when not operating as well as being compliant with health and safety regulations. Councillor A Cathcart also mentioned that he would like to see a boardwalk to which S Ferguson confirmed that elevated boardwalks are under consideration. F Shivers raised the possibility of lobbying DfC for additional funding. It was noted that DfC is already the Council's contact for BRCD.
Item 4	Introduction to Bangor City Masterplan Regeneration Officer P Dempster presented an introduction to the Bangor City Masterplan to members (Appendix 2). The presentation concluded with a recommendation to hold a Masterplan-focused workshop in August to support the development of a list of priority projects under the five identified priorities. C McMullan added that a report had been considered and approved by the Place and Prosperity Committee to enable Local Action Groups to select a project to be delivered through Regeneration's working-up budget. This could include, for example, a feasibility or technical study to support the development of a shovel-

	ready project for future capital funding opportunities. The budget is £100k per financial year, to be spent by 31 March 2027, and is to be shared across the city and four towns. Members were keen for the workshop to take place, while noting that the time of year may present challenges due to holiday plans. C McMullan noted that, where members are unavailable to attend in person, ideas and suggestions could be submitted by email. C McMullan asked whether members would like to open the workshop to a wider audience. This would not be a public engagement exercise but could include representatives from members’ organisations. F Shivers suggested that LAG members should discuss the matter with their respective groups and provide feedback. Other members discussed and agreed that opening the workshop to a larger audience could generate too many ideas and wish lists. F Shivers added that the Chamber could host a coffee morning to gather members’ ideas. F Shivers queried the list of projects on pages 5 and 6 of the Masterplan Review document, which had been circulated to the group at the beginning of the meeting, and the possibility of realistic KPIs being set and monitored. C McMullan advised that the list referred to was from the previous Masterplan and that, going forward, projects will fall under the five priorities identified as part of the review. It was also highlighted that a number of interventions have been, or are already being delivered under those themes, including the Waterfront and the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme. P Dempster mentioned that a dashboard from the internal working group, due to be set up in the coming months, will also monitor what is being achieved against the Masterplan. J Harte left the meeting at 16:58. A Kraly left the meeting at 17:00. Action: A suggested date for the Masterplan-focused workshop is to be circulated to members, with an opportunity for ideas to be submitted electronically.
Item 5	Any Other Business Chair

1. **Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme Update** – Regeneration Manager

C McMullan advised that a full update on the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme will be delivered at the September meeting.

By way of update on the current position, C McMullan highlighted the following key points:

Glow Up Grant

This scheme is almost complete, with one grant payment outstanding. In total, 76 Letters of Offer were issued, with an overall investment in Bangor of £194k.

Freshen Up Grant

This scheme went live in May and assessments are well underway. A total of 51 applications were received for Bangor and 34 Letters of Offer have been issued, with estimated investment into the city of £50k.

C McMullan noted that these schemes have seen approx. £250k of investment spent in Bangor within a year, which is significant to the city and the local businesses.

Councillor A Cathcart queried the red line boundary and the number of businesses unable to access funding due to this restriction. He also noted that areas such as Ballyholme would benefit from shopfront schemes of this nature if they were eligible.

C McMullan reminded members that the scheme is funded by DfC and therefore the town centre boundary must be applied, which is aligned with the Local Development Plan that is currently under review.

It was also noted that this point has been raised repeatedly, including at other LAG meetings.

Councillor A Cathcart commented on the positive visual improvement the schemes have made to Abbey Street in Bangor.

C McMullan provided key statistics from the Empty to Energised Scheme:

In Bangor, 10 applications were received, with seven Letters of Offer in Principle issued. The total value of investment to the city is £259k, and one project is complete.

	F Shivers praised the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme, noting that these positive stories should be promoted. C McMullan agreed and advised that a creative approach would be used to do so on completion. Action: A detailed list of figures is to be shared with the LAG at its next meeting following committee in September. C McMullan advised that the Clean City and Tidy Towns application is currently being finalised. This will sit as a strand under the umbrella of Supporting Thriving High Streets and seeks to enhance/ upgrade the public realm. Members noted the importance of involving Parks and other relevant Council departments in the application. Members were advised that an internal working group is in place, involving Estates, Parks, Cleansing and other relevant teams, to feed into the application. F Shivers suggested the possibility of introducing a best Glow Up/ Freshen Up/ Empty to Energised award at the Bangor Business Awards to encourage businesses. 2. August Special Meeting – Marine Gardens – Regeneration Manager As advised earlier in the meeting, a special meeting will take place in August to provide updates on the Queen’s Parade redevelopment, animation at Marine Gardens and Christmas in Bangor. Meeting concluded 17:35
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Newtownards Local Action Group Meeting Minutes	
17 June 2026 4.00pm Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex	
Attendees Alderman Stephen McIlveen Ards and North Down Borough Council Alderman Alan McDowell Ards and North Down Borough Council 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 Carly McMullan Regeneration Manager Ards and North Down Borough Council Calum Symington Administration Officer Ards and North Down Borough Council Pamela Dempster Ards and North Down Borough Council Diane Pearson Ards and North Down Borough Council Stephen Gardiner Department for Infrastructure Derek Wright Newtownards Chamber of Trade Michael Cafolla Newtownards Chamber of Trade	
Apologies Niall McVitty Department for Communities Claire McCrea Ards and North Down Borough Council	
Welcome C McMullan welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Newtownards Local Action Group.	
Appointment of Chair & Vice-Chair Michael Cafolla was nominated as Chair, proposed by D Wright and seconded by Alderman S McIlveen. It was agreed that the Vice-Chair would be nominated as and when required.	
Declarations of Interest There were no declarations of interest made at this time.	
Previous Meeting Minutes and Actions - Stephen Gardiner advised that plans are still being developed for Conway Square and that they would be passed to Council for distribution to the group once available. - Diane Pearson advised she was engaging with the market traders. C McMullan advised the planned update on the Supporting Thriving High Streets programme has been delayed until the next meeting, as the Freshen Up Grant and Empty to Energised Scheme are still ongoing. Alderman S McIlveen raised concerns that constituents had contacted him as their businesses fell outside the town centre boundaries and as such were not eligible for support from the grant schemes. D Wright noted that rates calculations are cheaper outside the boundary and that extending the boundary may raise other issues.	

C McMullan thanked members of the LAG who attended the recent LAG launch event in the Signal Centre.

Christmas Car Parking

D Pearson advised that she is preparing a report on options for Christmas period off-street car parking. The current car parking tariffs are operational until April 2027, but a promotional tariff could be considered for Christmas until then.

Options implemented by other councils include:

- Derry City and Strabane Council offer 5 free Saturdays at Christmas
- Newry, Mourne and Down District Council offer 3 free Saturdays at Christmas
- Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon offer 3 free Saturdays at Christmas
- Mid Ulster District Council offers 10p for 3 hours of parking
- Other councils don't run any promotional rates

Alderman S McIlveen asked if trade figures were available from other councils to correspond with their promotional periods.

D Pearson advised that she could try to find out. Issues were also noted regarding shop staff taking up spaces all day, or promotional rates incentivising long-term parking.

D Wright noted that Belfast City Council offers free parking on Sundays, which results in most people being unable to get a space. He supported free parking for a short period to encourage shoppers to visit, spend and then leave, allowing more shoppers to park. All-day parking creates issues due to a lack of turnover of spaces, which is evidenced by shopping centres now introducing tariffs to discourage all-day parking.

D Pearson advised that new Pay & Display machines were being implemented in ANDBC car parks, which require licence plate entry. These are due to be installed around July.

D Wright noted that the Chamber supports two-hour free parking, both off-street and on-street.

D Pearson replied that the promotional off-street tariff could be set at 50p for 2 hours to encourage people to obtain a ticket, rather than offering free parking where they may not obtain a ticket, resulting in a PCN issue. It was also noted that two-hour on-street parking legislation was being passed to Council at the end of June, which includes measures to stop shuffling of cars in a space.

D Wright enquired if tiered pricing was an option, with a cheap all-day tariff at outer car parks for staff to use.

D Pearson replied that it was possible. There is a need to incentivise people to come into the town, and a six-month review would also be included in any changes to confirm whether the changes were successful.

D Pearson advised that once legislation was in place, it would be much easier for ANDBC to change tariffs as required. Mention was also made of the previous promotional rate of £1 for 5 hours.

The Chair suggested clearer promotion of the £1 for 5 hours tariff, as people were familiar with it.

Action: D Pearson to arrange further promotion of the £1 for 5 hours parking tariff.

The Chair also noted that free outer car parks help reduce traffic pressures in the town, as people would leave their cars and walk in.

Councillor R Smart suggested it would be ideal if the promotion was borough-wide, to which D Pearson agreed.

D Pearson informed the group that line painting in car parks was due to start within the next week.

Introduction to Newtownards Town Centre Masterplan

P Dempster presented an introduction to the Newtownards Town Centre Masterplan to the group (Appendix 1).

Five priorities were identified in the 2023 Masterplan review:

- Grow the influence of the Square
- Tackle Hotspots
- A Connected Town
- Streets for All
- Town Centre Citizens Hub

Action: Update on Citizens Hub to be brought to the next meeting.

Alderman A McDowell enquired if the group was solely focused on the town centre.

C McMullan replied that it was agreed at the previous Town Advisory Group review that this group would be town-centre focused, but that there may be projects that impact areas both outside and inside the town centre.

Alderman A McDowell noted that there was no mention of the proposed park and ride at William Street, noting that it may help to alleviate some of the all-day parking issues. He also enquired if the cover for the Conway Square project had been dismissed. It was also noted that the Ards to Bangor Greenway could reinvigorate Newtownards, as the Comber Greenway had done with Comber.

C McMullan replied that the presentation was based on the Masterplan and that the purpose of the discussion was to consider the priorities.

S Gardiner noted that no plans yet had been made on traffic flow from the park and ride and that Court Street could be used to bring people into the town. However, High Street would need to change to a single line of traffic to support pedestrian access.

D Wright noted that the Comber Greenway stops outside the town.

Councillor V Moore added that signage is going into the Greenway imminently to direct pedestrians to the town centre.

Councillor R Smart noted that there is no pedestrian access through Castlebawn.

Action: S Gardiner to try and get park and ride update for the group.

Action: Invitation to be given to Translink to attend next Local Action Group meeting.

Alderman S McIlveen noted that Translink's current plans do not include closing the current bus centre. It was also noted that the flow of buses, including lay-bys to be situated on Hartford Link, are included in the planning application.

Alderman S McIlveen raised issues around the renaming of Queen's Hall as the "Citizens Hub", noting that the Town Hall should become the Citizens Hub and Queen's Hall should become the "New Queen's Hall".

Councillor R Smart noted that he had raised the issue regarding the naming of the citizens hub.

D Wright advised that the Active Travel team met with the Chamber and that the Chamber would be keen to have cycle infrastructure located in the town.

Councillor R Smart noted that a report had passed to Council with money in the budget for all LAGs, and it was important to be in a position to take advantage of it. He added that he was keen to see a project around dereliction but agreed that animation was much more straightforward.

C McMullan advised that the LAG would decide how Regeneration allocates its working-up project budget for the current financial year. It was added that this was not the only fund available, and that there is a dedicated officer in Regeneration seeking funding for projects.

C McMullan added that there may be dereliction opportunities through the new Local Economic Partnership programme.

Discussion was raised on the Conway Square Cover project, its feasibility and the design of the cover. D Wright noted that more modern traders want a covering to allow them to trade effectively. D Pearson noted that a survey had been passed to market traders and would hopefully provide some answers.

Alderman A McDowell enquired if hosting more than one market would cause issues. D Wright stated that the Chamber would like to see more markets, for example pop-up markets, farmers' markets on Thursdays, and flea markets.

Alderman S McIlveen noted a counterpoint that members of the public enjoy using the square. Discussion was held regarding the use of underutilised land to increase dwell time in the town, including "play boxes" which encourage young people to make use of the town centre.

Action: Regeneration to circulate date of focused Masterplan workshop session with the group.

D Wright enquired about progress in Meetinghouse Lane.

S Gardiner replied that Dfl is still happy to complete the works, as the materials are already available and costs would therefore be limited.

Any Other Business

Alderman S McIlveen advised that a representative of Bowtown Community Development Group and Disability Action had expressed an interest in joining the Local Action Group.

Councillor S Irvine supported the idea of community involvement through sub-working groups, but not through the main Local Action Group, as other community groups would then want to be involved.

Agreed: Representatives to be invited via the appropriate sub-groups.

Ards Peninsula Business Awards

C McMullan thanked the Chamber on behalf of ANDBC for the invitation to attend, noting the high volume of businesses in attendance alongside the community involvement.

Councillor R Smart passed on thanks to the Chamber.

D Wright noted that he was delighted with how the evening went, with 260 in attendance. It highlighted the desire for Newtownards to be the figurehead of the peninsula and Comber.

C McMullan asked if Chamber could provide a list of upcoming events.

Meeting concluded 17:30

Donaghadee Local Action Group Meeting Minutes	
23 June 2026 4.00pm Donaghadee Community Centre	
Attendees	Alderman Mark Brooks Ards and North Down Borough Council 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 John Caldwell Donaghadee Community Development Association Kate Boyd Donaghadee Community Development Association Shirley Cochrane Donaghadee Historical Society Stephen Gardiner Department for Infrastructure Niall McVitty Department for Communities
Apologies	Councillor Rosaleen Quinn Ards and North Down Borough Council Claire McCrea Ards and North Down Borough Council Adrian Kerr Donaghadee Community Development Association Denis Waterworth Donaghadee Community Development Association
Appendices	Appendix 1 – Donaghadee Community Development Association Update
Item 1	Welcome and Apologies Apologies were recorded from Adrian Kerr, Chair of the Donaghadee Local Action Group. In his absence, Councillor J Hennesey was nominated to chair the meeting. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Donaghadee Local Action Group, and introductions took place. Declarations of Interest No declarations of interest were recorded. Any issues arising during the agenda would be addressed accordingly. Previous Meeting Minutes and Actions Alderman M Brooks advised that he had made contributions under the Sports Hub item at the previous meeting which was not included within the meeting record. C McMullan advised that a Supporting Thriving High Streets update would be brought to the next LAG meeting, as the scheme was still ongoing and final figures would be available in the next few weeks.
Item 2	Donaghadee Community Development Association Quarterly Update J Caldwell provided an update to the group on behalf of DCDA. The summer festival was progressing well with plans for 160 events.

	• Donaghadee in Bloom was also progressing well, and DCDA were working closely with the ANDBC Parks Department. • Car parking and traffic flows continue to present issues in the town. It was noted that these issues are not included in the new Local Development Plan. • Concern has been raised regarding anti-social behaviour in the town. DCDA are undertaking a survey with teenagers and will hold a meeting in the Community Centre to discuss young people's priorities. • It was noted that the Education Authority has not provided anything to Donaghadee in approximately two years. • DCDA expressed appreciation for the update on the OBC for sports provision and advised that they are producing reports to support the justification and ensure the OBC is robust. • No response had been received from the Minister regarding coastal protection. • DCDA are launching their USA 250 years programme, supported by a generous grant from DfC, to produce videos, floral decorations, exhibitions and talks, including activity relating to the Battle of the Copelands, which may be of interest to USA cruise visitors. Councillor J Cochrane advised that the coastal protection issue was being brought to Council at the end of June, with the support of all Donaghadee councillors, to request a response from the Minister. C McMullan asked what the timescales were for DCDA to provide their report for the sports provision OBC. J Caldwell advised that it was expected within two months.
Item 3	Donaghadee Town Centre Masterplan Recap P Dempster provided a recap of the Donaghadee Town Centre Masterplan to the group. • The Masterplan provides a shared framework for regeneration in the town. • It is a non-statutory, evidence-led and delivery-focused document with shared ownership. • The four priorities are: 1. Parks for All 2. Heritage and Visitor Experience 3. Destination Donaghadee 4. Reawaken the Harbour Under priority 2, J Caldwell asked whether the wayfinding signage had been completed. C McMullan advised that some signage had been fitted, with fingerposts due to be installed the following week, including two signs for the Moat. Car parking signage is to be checked. The full wayfinding strategy is also available on the ANDBC website. Action: C McMullan to follow up on progress with car park signage. J Caldwell recommended that signage for the football pitch should not be installed at this stage, as DCDA hoped to move the football pitch to the current location of the bonfire. DCDA are hoping to obtain a grant from DfC, as the proposal would bring the bonfire site back into community use.

	N McVitty advised that DfC budgets had not yet been confirmed but recommended submitting a grant application to the Department. Under priority 3, P Dempster advised that the Donaghadee Tourism Study was almost complete and that work to deliver it had already begun. C McMullan advised that a report had been brought to the Place and Prosperity Committee to allow the LAGs to decide how Regeneration working-up funding is allocated to projects. A workshop will be held in summer to allow the LAG to decide which projects should be worked up and ready should funding become available. C McMullan recommended that members speak to the groups they represent and bring forward recommended projects. Alderman M Brooks noted that he had submitted recommendations to make use of the putting green, but these had been referred back to the Masterplan each time. C McMullan noted that the Masterplans were designed to move away from a list of individual projects and towards a more strategic overview. An internal officers' forum is being established to support delivery of the Masterplans. The Chair asked what the group needed to take away from these points. C McMullan asked the group to consider which projects they wish to take forward, noting that invitations can be issued within the groups represented to attend the workshop drop-in session and discuss prioritisation. Action: Workshop date to be set as soon as possible for the summer and circulated to the group.
Item 4	Sub-Working Group Nominations C McMullan advised that invitations could be extended outside the group, if required. The Chair asked whether Anton Cozzo was following up with the sports forum. Action: Regeneration to follow up with A Cozzo regarding sports forum membership. J Caldwell advised that A Kerr wished to be involved in the Destination Donaghadee Sub-Group. S Cochrane advised that she also wished to be involved. Alderman M Brooks suggested extending an invitation to Lewis Waterworth. Discussion took place regarding extending invitations to all businesses, cafés and restaurants in Donaghadee to provide representation. It was agreed that this could widen the group too significantly and that the resource was not available to manage this approach. It was agreed that the group would consist of Adrian Kerr, Shirley Cochrane and Councillor James Cochrane. The first action for the group would be to review the Donaghadee Tourism Report being developed by Podd Consulting and then determine any further membership required to assist with delivery of the report.

	S Cochrane noted that some sports groups are content with their current position and may not need to sit on the sub-group. Alderman M Brooks noted that ANDBC had recently changed how it assesses rates, which had reduced rates for some sports groups, including Donaghadee Cricket Club. It was agreed that Alderman Mark Brooks, John Caldwell and Ricky Robinson would sit on the sports sub-working group. The key action for the group would be to help drive forward the OBC for sports provision in Donaghadee. Representation from clubs would be brought to the group as required.
Item 5	Any Other Business 1. DfI Communications – no waiting legislation regarding A2 Donaghadee S Gardiner advised that the scheme would add no-parking lines where parking was causing a pinch point near the traffic island at the junction of High Street and Bridge Street. This would not result in the loss of parking spaces, as parking is not currently permitted at this location. 2. Update on Donaghadee Pump Track C McMullan advised that permitted development confirmation had been received from the ANDBC Planning Department, and it was hoped that work would commence on site in August. Neighbour and business notifications will be carried out in advance of works commencing. Regeneration are aware of social media activity surrounding the scheme and are considering the implications for wider support for the Masterplan. The Chair noted that some people appeared to view the recent information sessions as an opportunity to object. C McMullan advised that the ANDBC website had been updated with all relevant information, including details of the engagement sessions. Other locations were considered but were not part of the Masterplan, and work will continue as agreed. J Caldwell noted that many of the complaints appeared to be coming from the same groups that had raised concerns regarding the new Lidl and Strand Homes developments. Alderman M Brooks noted that he recalled similar concerns when the new Spar opened, including concerns that it would cause footfall to leave the town. He noted that the town remains vibrant. 3. Any other business S Gardiner noted that High Street is to be resurfaced this financial year, with works expected to start in October. The works are to be carried out at night.

	J Caldwell asked whether it would be possible to align the works with the opening of the Cannyreagh Link Road. S Gardiner advised that he does not have control of the Cannyreagh Link Road but would bear the information in mind. <i>Meeting concluded at 17:08.</i>

Comber Local Action Group Meeting Minutes	
29 June 2026 6.00pm Comber Leisure Centre	
Attendees	Alderman Trevor Cummings Ards and North Down Borough Council Chair Councillor Libby Douglas 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 Iris McBride Comber Chamber of Commerce Fiona McAlpine Comber Chamber of Commerce
Apologies	Councillor Patricia Morgan Ards and North Down Borough Council Councillor Philip Smyth Ards and North Down Borough Council Niall McVitty Department for Communities Stephen Gardiner Department for Infrastructure Joan Cowan Comber Regeneration Community Partnership Bobby Hunniford Comber Rotary Club
Item 1	Welcome and Apologies The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Comber Local Action Group. Declarations of Interest No declarations of interest. Any issues arising during the agenda will be addressed accordingly. Previous Meeting Minutes and Actions The previous minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the last meeting. Proposed by Councillor L Douglas and seconded by I McBride. D Pearson provided a response to the previous meeting action requesting an update on EV infrastructure in Comber. <i>“We are reviewing EV provision across the borough. At present, we do not have anything planned for Comber, but Licensing and Regulatory Services will provide an update when available.”</i>
Item 2	Introduction to Comber Town Centre Masterplan P Dempster presented a refresh of the Comber Masterplan to the group. - Four priorities included

	1. A more walkable Comber – making short trips easier, safer and more inclusive. 2. Activate the Square – using the civic heart for events, seating and everyday life. 3. Connect with the Lough – linking the centre with natural assets and visitor routes. 4. Strengthen local vitality – building the coffee, cycling, craft and cuisine offer. - It is a shared framework for regeneration in the town - It is a non-statutory, evidence-led and delivery-focused document with shared ownership. - Priorities become action through quick wins, enabling work and capital delivery - There is a need to align with stakeholders, identify champions, package small actions into deliverable projects and track progress openly. - Next steps will be a stakeholder workshop to examine what can be delivered under the priorities C McMullan advised that Regeneration is allocated £100,000 each year for developing projects. Regeneration has submitted a report to Committee to allow each LAG to determine what is developed for its area. Regeneration would like projects to be identified by the start of September to allow for the procurement of consultants. I McBride advised that the Chamber could meet to discuss potential projects. C McMullan advised that officers could come to meetings that are already arranged if it made the process easier. The Chair stated that trader and third sector input would be the most important. It was agreed to hold a meeting in the last week of July 2026. Chair enquired if a map of the publicly accessible greenway was available. Action: P Dempster to provide a map to the group. C McMullan noted there could be a project developed around signage for the greenway.
Item 3	Digi-Hub Update A written update was provided by Niall Drew (Development Projects) to the group. “Update on the Mini Digi Hub Project

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.

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 real-time digital sensors, informing officers of the centre's environmental metrics and power consumption figures. A delivery agent has now been successfully procured and appointed to carry out this work and is currently developing the solution. The awarding of this contract will significantly progress the project and support the ambitions of the "Smart Towns and Villages" funding mechanism.

Timeline – short term

- **June 2026** Delivery Agent currently working on the sensor array solution to go into centre with initial sensor deployment underway.
- **July 2026** The terms of reference for the procurement process to appoint an architectural service are currently going through an approval process with the funder. Following this, a procurement process will be undertaken, which will determine clear timelines going forward.
- **September 2026** A digital transformation event is planned for Comber Community Centre. This will be for residents, businesses and community centre users, and will be designed to explain what the Comber Digi Hub project is, how it can add value, and provide attendees with the opportunity to feedback on how they would like to see the project move forward.

Timeline – long term

Following the successful re-imagining of the centre, the design will allow the centre to continue as a community centre, but where value can be added to existing users with technology.

The permanent IoT solution will allow Comber Community Centre to be showcased as an exemplar site for digital transformation technology through the emerging discipline of the Internet of Things.

Benefits of the project

Community

- Improved facilities and user experience
- Increased engagement and footfall
- Access to digital skills and support

Economic

- Support for local businesses adopting digital tools

	• Attraction of new users and potential revenue opportunities • Enhanced profile for Comber as a digital innovation location Environmental • IoT data enabling reduced energy consumption • Improved environmental management of the building • Contribution to wider sustainability goals Next steps • Continue IoT deployment and testing • Secure approval for architectural procurement • Deliver September engagement event • Design Phase • Develop a communications plan for ongoing updates.” C McMullan advised that Regeneration can ask N Drew to attend the next meeting to give a further update on the project. Chair requested that the update is provided to all members. C McMullan replied that it would be included with the minutes.
<u>Item 4</u>	Any Other Business Additional Representation on Local Action Group C McMullan advised that the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and Education Authority (EA) were keen to engage with the five Local Action Groups across the borough. Chair noted that it was hard to get departments to attend meetings as their resources are spread thin. I McBride stated that a good working relationship with PSNI would be beneficial for traders in the town and helpful in relation to upcoming events, parades, and other relevant matters. The Chair advised that he already worked closely with Sheldon from the local neighbourhood policing team. Councillor L Douglas advised that she could share Sheldon’s details if he wishes to attend upcoming chamber meeting. The Chair enquired why EA wished to attend. C McMullan replied that they would be keen to attend the various Local Action Groups to ensure youth interests are represented.

Chair noted that EA work through identified local youth groups and that most young people in the area attend the arena.

I McBride advised that previous Comber masterplan included supporting Nendrum College to increase its student base to include 6th form.

Chair advised he worked closely with Nendrum principal Andy Walker and that he was very keen to be involved with the LAG.

C McMullan enquired whether it would be appropriate for Nendrum College to help drive projects forward through relationship-building, pupil feedback and engagement, rather than sitting on the LAG itself.

Update on Comber Gap Site

C McMullan advised the group that vegetation at the site had been cut back the previous week and that the hoarding installation contractors were ready to get on site and begin works. Work was expected to start at the end of this week or the start of next week. Further landscaping works will be carried out later in the year once nesting season has concluded.

Comber Earlies Feedback

Chair stated that the event was very successful.

I McBride noted issues with signage outside SuperValu, which has become a recurring issue over the last three years of the event. However, overall trader feedback from the day was good. Some attendees found it too busy and did not stay.

Councillor L Douglas noted an issue with people tripping on ground laid cables. C McMullan replied that cables could be moved overhead.

A written update was provided by Heather Shields (Events) on the event.

"We had a very successful day in Comber. The official visitor count was 12,000, slightly down on last year's figure of 12,600. Perhaps worth noting that Armed Forces Day was taking place on the same day in Coleraine, drawing a crowd of around 25,000 visitors.

We trialled a quiet hour by opening the event at 10:00, an hour earlier than usual, and this was well received.

Ten Comber businesses participated in the passport initiative. We haven't had direct feedback from them yet, but all 1,000 printed passports were distributed.

Twenty ANDBC businesses traded in the artisan market, with many Taste AND Network members represented. They all reported a strong day of trade, with four businesses selling out completely.

The festival bar was operated by McBride's, who also reported a successful day. Modest Beer, Echlinville and Copeland Distillery were all represented.

The Producers Stage was hosted by Lotte Duncan, who used produce that was available to purchase from the artisan market for her cookery demonstrations. She also interviewed producers on stage, giving them a platform to share stories about their businesses and produce. This area attracted a steady crowd throughout the day and was well received by both visitors and producers.

Lecturers and students from SERC hosted the main demo kitchen and potato tasting sessions. They got through a record amount of Comber Earlies - 340 kilos in total!

To facilitate set-up, delivery and take-down, we closed Comber Leisure Centre car park from Thursday morning. Additional parking was made available at 1st and 2nd Presbyterian Churches; only 2nd Presbyterian was used and it never reached full capacity. These arrangements were promoted via social media and the Visit ANDBC website. On Saturday, we added Comber Baptist Church as an additional car park, and all car parks were well utilised throughout the day. We were able to reopen the leisure centre car park on Saturday evening at approximately 10pm."

I McBride noted success of the passport, advising that McBride's had passed out 95 ice creams to passport holders.

Councillor L Douglas advised that, during a Radio Ulster interview, one of the farmers attending was not aware of the passport initiative, and that next year there should be greater awareness of media messaging.

Action: Regeneration to share feedback with relevant internal departments

Rural Business Development Grant Scheme (RBDGS)

P Dempster provided an update to the group on the RBDGS.

- DAERA opened the scheme today, 29 June.
- It offers up to £7,500 at a 50% grant award rate for capital purchases for rural micro-businesses.
- Workshops will be held by ANDBC, and the scheme is open until 30 July 2026.

Meeting concluded 18:55

Hollywood Local Action Group Meeting Minutes	
30 June 2026 4.00pm Queens Leisure Complex	
Attendees	Alderman Alan Graham Ards and North Down Borough Council Alderman Martin McRandal 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 Niall McVitty Department for Communities Stephen Gardiner Department for Infrastructure Helen Aston Hollywood Chamber of Trade
Apologies	Councillor Stephen Hollywood Ards and North Down Borough Council Councillor Gillian McCollum Ards and North Down Borough Council Lauren DePledge Hollywood and District Community Council
<u>Item 1</u>	Welcome and Apologies Vice-Chair H Aston assumed the role of Chair in Councillor G McCollum's absence. The Chair welcomed everyone to the Hollywood Local Action Group meeting, and introductions were carried out. Declarations of Interest There were no declarations of interest. Any issues arising during the agenda would be addressed accordingly. Previous Meeting Minutes and Actions D Pearson advised that the previous meeting action regarding clear footpaths was being included in a letter submitted by ANDBC to DfI.
<u>Item 2</u>	Christmas Parking D Pearson provided the group with an update on upcoming changes to off-street parking charges. - Changes had been expected in October but now appear more likely to take effect from 1 April 2027. - The current promotional offer, introduced in 2013, is £1 for five hours.

	- Derry City and Strabane District Council offer five free Saturdays at Christmas. - Newry, Mourne and Down District Council offer three free Saturdays at Christmas. - Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council offer three free Saturdays at Christmas. - Mid Ulster District Council offer 10p for three hours of parking. - Other councils don't run any promotional rates - Newtownards Local Action Group does not want a new promotional rate and would prefer further promotion of the £1 for five hours rate. - ANDBC is in favour of keeping the rate consistent across the borough. The Chair supported retaining the £1 for five hours rate and noted that the Chamber did not want free parking. Alderman A Graham supported the case for consistency across the borough. Alderman M McRandal stated that he had not perceived significant demand for a Christmas promotional rate.
<u>Item 3</u>	Introduction to Holywood Town Centre Masterplan P Dempster presented an introduction to the Holywood Town Centre Masterplan to the group (Appendix 1). The five priorities are: - Hands on Holywood - Queens Hall/Community Facility - Holywood on Sea - Walk, Bus, Bike, Rail - Innovation Hub P Dempster explained each priority and the areas of focus for stakeholders under each one. The next stages arising from the presentation are a presentation to the group on the Innovation Hub and Community Facilities by the Director of Place and Prosperity and the Director of Active and Healthy Communities. In addition, a workshop is being organised to discuss the masterplan priorities and identify actions to advance them.

Item 4	Any Other Business Additional Representation C McMullan advised that PSNI and the Education Authority are willing to engage with all five Local Action Groups. Most other groups had chosen to invite representatives as and when required. Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2026-27 P Dempster advised that the RBDGS was now open and that ANDBC was seeking eligible applications. It is a capital grant scheme for rural micro businesses, offering 50% match funding up to £7,500. It closes on the 31st July, and a number of workshops had been scheduled by the Regeneration Team for applicants to attend. Action: P Dempster to provide information on RBDGS to the group. <i>Meeting concluded 16:28</i>
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Bangor City Local Action Group Special Meeting Minutes	
06 August 2026 4.00pm Signal Centre, Innotec Drive, Bangor	
Attendees	Councillor Wesley Irvine Ards and North Down Borough Council Chair Councillor Alistair Cathcart Ards and North Down Borough Council Councillor Tom Brady Ards and North Down Borough Council Mayor Councillor Craig Blaney Ards and North Down Borough Council Brian Dorrian Director of Place & Prosperity 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 Administrative Officer Ards and North Down Borough Council Claire Jackson Head of Communications and Strategic Place Delivery Ards and North Down Borough Council Sharon Mahaffy Head of Tourism, Arts and Heritage Ards and North Down Borough Council Wendy Smith Events Manager Ards and North Down Borough Council Niall McVitty Department for Communities Frank Shivers Bangor Chamber of Commerce David Jebb Over 50's Council Alison Blayney Bangor Chamber of Commerce Emma Dury Seacourt Print Workshop Alison Gordon Open House Festival Louise Spence North Down Community Network Damian Mitchell Bangor Marine Aran Blackbourne Bangor Marine
Apologies	Marianne Kennerley Boom Studios
Item 1	Welcome and Introductions The Chair welcomed members to the special meeting of the Bangor City Local Action Group. Introductions were completed by those present. Declarations of Interest No declarations of interest were raised.

Item 2

Update on Queen's Parade Redevelopment

A Blackbourne provided an update on progress with the Queen's Parade redevelopment. Members were advised that Phase One has commenced, although progress has been affected by a number of technical and weather-related challenges. The programme has been particularly dependent on concrete pours, with weather conditions impacting this.

It was noted that the materials selected are intended to meet the Council's long-term maintenance requirements. While the product is considered to be of high quality, it has proved challenging to work with. Bangor Marine confirmed that delays are outside the control of the delivery team but reaffirmed its commitment to progressing the scheme.

Members were advised that the design of the pavilion has been amended, with the first pavilion due to commence the following week and materials ready for installation. Drainage has been designed using small slots rather than large drain covers, and four-metre lighting columns are also due to be installed. The steps will be delivered in granite rather than cast concrete; however, there has been a slight delay in delivery from China.

A delay relating to the marine construction licence was reported, linked to technical issues with the seawall and the expiry of the previous licence. New reports are required, which will have associated cost implications, before a new marine construction licence can be secured.

A legal agreement has also been reached with NIE in respect of the substation. It was noted that the NIE programme had the potential to delay the Bangor Marine project, but the priority remains to have the event space available for Christmas.

Bangor Marine confirmed that it is contributing 50% towards the new Christmas tree. The concrete surround is fixed in place and ready for use.

A competition has opened for the bandstand supplier, with local interest in developing the design. A supplier has been selected but not yet formally appointed and will work with the design team.

Bangor Marine is also working closely with artist Colin Davidson to review the timing of installation for the Dove sculpture as part of the Eclipse series.

Activation points within the project will include a sensory area with planting, tables and chairs.

B Dorrian advised that the updated area to be transferred to Council will be reported to the Place and Prosperity Committee in September. W Smith confirmed that the Events Team is planning on the basis of transfer by 14 November at the

latest. A Blackbourne confirmed that full transfer of the site is expected in March 2027.

D Mitchell raised concern regarding the volume of Freedom of Information requests being received and the impact this has.

Bangor Marine also advised that the memorial fountain is being refurbished by Council and will be reinstated as part of Phase One.

Councillor A Cathcart noted that businesses are keen to understand future opportunities for the pavilions. D Mitchell advised that further information can be released to potential operators once opening timelines are confirmed. Mayor, Councillor C Blaney asked what type of businesses would be located in the pavilions, A Blackbourne confirmed that the focus would be on local businesses rather than multinational operators.

F Shivers asked for plans and timelines for Phases Two and Three and queried the position regarding the sites originally planned for kiosks. B Dorrian explained that utilities are being installed, but Council will determine the final use of the serviced plots, which do not necessarily have to be used for kiosks. A Blackbourne added that the serviced plots could support a range of uses, including a potential Christmas market. E Drury expressed support for this change.

The Chair asked about Bangor Marine's plans for wider public engagement. D Mitchell advised that the next planned press release is expected at Christmas. Councillor A Cathcart noted that the key message should be that the site will be available for Christmas. Members discussed the importance of clear communications in relation to the site and the planning issues contributing to delays.

B Dorrian noted that the scheme will deliver 3,500 sqm of new open green space and shrub planting and over 100 new trees across the completed Phase 1, car parking will be reduced from 220 to 80 spaces.

A Blackbourne stated that the completed site has the potential to make a significant contribution to the culture of Bangor and create a strong sense of momentum in the city. D Mitchell noted that the majority of the public want to see the project completed. F Shivers encouraged elected members to support the project publicly.

D Mitchell reminded the group that funding can only be claimed back when work has been completed and advised that work would not continue if Bangor Marine did not consider the project capable of reaching the claim-back stage.

	Action: C Jackson to prepare communications, including a visual version, regarding the Queen's Parade site for public information and wider distribution. D Mitchell noted that Bangor Marine intends to add further FAQs to its website to address common questions and concerns.
Item 3	Marine Gardens Animation C Jackson acknowledged the work undertaken by Bangor Marine and noted that a range of recent communications had been issued, including website FAQs and press releases. It was recognised that further amplification of key messages would be beneficial. C Jackson provided an overview of proposals for the animation of Marine Gardens. The group was advised that animation of the space will support regeneration, increase footfall and contribute to the cultural offer within the city. It was emphasised that it is critical the space is activated effectively when Council receives the land back. Members noted the success of the recent weekend event and recognised that, while such events are valuable, they cannot be delivered continuously at the same scale. A new officer has been appointed to focus on animating the area, supported by an £80,000 budget to March 2027. Council departments have been asked to prioritise the site and consider how activity delivered elsewhere in the borough could be adapted for Marine Gardens. It was further noted that artist Colin Davidson is bringing in a company to engage with youth groups and schools, with activity expected to roll out in January/February 2027. A dedicated website is being created for the site, and Council is working with Bangor Marine on branding and wayfinding signage. A grant scheme is also being developed to support groups and organisations to use and animate the space. The civic launch will be small scale, with Christmas expected to provide the first significant public launch. Regular programming will be considered across different areas of the site. L Spence noted the importance of ensuring that other areas are not overlooked as Marine Gardens is brought forward. B Dorrian advised that the aim is to maintain a minimum annual animation budget of £80,000, with C Jackson adding that £100,000 has already been allocated for the following year.

F Shivers advised that Bangor Chamber of Commerce had invested £40,000 in the recent Bangor Beats event and suggested that the proposed budget may not be sufficient. He also asked whether the developer intended to make any contribution. D Mitchell stated that a wider collective approach would be required and noted that the events area and wider gardens could become an income driver. F Shivers emphasised the need to use the available budget strategically.

D Mitchell stated that delivery should not rest solely with Council and suggested that a subgroup may be required. He added that Bangor Marine would support where possible. W Smith confirmed that the new Animation Officer will focus on Marine Gardens, and that the officer's current events role will be backfilled to avoid any reduction in delivery performance.

C Jackson noted that larger companies will want to see how the space operates before committing. F Shivers asked whether Council still charges for events and suggested that some free events could be used to help drive footfall. C Jackson advised that Council wishes the site to generate a level of income and noted that an expression of interest has been released for a large Ferris wheel.

C Jackson advised that a 19-metre Christmas tree has been acquired for the site, significantly larger than the Council's standard 10–12 metre trees. It is expected to be visible from Main Street and High Street. Members noted that the previous Christmas switch-on attracted approximately 8,000–10,000 people, while the event space capacity is around 5,000; therefore, overspill arrangements will be required.

F Shivers suggested Holborn Square as a potential overspill space, although W Smith noted that it is relatively disconnected from the main site. C Jackson advised that the switch-on will include lighting installations to provide longevity, with options including tamper-proof lighting programmed to music and projections onto the ground and buildings. W Smith added that the event will be weatherproof and capable of being built upon in future years, noting the success of charged-entry models such as Antrim Christmas Village.

L Spence left the meeting at 17:22.

Members discussed the provision of new Christmas lights. Councillor A Cathcart suggested that some enclosed events could be charged for, while following the Open House Festival model of providing a mix of paid and free activity. F Shivers advised that the Chamber is planning activity in Holborn Square during the Christmas period.

Agreed: The Bangor City Local Action Group supported the proposed plans for Christmas 2026.

	Mayor, Councillor C Blaney asked whether there would be support for food trucks at the event. W Smith advised that this is under discussion, with the marina car park identified as a potential location. Members suggested a range of potential Christmas period events, including Bangor Ladies Choir, following the success of the Bangor Beats weekend. B Dorrian thanked S Mahaffy for her work in responding to the large volume of Freedom of Information requests received in relation to the event.
Item 4	Christmas in Bangor 2026 This item was discussed under Item 3, Marine Gardens Animation.
Item 5	Any Other Business C McMullan provided an update on the Clean City and Tidy Towns funding application. N McVitty noted that the Department has not yet received its budget for the year; however, the business case can be progressed so that it is ready once budgets are confirmed. B Dorrian advised that the scheme relates to previous public realm areas, while the Queen's Parade footpaths are being revitalised by Bangor Marine as part of the wider Marine Gardens scheme. B Dorrian further advised that an Integrated Consultancy Team has been appointed for the 2.2-mile stretch of waterfront, with design work due to commence the following week. This forms part of the wider Belfast Region City Deal funding, with a budget of £30 million. Agreed: In-ground lighting is to be removed from Bangor public realm. Councillor A Cathcart requested that the in-ground lighting be replaced with matching granite paving rather than individual discs. He also suggested that the tree outside Seacourt be replaced with a pathway, as it currently obscures the building. F Shivers raised feedback from the organisers of the recent pipe band championship, advising that they wish the event to remain in Bangor rather than be hosted in Newtownards. B Dorrian advised that this was a decision made by Council. The meeting concluded at 17:42.

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	03 September 2026
Responsible Director	Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Communications and Marketing
Report title	Marine Gardens, Bangor: Update, Opening and Christmas 2026
Attachments	
File Reference (if applicable)	
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	Budget
	Narrative: Delivery will be managed within approved budgets and through existing resources
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 requirements to be confirmed in accordance with normal Council arrangements Choose an item.
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

Marine Gardens is the first 'on-the-ground phase' of the Queen's Parade Development and a flagship project within the wider regeneration of Bangor. Representing a capital investment of more than £11 million when fully operational, Marine Gardens will become a significant new civic asset for the city.

The Council's ambition is to ensure that Marine Gardens becomes known as a safe, welcoming and well-used destination – supporting sustained footfall and economic activity, community wellbeing, inclusive participation, cultural activity and Bangor's position as a vibrant coastal destination.

The Council's approach will combine regular community programming with larger events and destination activity. Initially it should be recognised that Council-led programming will be important to showcase the potential of the new space and build confidence in usage among local groups, partners and external event organisers. The Council agreed to fund a dedicated Place Animation Officer for a two-year period. The role will support programming, bookings, stewardship, monitoring and continuous improvement of the space as further phases are delivered. An appointment was made to this post in July with the Officer starting the role on 1 September 2026. A budget of £80k was also made available for animation, engagement and a range of marketing activities associated with the site and the opening of Phase 1A in particular.

Phased opening

Early indications from Bangor Marine had anticipated all the Phase 1 area would be available at the first handover date in November 2026. Due to weather constraints, the construction timetable has been delayed and in this first stage only the McKee Clock Arena area is being handed over. This has necessitated a reshape of plans for the Christmas period from what had previously been planned.



The current anticipated sequence is:

- McKee Clock Arena (events space): to be handed over in the first week of November 2026, subject to site readiness, facilitating the Bangor Christmas programme.
- Remainder of Phase 1A: sunken gardens, grassed areas, promenade and central focal point, expected in March 2027.

- Phase 1B: playpark and car park, subject to planning permission, estimated for spring/summer 2027.

The phased approach creates successive opportunities to launch and promote different parts of Marine Gardens. It also requires careful management of access, presentation, servicing and communications while work continues elsewhere on the site.

Initial opening - McKee Clock Arena

The first opening milestone will establish the McKee Clock Arena as an operational outdoor events space and provide an early public demonstration of the potential of Marine Gardens.

It is proposed to hold a civic and media event to mark the transfer of the initial area. This will involve funders and partners, targeted stakeholders and media engagement, and will position the opening as a visible milestone in Bangor's regeneration. Discussions are ongoing with DfC and Bangor Marine around this.

Before public activity begins, officers must co-ordinate various operational arrangements required for safe and effective use of the available area. This will include event permissions, access, servicing, communications and management of the interface with continuing construction works. Much of this work is ongoing but some will only be able to take place once handover of the space happens in November – as such while handover is due to happen in the first week of the month, the site will not be publicly accessible until the Switch On weekend (21 November). This allows for the infrastructure build associated with Christmas to take place.

Christmas 2026

Marine Gardens is proposed as the principal focal point for Christmas activity in Bangor in 2026. A four-week 'Light Up' programme is planned from Saturday 21 November, beginning with the traditional Christmas Lights Switch-On and continuing across the following weekends. The approach is intended to showcase the new space, encourage repeat visits and support city-centre footfall rather than relying on a single event. The principal proposed elements include:

- A large-scale, bespoke and visually distinctive Christmas tree at the centre of the McKee Clock, with high visibility from High Street and Main Street. At 19m+ it will help to put Bangor on the map as having the largest free standing Christmas tree in Northern Ireland (potentially the Island of Ireland). The tree is being part-funded by Bangor Marine via Levelling Up; as part of the Marine Gardens infrastructure improvements.
- A signature lighting installation using dynamic lighting, skyline projections and illuminated features to create an accessible, family-friendly experience. It will have broad appeal and help to build Bangor's reputation as a regional festive destination. In the opening year, this will not operate as a ground-level trail because of the security requirements and associated cost within an open site.

- A big (observation) wheel offering panoramic views across Bangor Marina and Belfast Lough. As a prominent landmark attraction, its strong visual appeal will also generate valuable promotional content, contributing to wider engagement during the festive period. An Expression of Interest process is ongoing for this opportunity.
- Discussions are in progress with providers for festive markets throughout the period. It is anticipated that these will include seasonal food/ drinks and craft items.

The Christmas Lights Switch-On on 21 November will be the first major public event in McKee Clock Arena and the showcase event for the season. It will introduce the landmark tree and lighting scheme and encourage visitors to engage with both the new waterfront space and the wider city centre.

Santa and the Mayor will arrive at 6pm (tbc) for a spectacular switch on, with technology allowing them to 'flick a switch' and turn the McKee Clock Arena into a magical, festive space, with all the trees in the newly renovated area brightly light. Seasonal musical performances will accompany.

Over the following four weekends (up to 22 December), it is intended that lower-intensity animation, including street entertainment, music, choirs, arts and family activity, will maintain activity and provide further opportunities to visit the new space. This will elongate the Christmas programme beyond the usual one-day Switch-On with the aim of engaging more residents and visitors with the space and increasing footfall across the city.

Stakeholder engagement

The Bangor City Local Action Group has been updated on progress at Marine Gardens and on the developing approach to Christmas activity. The Events Team has engaged the Group on Christmas animation options and associated programming, and members have had the opportunity to feed into the direction of the plans. Feedback has supported an approach which extends activity over a longer period rather than concentrating the offer solely on a single day. At its meeting on 7 August 2026, the Group also received a detailed update from Bangor Marine Ltd on construction progress and the intended first handover milestone. Engagement will continue as the opening and Christmas arrangements are finalised.

Delivery considerations

The initial programme will be delivered through cross-service working, supported by the Place Animation Officer, existing events and communications resources, and procured suppliers or operators where required.

Key dependencies include timely handover of the McKee Clock Arena, completion of the required electricity infrastructure and safe separation from continuing construction works. Officers will monitor these dependencies and refine the detailed programme as necessary.

Next Steps

- Complete detailed handover and operational readiness planning for McKee Clock Arena.
- Complete the event management arrangements for the Christmas Lights Switch-On.

- Confirm the programme of animation activity across the subsequent weekends.
- Continue engagement with the Bangor City Local Action Group and other stakeholders as plans are finalised.
- Develop the 2027 programme in preparation for the handover of the remaining Phase 1A and Phase 1B areas.

Summary

The initial opening of McKee Clock Arena and the Christmas 2026 programme provide an important opportunity to introduce the public to Marine Gardens and demonstrate its potential as a civic, cultural and destination space. Although the plans have been reframed to reflect the part of Phase 1 now expected at the first handover, the phased approach allows the Council to mark a series of milestones, learn from early activity and build momentum as the remainder of the Gardens becomes available.

A co-ordinated opening, a high-quality four-week Christmas programme and continued engagement with the Bangor City Local Action Group and other partners will help establish Marine Gardens as a vibrant and well-used part of Bangor's regeneration from the outset.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council Notes the phased opening and activation approach for Marine Gardens; and the proposed Bangor Christmas Switch On detail and 4-week animation programme.

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	03 September 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Economic Growth
Report title	Go Succeed Activity Update - Quarter 1 2026/27
Attachments	N/A
File Reference (if applicable)	ED135
Legislation	Choose an item.
Resource Implications	Budget
	Narrative: Grant funded
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

Members will be aware, that Go Succeed went live on 1 November 2023 with combined 18-month targets for Engage and Foundation delivered by Enterprise NI (ENI) and associated Local Enterprise Agency network and Growth and Scaling delivered by Full Circle consortia partners. All aspects of the service are up and running, with the first 18-month cycle now complete.

A one-year extension was granted through the Shared Prosperity Fund from 1 April 2025 until 31 March 2026 to continue the delivery of Go Succeed in a similar manner.

From the 1 April 2026, the Local Growth Fund became a co-funder of the Go Succeed Programme. The current phase of the programme will run until 31 March 2027. In parallel, all 11 councils are working together to design the next phase with procurement expected to begin shortly to ensure delivery agents are in place when the new programme starts.

This report provides an update on Go Succeed activity and performance during the period from 1 April to 30 June 2026.

Go Succeed Participation

Go Succeed Pillar	12 Month Target	Q1 Actual
Engage	243	111
Foundation	45	13
Growth	119	43
Scaling	1	0

Engage

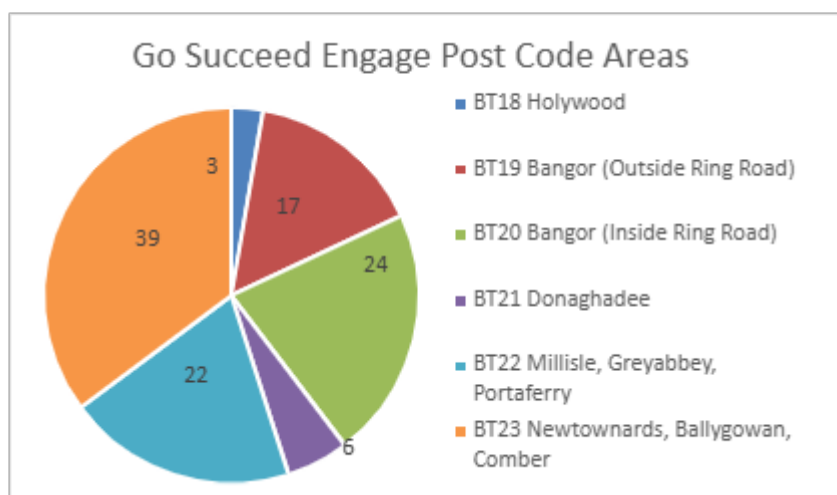
As at 30 th June 2026 (12-Month Target of 243)	
Go Succeed clients assigned on Engage Pillar completed Diagnostics	120*
Project Sign Off carried out by LEA's *	48
Jobs Created	29

- *Please Note: sign-off include Business Plans and Enterprise Action Plans to determine Job Creation. Of the 120 diagnostics completed 9 of these were for clients who applied for Go Succeed support prior to 1st April 2026*

The chart below indicates by postcode that 111 Go Succeed Engage clients registered from 1 April 2026 to 30 June 2026. The chart includes 14 clients who registered but did not progress further with the service and are recorded as withdrawals. Reasons for withdrawal may include a change in circumstances, illness, lack of time, loss of interest, progression into employment or education or being assessed as ineligible. Before a client is recorded as withdrawn, three attempts are made to contact them by email and telephone.

A further 12 clients progressed to the Foundation pillar after completing the engage pillar.

The total also includes individuals who have been referred to other economic inactivity support services, as outlined later in the report under Community Outreach and Economic Inactivity Support.

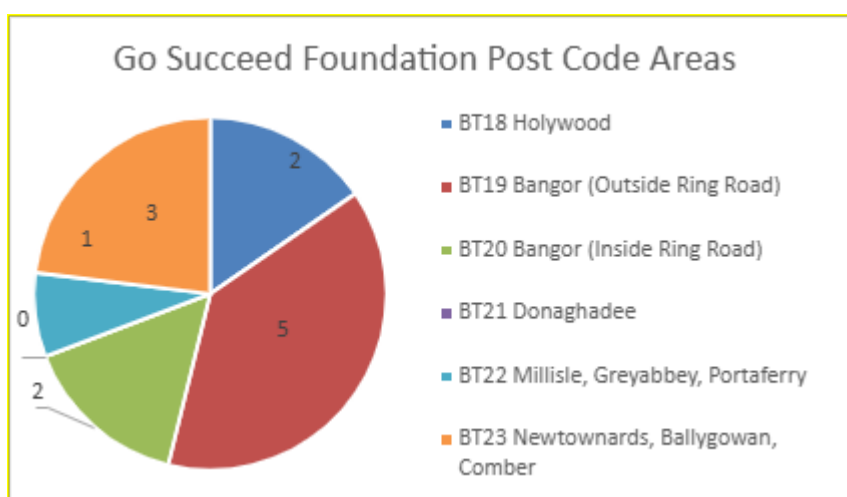


Foundation

As of 30 th June 2026 (12-Month Target of 45)	
Go Succeed clients assigned on Foundation Pillar completed Diagnostics	24*
Project Sign Off carried out by LEA's *	3
Jobs Created	2

- Please Note: sign-off include Business Plans and Enterprise Action Plans to determine Job Creation. Of the 24 diagnostics completed 11 of these were for clients who applied for Go Succeed support prior to 1st April 2026*

The chart below indicates by postcode 13 Go Succeed Foundation clients registered from 1 April 2026 to 30 June 2026, these include withdrawals.

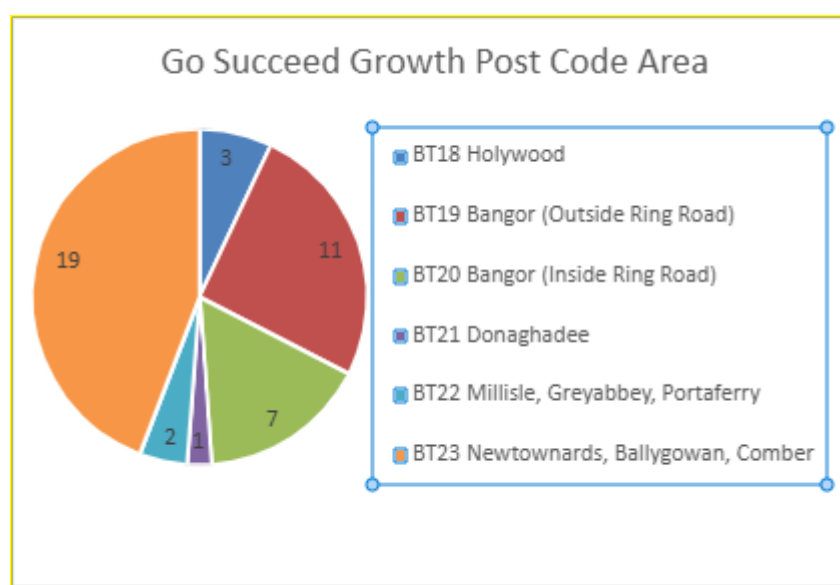


Growth

As at 30 th June 2026 (12 - Month Target of 119)	
Go Succeed companies registered on Growth Pillar (estimate)	43
ANDBC Officer Diagnostic Approved	58*
Mentor Hours Allocated	243
Existing clients with additional hours	1
Clients returning post 12 months of initial mentoring ending	2

- Please Note: budget allows for average of 15hrs support per company. Of the 58 diagnostics completed 15 of these were for clients who applied for Go Succeed support prior to 1st April 2026.*

The chart below indicates by postcode 43 Go Succeed Growth clients registered from 1 April 2026 to 30 June 2026.



Future activities scheduled for next three quarters

Go Succeed Grants will have its fourth open call that may provide funding of up to 50% of costs for eligible capital items up to a maximum grant award of £4,000 and minimum grant award of £1,000.

Grants are available under the Foundation, Growth and Scaling pillars and applying for this grant will be through a targeted competitive call. Go Succeed clients will be eligible to apply once they have completed at least 60% of their mentoring; however, grants cannot be drawn down until the mentoring is fully complete. Grant applications will open on 1 September 2026 and close on 13 October 2026.

The Ultimate Pitch Competition: This pitching competition gives local entrepreneurs the opportunity to compete for up to £6,000 in investment for their business idea. There are two heats, local and regional. Applicants can compete for £1,000 at a local council heat, with the potential to progress to the regional final and

compete for an additional £5,000.

The competition opened 27 July 2026 and closed on 17 August 2026, with local heats leading to a final in November during Global Entrepreneurship Week.

Future Founders a youth entrepreneurship programme in partnership with Young Enterprise NI and the six Further Education Colleges targeting students from age 16-24 to encourage and support future entrepreneurs and develop creativity and innovation.

This year's events commence in September with the Introduction to Ideation. The Innovation Camp will be held in October, with a team based workshop where students will pitch an original business concept in a Dragon's Den style event. The programme finishes in November 2026 with the Entrepreneurship Hub event, an open forum format where students get direct mentorship with three local business owners in a Q&A session discussing their business journey from idea to running a successful business.

Community Outreach is activity that informs targeted groups about the Go Succeed Service through a series of information sessions with the aim for individuals to register onto the service. An analysis of recent applications for Go Succeed has revealed that while urban areas demonstrate high engagement, four key areas; Donaghadee, Carrowdore, Millisle and Portaferry have a low registration rate. To address this, planning is in place to host four targeted information sessions between September and December 2026.

Finance:

The GO Succeed Programme is funded through the Local Growth fund with match funding provided by Councils.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council Notes the content of the report.

Unclassified

ITEM 14

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Place and Prosperity Committee
Date of Meeting	03 September 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Economic Growth
Report title	Labour Market Partnership - Quarterly Update Report
Attachments	
File Reference (if applicable)	RDP 47
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	Budget
	Narrative: DfC funded
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:

The Ards and North Down Labour Market Partnership (LMP) was established in August 2021 to address local employment and skills needs. The Council provides secretariat support to the LMP. This report provides an update on delivery of the 2025–26 Action Plan and progress with the 2026–27 programme.

LMP Funding and Action Plan for 2025–26: The LMP Secretariat received a Letter of Offer from DfC on 15 May 2025 for administration and programme delivery. In November 2025, DfC provided approximately £109,792.26 in additional funding. This enabled participant numbers to be increased for the Transport Academy and the Academy for People with Disabilities, and two new academies to be introduced: an SIA Licence Academy for 12 participants and a Taxi Academy for 16 participants. DfC approved the revised budget and associated change requests on 27 November 2025.

LMP Funding and Action Plan for 2026–27: DfC has provided two interim allocations of £100,942.90, each covering a three-month period from 1 April to 30 September 2026. As the Executive has not yet agreed a budget, the Council is awaiting a formal Letter of Offer.

An update on delivery of the 2025–26 Action Plan is provided below.

2025-2026 Action Plan Update:

Signposting Employability and Skills Register:

Two registers have been produced: an Employer Register and a Participants Register. Both are available to download from the Council website, and printed copies are also available. Distribution of printed copies is reported separately, as it cannot be captured through website download data.

Between April 2025 and 19 March 2026, the registers were downloaded as follows:

- Employer Register: 74 downloads
- Participants Register: 112 downloads

The following registers have been given out at recent events:

Name of event	Number handed out
Entrepreneur Road Show – Employer Guide	1
West Winds – Skills and Employment Support Clinic	1
Donaghadee – Skills and Employment Support Clinic	5
Millisle – Skills and Employment Support Clinic	3
Disability Employment and Support Day – 25 November 2025	6
Job Fair, Aurora – 5 February 2026	70
Disability Employment and Support Day – 26 February 2026	40

Name of event	Number handed out
Apprenticeship Careers Fair – 19 February 2026	120
Total	246

In total, 432 guides were downloaded or distributed during 2025–26. The guides will be updated to reflect current projects and programmes, with reprinting funded through the 2026–27 Action Plan.

Transport Academy:

The academy recruited 66 participants across its HGV/coach and driving licence elements. Fifty participants completed the HGV/coach training, with 45 moving into employment. Six participants passed their driving test, with four moving into employment. One further participant secured employment before completing the driving test. The academy has been extended to 30 September 2026 to complete the remaining activity and monitor further employment outcomes.

Academy for People with Disabilities:

The academy was expanded by 15 places, bringing the total to 45 participants. All places were filled and both cohorts have completed the programme. Fourteen participants have moved into employment against a target of 15. Delivery was extended to 30 June 2026 to support achievement of the remaining employment outcome.

Greentech Academy:

The academy is complete. Twenty-eight participants gained 49 qualifications, with 14 reporting improved employment outcomes against a target of 11. Further employment outcomes will continue to be monitored.

Catering Academy:

The academy recruited 15 participants across two cohorts, with 12 moving into employment. Delivery was extended to 30 September 2026.

Classroom Assistant Employability Academy:

The academy recruited 25 participants across two cohorts. Twenty-one participants moved into employment, exceeding the target of 13. The academy is now complete, and further employment outcomes will continue to be monitored.

Health and Social Care Academy:

The academy was reduced from 22 to 17 places to support an increase in the Taxi Academy. All 17 places were filled, and 10 participants moved into employment against a target of 11. Delivery was extended to 30 June 2026.

Employer Led Upskilling Programme:

The programme supported 54 companies and 103 employees. Grants totalling £20,073.90 were awarded to 23 companies. Of these, 19 completed the training, enabling 53 employees to gain 57 qualifications. A further 50 employees attended group training funded through an additional £3,000 allocation. The programme

exceeded its targets of 46 participants and 12 employers and was completed in March 2026. Employment outcomes will continue to be monitored.

SIA Academy:

Training was completed on 16 March 2026 by all 10 participants, all of whom passed. Four participants have moved into employment, and four others have received their licence. Delivery was extended to 30 September 2026 to allow remaining licence and employment outcomes to be confirmed.

Taxi Academy:

Six participants have completed the required tests, with three moving into employment. Other participants are progressing through medical, AccessNI, theory or practical requirements. Two participants were removed from the programme following non-attendance and no further engagement. Delivery has been extended to 30 September 2026.

Employment Support Clinics:

Three clinics were delivered and are now complete.

Employer Information Session:

One session was delivered and is now complete.

Disability Employment and Support Days;

Two events were delivered and are now complete.

Job Fairs:

Two job fairs were delivered and are now complete. DfC confirmed that the March 2026 event resulted in 34 filled positions, including 10 secured by people who were previously unemployed.

Apprenticeship Careers Fair:

One fair was delivered and is now complete.

PR Campaign:

The campaign generated 80 expressions of interest. The campaign analytics are shown below.



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	March/April
Adshells Live - coverage across Bangor, Ards, Comber and Holywood	



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

Fifteen promotional displays were produced and distributed across community centres and partner organisations throughout the Borough. One display has been retained for future events, and a further display will be provided to the Housing Executive in Bangor.

Webinar:

One webinar was delivered and is now complete.

Easement Bids:

ADR Training Easement Bid:

A £5,000 easement bid was approved to provide ADR training for 10 current or former Transport Academy participants. ADR is the specialist qualification required to transport dangerous goods by road.

Initial interest from Transport Academy participants was limited to three. Following wider promotion through the Council's Facebook page, 33 expressions of interest were received, including five from outside the Borough.

Three participants have completed the training, two were scheduled to begin in August 2026, and the remaining five are scheduled to complete it between October and December 2026.

Childcare Academy:

People 1st was appointed to deliver the academy. An initial upskilling offer attracted no applications, so the programme was revised to support people who are economically inactive, underemployed or at risk of redundancy to enter the childcare

sector and gain a Level 2 accredited qualification. Seven applications have been received to date.

Funding is available for eight participants and must be spent by 31 December 2026. As the programme is funded by the Department for the Economy, it must support employment in the childcare or childminding sector.

25-26 AND LMP Job Outcomes:

Programme / Project	Job Targets	Job Outcomes	Progress Update
Academy for People with Disabilities (45 participants)	15	14	All 45 places were filled and both cohorts completed the programme. Delivery was extended to 30 June 2026.
Transport Academy (66 participants)	42	49	Across two HGV cohorts, 50 participants completed training and 45 moved into employment. Six participants completed the driving licence element, with four moving into employment.
Classroom Assistant Employability Academy (25 participants)	13	21	The first cohort recruited 12 participants, with nine moving into employment. The second recruited 13, with 12 moving into employment.
Catering Academy (15 participants)	16	12	The first cohort achieved five employment outcomes and the second achieved seven. Delivery was extended to 30 September 2026.
Health and Social Care Academy (17 participants)	11 (revised)	10	Twelve participants joined the first cohort and five joined the second. Ten participants moved into employment.
Greentech Academy (28 participants)	11 enhanced employment	14 enhanced employment outcomes	Twenty-eight participants gained 49 qualifications. Fourteen reported increased working hours or higher-paid employment.
Childminding Academy (six participants)			No employment target or outcome is reported.
SIA Licence Academy (10 participants recruited)	9	4	All 10 participants completed the training and nine passed. Four moved into employment, and four others received their licence.
Taxi Academy (22 participants)	15	3	Six participants have completed the required tests. Other

Programme / Project	Job Targets	Job Outcomes	Progress Update
			participants are progressing through medical, AccessNI, theory or practical requirements.
Childcare Academy (eight funded places)	5		Seven applications have been received. Recruitment remains open.
ADR Training (10 participants)	6 (enhanced employment)		Three participants have completed the training, two were scheduled to begin in August 2026, and five are scheduled between October and December 2026.
Jobs, Support and Training Fair – 5 February 2026			53 exhibitors and 122 attendees.
Apprenticeship Careers Fair – 19 February 2026			33 exhibitors and 320 attendees; 144 people registered for programmes.
Job Fair – 19 March 2026		34	55 exhibitors and 351 attendees, including nine pupils. DfC confirmed that 34 positions were filled, including 10 secured by people who were previously unemployed.
Disability Employment and Support Day – 25 November 2025			17 exhibitors and six attendees.
Disability Employment and Support Day – 26 February 2026			15 exhibitors and 60 attendees; 35 people registered for programmes.
Skills and Employment Support Clinic, West Winds – 10 September 2025			Six people attended.
Skills and Employment Support Clinic, Donaghadee – 17 September 2025			39 people attended. Belfast Works Connect subsequently engaged with a community representative and is supporting more than 20 women.
Skills and Employment Support Clinic, Millisle – 21 October 2025			Nine people attended. Four community groups engaged with Belfast Works Connect and Disability Action.

Programme / Project	Job Targets	Job Outcomes	Progress Update
Employer Led Upskilling Programme	19 enhanced employment outcomes		33 participants reported increased working hours or higher earnings.
Total Employment Outcomes, 2025–26	162 (126 jobs +36 enhanced jobs)	147 jobs + 47 enhanced jobs = 194	

Year to date Job Outcomes update:

The 2025–26 Action Plan has delivered 147 employment outcomes and 47 enhanced employment outcomes to date. This figure remains subject to confirmation as outstanding outcomes continue to be monitored.

2026-2027 Action Plan Update:

As a formal Letter of Offer has not yet been received, programme activity has been limited to date. The interim funding provides salary cover until 30 March 2027.

Delivery agents have been appointed for the following academies:

- Warehouse Academy for 16 participants, providing manual handling and forklift licence training.
- Classroom Upskilling Academy for 25 participants. Recruitment has commenced, with delivery scheduled to begin in September 2026.
- Administration and Business Services Academy for 17 participants.

Signposting Employability and Skills Register:

The Employer Register and Participants Register are being updated as part of the 2026–27 Action Plan.

Between April and 8 June 2026, the registers were downloaded as follows:

- Employer Register: three downloads
- Participants Register: two downloads

Printed copies distributed at events are set out below:

Name of event	Number distributed
Community Volunteer Celebration Event	8
Total	8

In total, 13 guides were downloaded or distributed between April and 8 June 2026.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council notes the content of the report.