

September 29th, 2026

Notice Of Meeting

You are requested to attend the meeting to be held on **Wednesday, 7th October 2026** at **9:00 am** in **Hybrid - Church Street, Newtownards and via Zoom**.

Agenda

Agenda

(Attached)

Attachment: EC 07.10.26 Agenda.pdf

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1. **Apologies**
2. **Declarations of Interest**

Reports for Approval

3. **Notice of Motion 619 Greyabbey Tennis Courts**

(Attached)

Attachment: 3 Notice of Motion 619 Greyabbey Tennis Courts.pdf

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4. **Sand Dune and Coastal Management**

(Attached)

Attachment: 4 Sand Dune and Coastal Management.pdf

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Attachment: 4.1 Appendix 1 - Summary of Main Legislation and Considerations.pdf

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Attachment: 4.2 Appendix 2 Local Site Survey Reports.pdf

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Attachment: 4.3 Appendix 3 - Example of Standard Operating Procedure.pdf

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Attachment: 4.4 Appendix 4 - Sand Dune Restoration Recommendations.pdf

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5. **Donaghadee Local Nature Reserve Proposal**

(Attached)

Attachment: 5 Donaghadee Local Nature Reserve Proposal.pdf

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6. **Name to be added to Bangor War Memorial**

(Attached)

Attachment: 6 Name to be Added to Bangor War Memorial.pdf

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7. Notice of Motion 684 Lighting between Donaghadee Harbour and Donaghadee Community Centre

(Attached)

Attachment: 7 Notice of Motion 684 Lighting between Donaghadee Harbour and Donaghadee Community Centre.pdf

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Attachment: 7 Appendix 1 Ddee Harbour Pedestrian Improvements.pdf

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Reports for Noting

8. Future Cemetery Provision - Strategic Need and Capacity Update

(Attached)

Attachment: 8 Future Cemetery Provision - Strategic Need and Capacity Update.pdf

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9. Response to Notice of Motion 716 Donaghadee Harboured Shared Island Funding Request

(Attached)

Attachment: 9 Response to Notice of Motion 716 Donaghadee Harboured Shared Island Funding Request.pdf

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10. Bangor Castle Walled Garden Social Value Analysis

(Attached)

Attachment: 10 Bangor Castle Walled Garden Social Value Analysis.pdf

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Attachment: 10 Appendix 1 Social Value Analysis of the Bangor Castle Walled Garden.pdf

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11. Town Centres Wardens Update

(Attached)

Attachment: 11 Town Centre Wardens Update.pdf

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12. Borough Cleanliness Survey 2026/27 Quarter 1 (April to June 2026)

(Attached)

Attachment: 12 Borough Cleanliness Survey 2026-27 Quarter 1 (April to June 2026).pdf

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Attachment: 12 Appendix 1 AND Q1 Borough Cleansing Survey 2026-27.pdf

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13. Notices of Motion

14. Any Other Notified Business

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

Reports for Approval Delegated to Committee (In Confidence)

15. Tenders

15.1 Marine Service Tender Award

(Attached)

Attachment: 15.1 Marine Service Tender Award.pdf

Not included

15.2 Tender for the Loading, Transport and Treatment of Container Glass

(Attached)

Attachment: 15.2 Tender for the Loading, Transport ,and Treatment of Container Glass.pdf

Not included

15.3 Extension of the Tender for the Design, Supply, Installation and Maintenance of Solar PV Systems at Various Council Properties

(Attached)

Attachment: 15.3 Extension Tender for Design, Supply, Installation & Maintenance Solar PV Systems.pdf

Not included

Reports for Approval (In Confidence)

16. Addendum to outline Business Case on Future Cemeteries

Provision within the Borough

(Attached)

***Attachment: 16 Addendum to Outline Business Case on Future Cemeteries
Provision within the Borough.pdf***

Not included

***Attachment: 16 Appendix 1 - Draft OBC Addendum Future Cemetery Provision
September 2026 V1.pdf***

Not included

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

30 September 2026

Dear Sir/Madam

You are hereby invited to attend a hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of the Environment Committee of Ards and North Down Borough Council in the Council Chamber, 2 Church Street, Newtownards on **Wednesday, 7 October 2026** commencing at **7.00pm**.

Yours faithfully

Susie McCullough
Chief Executive
Ards and North Down Borough Council

A G E N D A

1. Apologies
2. Declarations of Interest

Reports for Approval

3. Notice of Motion 619 Greyabbey Tennis Courts (Report attached)
4. Sand Dune and Coastal Management (Report attached)
5. Donaghadee Local Nature Reserve Proposal (Report attached)
6. Name to be added to Bangor War Memorial (Report attached)
7. Notice of Motion 684 Lighting between Donaghadee Harbour and Donaghadee Community Centre (Report attached)

Reports for Noting

8. Future Cemetery Provision - Strategic Need and Capacity Update (Report attached)
9. Response to Notice of Motion 716 Donaghadee Harboured Shared Island Funding Request (Report attached)
10. Bangor Castle Walled Garden Social Value Analysis (Report attached)
11. Town Centres Wardens Update (Report attached)

12. Borough Cleanliness Survey 2026/27 Quarter 1 (April to June 2026) (Report attached)

13. Notices of Motion – to be confirmed following September's Council meeting

14. Any Other Notified Business

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

Reports for Approval Delegated to Committee (In Confidence)

15. Tenders

- 15.1. Marine Service Tender Award (Report attached)
- 15.2. Tender for the Loading, Transport, and Treatment of Container Glass (Report attached)
- 15.3. Extension of the Tender for the Design, Supply, Installation and Maintenance of Solar PV Systems at various Council Properties (Report attached)

Reports for Approval (In Confidence)

16. Addendum to Outline Business Case on Future Cemeteries Provision within the Borough (Report attached)

MEMBERSHIP OF ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE (16 Members)

Alderman Adair	Councillor Douglas
Alderman Armstrong-Cotter	Councillor Edmund
Councillor Ashe (Vice Chair)	Councillor Harbinson
Councillor Blaney	Alderman McRandal – Apology received
Councillor Boyle	Councillor Kendall
Councillor Brady	Alderman McAlpine
Alderman Cummings	Councillor Newman
Councillor Cathcart (Chair)	Councillor Wray

Unclassified

ITEM 3

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Environment Committee
Date of Meeting	07 October 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Environmental Services
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Parks and Cemeteries
Report title	Notice of Motion 619 Greyabbey Tennis Courts
Attachments	N/A
File Reference (if applicable)	NOM 619
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	Budget and Staffing Narrative: resources in place
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 decision 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 May 2024, Council agreed the following decision arising from a Notice of Motion:

“That this Council notes with concern the temporary closure of Groomsport tennis courts due to issues around the safety of the playing surface. Further to this Council tasks Officers to bring back a report on Tennis Court maintenance throughout the Borough and will commit to ensuring all our tennis facilities are properly maintained and are fully accessible to all. Council will also promote the use of tennis facilities in the Borough as we approach the spring/summer season.”

A subsequent update report was presented to Council in January 2025 outlining the costs and anticipated works required for tennis courts across the Borough. At that meeting Council agreed:

“That the Council agree the recommendation of the Committee but further tasks officers to explore the feasibility of incorporating a MUGA as part of the redevelopment of Greyabbey Tennis Courts including engagement with current users, sports clubs and community groups to ensure use for all sports and maximum investment and sport participation for the community of Greyabbey.”

A further report was brought to Council in January 2026 recommending that:

“Council await the outcome of the Leisure Facilities Audit and the further delivery of other older children provision locations as outlined in the Play Strategy in order to accurately determine the level of facility provision required across the Borough, as well as Greyabbey, and the priority areas to be delivered in accordance with available budgets provided through the rates and grants that will be sought.”

An alternative proposal was subsequently agreed in January 2026 that:

“That the Development of the Greyabbey MUGA Project be delivered as a joint Village Renewal and Parks Project with progress report coming to the Council.”

Key Issues

Greyabbey Village Plan

If the future development of a MUGA in Greyabbey is to be a joint village renewal and Parks project, it is required to be considered in the context of the priorities of the emerging Greyabbey Village Plan. This should take account of the Council's wider strategies on play provision for older children.

Following adoption of the Village Plan, identified projects will then be prioritised through an agreed assessment framework considering strategic fit; community need; community benefit; deliverability; funding availability; and value for money.

The Greyabbey Village Plan is expected to be launched later this year. Development of the Plan commenced in May 2024 and included extensive community engagement with residents, community organisations, schools and other local stakeholders through workshops, surveys, public events and drop-in sessions.

The findings informed a series of proposed priorities and actions for the village. The provision of a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) was raised during the engagement process, primarily in the context of improving recreational opportunities for children and young people.

The emerging outdoor recreation priorities are:

- Enhance Recreational Areas
- Walking and Cycling Trails
- Increased Green Spaces

During public consultation on these priorities, there was additional support expressed for the inclusion of a MUGA within the emerging priorities for the village.

Leisure Facilities Audit

Under the Leisure Strategy Implementation Plan approved by Council in 2025, a Borough-wide Leisure Facilities Audit is currently being undertaken. The audit will provide an evidence-based assessment of existing and future requirements for leisure infrastructure, including tennis courts, pitches, MUGAs and other recreational facilities. The audit will assist Council in determining:

- The level of tennis court provision required across the Borough;
- Whether existing facilities should be retained, enhanced or replaced;
- The future requirement for MUGAs and other recreational infrastructure; and
- The relative priority of investment across settlements.

Until the audit has been completed, it is not possible to determine the appropriate future level of tennis provision within Greyabbey or whether there is a demonstrated need for the proposed Greyabbey MUGA Project.

Existing Recreational Provision

Council has recently invested in recreational infrastructure within Greyabbey through the refurbishment of Islandview Play Park, completed during 2025/26 in accordance with the Council's Play Strategy.

The Play Strategy also identifies a future requirement for provision aimed at older children and young people within Greyabbey. This could potentially be delivered through a MUGA, wheel sports facility or similar recreational infrastructure, subject to consultation, assessment of need and available resources.

MUGAs delivered through the Play Strategy are generally informal recreational facilities, typically providing opportunities for football and basketball on a tarmac surface enclosed by perimeter fencing. They are freely accessible for public use.

While such facilities can support a range of informal activities, they are not normally designed to provide dedicated tennis facilities. Tennis provision requires court-specific dimensions, surfacing, line markings, posts and net systems which differ from the design and purpose of a standard Play Strategy MUGA.

Next Steps

At this stage, the scale, specification and priority of the Greyabbey MUGA Project will be informed by the completion of the Borough-wide Leisure Facilities Audit and adoption of the Greyabbey Village Plan. Together, these will provide the strategic and evidence-based framework for considering future recreational investment within Greyabbey.

The Play Strategy adopts a phased approach to the delivery of older children's facilities across the Borough based on population size, strategic need and available resources. The remaining locations identified for future older children's provision are:

- Bangor (76,403 population, 2021 Census) - Bangor Cycle Park being delivered through PEACEPLUS funding and additional provision planned through the Bangor Waterfront Scheme;
- Holywood (10,757) - delivery planned during 2026/27;
- Donaghadee (7,325) - Pump Track being delivered through PEACEPLUS funding;
- Portaferry (2,372) - delivery planned during 2026/27;
- Ballywalter (2,008);
- Cloughey (1,347);
- Groomsport (1,224); and
- Greyabbey (879).

The Play Strategy therefore provides an existing phased programme of investment, with a number of larger settlements currently prioritised.

Following adoption of the Greyabbey Village Plan, projects identified within the Plan, including recreational proposals, will be assessed and prioritised using the agreed project assessment framework.

Officers are not currently aware of any confirmed external funding programme that would support a project of this nature. However, appropriate funding opportunities will continue to be monitored as they arise.

Summary

This report provides an update on the consideration of recreational facilities within Greyabbey following previous Council decisions relating to tennis court provision and the potential development of the Greyabbey MUGA Project.

Community engagement undertaken through the emerging Greyabbey Village Plan has identified support for enhanced recreational opportunities for children and young people, including interest in a potential MUGA.

However, the nature, scale and priority of any future provision has not yet been determined. The Borough-wide Leisure Facilities Audit will provide the evidence base for assessing future demand for tennis courts, MUGAs and other recreational facilities, while the Greyabbey Village Plan will establish the wider community priorities for the village.

It is therefore considered appropriate that any further development of the Greyabbey MUGA Project is informed by the findings of the Leisure Facilities Audit, the adopted Greyabbey Village Plan, the existing Play Strategy programme and wider Council priorities.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council **Agrees** that further development of the Greyabbey MUGA Project, as a joint Village Renewal and Parks Project, continues as informed by the findings of

- (i) the Borough-wide Leisure Facilities Audit,
- (ii) the priorities identified through the adopted Greyabbey Village Plan and
- (iii) the Councils Play Strategy for the delivery of older children's facilities across the Borough.

Furthermore, **agrees** that funding opportunities continue to be sought for the project.

Unclassified

ITEM 4

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Environment Committee
Date of Meeting	07 October 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Environmental Services
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Parks and Cemeteries
Report title	Sand Dune and Coastal Management
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Summary of Main Legislation and Considerations Appendix 2 - Local Site Survey Reports Appendix 3 - Example Standard Operating Procedure Appendix 4 - Sand Dune Restoration Recommendations
File Reference (if applicable)	88008 / PCA102
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 The Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 The Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (NI) 2011 The Conservation (Natural Habitats) Regs (NI) 1995 The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 Part 4
Resource Implications	Budget and Staffing Narrative: No capital or revenue budget is currently approved for the purchase or operation of mechanical beach-cleaning equipment or for the proposed dune-restoration programme. Development of a costed programme can initially be undertaken through existing officer resources. Any requirement for specialist ecological support, planting, fencing,

If multiple:

	signage, monitoring, maintenance or other physical works will be brought through the estimates and business-planning process before any commitment can be made
Screening Requirements	<i>The Council will commit to consider the implication of all reports under the categories of Section 75, Rural Needs, Data Protection, Climate and Sustainability:</i> Screening of decision not required
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Priority 2: Environmental 2. An environmentally sustainable and resilient Council and Borough meeting our net zero carbon targets If multiple:

Background

This report provides the further information and evidence requested by Council following its in-principle decision of December 2025 to agree in principle to purchase a mobile biosecurity wash-down unit and relevant mechanical beach-cleaning equipment, subject to the estimates process. This was too late for the estimates at that time and so is now being considered. It summarises the regulatory advice received from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and reports the findings of ecological surveys at Cloughey, Portavogie, Millisle and Seapark, and seeks a decision on whether the proposed mechanical beach-cleaning equipment should be considered or whether a phased, nature-based coastal management approach should be adopted.

In November 2023, Council agreed Notice of Motion 585, which recognised the value of the Borough's beaches and coastal environment and asked officers to report on the proactive cleaning and maintenance of beaches in accordance with applicable environmental requirements.

In January 2024, Council noted the work being undertaken to manage beaches and the coastal environment sustainably. Officers were also asked to report on the potential installation of beach biosecurity sanitation units, possible funding and locations, and how associated equipment might support mechanical beach cleaning.

A further report was considered in January 2025. Council agreed that officers should undertake fact-finding visits to beaches managed by Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council and Newry, Mourne and Down District Council and report on potential improvements, including the possible phased provision of biosecurity facilities.

Those visits took place during August and September 2025. Officers and Elected Members observed that mechanical cleaning at Portrush East Strand was targeted at small litter items rather than the routine removal of seaweed. Mechanical cleaning was

not taking place at Whiterocks, Cranfield or Tyrella. At Whiterocks and Tyrella, dune restoration measures included marram planting and the management of public access.

In December 2025, Council agreed in principle to purchase a mobile biosecurity wash-down unit and relevant mechanical beach-cleaning equipment, subject to the estimates process. The associated report provided an indicative capital estimate of approximately £125,000, comprising around £55,000 for a mobile wash-down unit and £70,000 for a mechanical beach cleaner. It also noted that staffing and vehicle maintenance costs would be additional.

The December 2025 report indicated that some form of mechanical cleaning might be possible subject to appropriate biosecurity controls. Subsequent detailed engagement with DAERA and NIEA on 11 February 2026 clarified that biosecurity is only one part of the regulatory process. The environmental designations, conservation objectives and site-specific sensitivities affecting the Council's beaches create substantial additional constraints. This represents material new information for Council's consideration.

Key Issues

Continued Beach Maintenance: Council is responsible for cleaning and maintaining amenity and recreational beaches under its ownership or management. The Parks and Cemeteries Service undertakes routine manual litter picking, bin servicing where facilities are provided, environmental inspections and other appropriate maintenance through its ranger service. Specialist contractors remove hazardous or harmful material when required. Community and volunteer beach-cleaning activity is also supported through the provision of equipment and the collection of bagged litter.

The retention of appropriate natural seaweed and strandline material does not mean that litter will be left on beaches. Litter and harmful material will continue to be removed, while natural material will be retained where it is safe, practicable and environmentally appropriate. Exceptional accumulations affecting health, safety or essential access will continue to be assessed on a site-specific basis and, where necessary, discussed with the relevant regulatory authorities.

Environmental role of dunes and strandline material: Coastlines and sand dune systems are valuable natural assets. They support specialised plants, invertebrates and birds, contribute to landscape character and public amenity, and can help reduce exposure to coastal erosion and storm impacts. Healthy dunes can absorb wave energy, trap wind-blown sand and adjust over time as coastal conditions change.

Vegetation is central to dune formation and stability. Pioneer plants and dune grasses trap wind-blown sand and bind sediment through their roots. Natural wrack, including seaweed and seagrass deposited along the strandline, provides shelter, organic material and nutrients for coastal plants and invertebrates. It can also create obstacles around which sand accumulates, supporting the early stages of dune development. Retaining appropriate natural strandline material, protecting existing vegetation and managing trampling can therefore support biodiversity and improve the ability of dune systems to respond to erosion and storm events. These measures are habitat-management and local resilience interventions. They are not engineered coastal-

defence schemes and do not alter statutory responsibilities for coastal flooding or erosion.

DAERA and NIEA Advice: Officers met DAERA and NIEA on 11 February 2026 to discuss routine mechanical beach cleaning, including the proposed removal of natural seaweed and strandline material. NIEA advised that the environmental designations and site-specific conservation objectives applying to the Ards and North Down coastline would make approval difficult and, where any activity was capable of being approved, it would be subject to significant restrictions and mitigation.

The Borough contains a range of coastal systems, from relatively sheltered lough shores to more exposed Outer Ards beaches. Their management must therefore be site-specific and informed by local geomorphology, ecology and conservation objectives. Practices observed elsewhere, including the limited mechanical removal of small litter items at Portrush East Strand, do not provide a direct precedent for routine mechanical cleaning or seaweed removal at the Council's designated beaches.

The principal matters identified for any proposed mechanical intervention include:

- whether the activity is necessary and whether a less damaging method is available;
- the potential removal of sand or sediment together with the target material;
- disturbance to wintering birds, other protected species and strandline invertebrates;
- damage to dune vegetation, dune toes and natural sediment movement;
- vehicle access, rutting, noise, visual disturbance and the risk of fuel or hydraulic leaks;
- biosecurity and the potential spread of invasive non-native species;
- the timing, frequency, operating area and weather or tidal conditions; and
- the handling, classification and lawful disposal of collected material.

Appendix 3 illustrates the regulatory and operational controls that would have to be considered if a site-specific mechanical intervention were proposed. However, it should be noted that this is not an approved operational procedure and does not confer permission to undertake mechanical cleaning.

Environmental Designations and Approvals: The surveyed locations are within or close to areas protected for their habitats, species and coastal features. Exact boundaries and the relationship of any proposed works to protected features must be confirmed against a site plan before work is designed or commissioned.

Site	Designated sites potentially affected	Required Approach
Seapark	Belfast Lough SPA and Ramsar site, together with the relevant ASSI boundary	Confirm the exact works area and zone of influence with NIEA before intervention

Site	Designated sites potentially affected	Required Approach
Millisle, Portavogie & Cloughey	Outer Ards ASSI, SPA and Ramsar site, together with any relevant marine designation within the zone of influence	Undertake site-specific ecological assessment and confirm HRA, assent and marine requirements

Where an operation is likely to damage the features of an ASSI, Council, as a public body, must apply to DAERA for assent. Where a proposal could affect an SPA or SAC, Council must also complete the appropriate Habitats Regulations Assessment process. The HRA should accompany the application for assent where both requirements apply. A marine licence or exemption may also be required, depending on the nature and location of the activity.

These requirements apply to all potentially damaging operations and not only to mechanical cleaning. Dune planting, fencing, access management and invasive-species control will therefore be designed in consultation with relevant specialists and progressed only after all necessary assessments, landowner permissions and regulatory approvals have been obtained.

Evidence from Tyrella: During the September 2025 fact-finding visit, officers observed a practical dune-restoration approach at Tyrella involving marram planting, retention of appropriate natural strandline material and low-impact fencing to reduce trampling. This provided a useful example of measures that could be considered at suitable sites within Ards and North Down, subject to site-specific assessment, consent and monitoring.

2026 Ecological Surveys: Ecological surveys were undertaken in July 2026 at Cloughey, Portavogie, Millisle and Seapark. The surveys considered the extent and condition of existing dunes, vegetation zones, strandline material, informal access routes, invasive species and opportunities for habitat enhancement. The detailed reports are provided at Appendix 2.

All four sites contained some dune or coastal vegetation, although their scale, condition and potential for enhancement varied. Cloughey and Portavogie contained the most extensive dune systems. Dune grasses recorded across the sites included sea lyme grass, sand couch and marram grass, together with other lower-growing coastal species.

Common pressures included trampling and informal paths through vegetation, gaps within dune systems and the presence of invasive or potentially invasive plants, including sea buckthorn at relevant locations. The surveys identified opportunities to improve habitat condition, manage access and increase public understanding of the ecological role of dunes and natural strandline material.

Site(s)	Recommended Management Direction
Cloughey, Portavogie and Millisle	Interpretive signage and community engagement; appropriate native dune planting in areas confirmed as suitable; low-impact fencing to protect restoration areas; rationalisation of informal paths while retaining suitable public access; and invasive-species management in accordance with an approved method.
Seapark	Interpretive signage explaining the importance of natural strandline material and coastal vegetation. Any physical intervention would be subject to further site assessment and regulatory advice.

The recommendations relate to the four surveyed sites. They do not diminish the importance of other amenity beaches, including Ballywalter, which will continue to be litter picked and maintained. Subject to need, site conditions, resources and approvals, the survey and management approach could be extended to other suitable coastal locations in the future.

Strategic Context: The proposed approach supports the Council's Local Biodiversity Action Plan and its wider climate adaptation and sustainability objectives. It is also consistent with Notice of Motion 725, which recognises that local coastal interventions must sit within a clearer regional framework for coastal monitoring, planning, governance and funding.

A nature-based approach allows the Council to improve habitats and local resilience within its existing land-management role while continuing to seek clearer Northern Ireland Executive leadership and funding for the wider issues of coastal flooding, erosion and infrastructure protection.

Financial and operational implications: The December 2025 report estimated an initial capital cost of approximately £125,000 for a mobile machinery wash-down unit and a mechanical beach cleaner. This was an indicative equipment estimate and did not include the full costs of implementation, including:

- additional staffing, supervision and seasonal cover;
- tractors, towing vehicles, fuel and transport between sites;
- storage, servicing, repairs, inspections and replacement;
- operator training, personal protective equipment and safe systems of work;
- containment and lawful disposal of wash water and collected material;
- ecological surveys, HRA, assent, licensing and compliance monitoring; and
- the administration required to plan and document each site-specific operation.

No approved Parks and Cemeteries capital or revenue budget is currently available for this work. Given the limited circumstances in which the equipment could potentially be used, the low likelihood of approval for routine removal of natural strandline material and the substantial whole-life cost, officers do not consider that procurement would represent value for money at this time.

The proposed nature-based measures will also require a costed delivery programme. Signage, engagement and some monitoring may be deliverable within existing resources, while planting, fencing, access works, invasive-species management and specialist ecological support may require additional funding. Any unfunded requirement will be brought forward through the estimates and business-planning process before a commitment is made.

Next Steps

Subject to Council approval, officers would develop a phased implementation programme for the four surveyed sites. This will include:

- confirming ownership, exact designation boundaries, protected features and regulatory requirements with DAERA and NIEA;
- establishing baseline information through fixed-point photography, vegetation condition records and, where proportionate, simple dune-profile monitoring;
- engaging local residents, schools and community organisations and developing consistent interpretive signage;
- identifying priority restoration areas and retaining safe, clearly defined and, where practicable, accessible routes to and across the beach;
- preparing site-specific specifications for appropriate planting, low-impact fencing, access management and invasive-species control;
- obtaining all required assessments, assents, permissions and licences before physical work begins;
- preparing capital and revenue cost estimates and identifying potential internal and external funding; and
- monitoring the initial phase through fixed-point photography, vegetation-condition assessments and site inspections, with a progress report presented to Committee 12 months after implementation commences.

Routine manual litter removal, environmental inspections and responsive management of health, safety and access issues will continue throughout this process as usual.

Summary

Council has considered the potential use of mobile biosecurity and mechanical beach-cleaning equipment over a number of reports. Following the December 2025 in-principle decision, more detailed regulatory engagement and ecological assessment have now been completed.

DAERA and NIEA advice indicates that routine mechanical removal of natural seaweed or strandline material at the Council's designated beaches would be difficult to approve and, if capable of approval in a particular circumstance, would be heavily restricted. Biosecurity controls would address only one part of the environmental and operational requirements.

The 2026 surveys found clear opportunities to improve the dune and coastal habitats at Cloughy, Portavogie, Millisle and Seapark through site-appropriate planting, low-impact fencing, access management, signage, community engagement, monitoring and invasive-species control. These measures would complement, rather than replace, the Council's routine manual litter-picking and beach-maintenance activity.

In view of the regulatory constraints, ecological risk, limited operational use and whole-life cost of mechanical equipment, officers recommend that the proposed purchase should not proceed at this time. A phased and costed nature-based programme provides a more proportionate and environmentally responsible approach.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council:

1. Agrees, in light of the regulatory, ecological and financial evidence, not to progress the proposed purchase of a mobile biosecurity wash-down unit and mechanical beach-cleaning equipment at this time.
2. Agrees that any future mechanical beach intervention will be considered only on an exceptional, site-specific basis, subject to environmental assessment, necessary approvals, a full business case, identified funding and further Council approval.
3. Agrees that officers develop a costed implementation and monitoring programme, secure the necessary approvals, and report progress to Committee 12 months after implementation commences.
4. Notes the advice received from government agencies and the findings of the 2026 ecological surveys.
5. Endorses a phased, nature-based management approach for the surveyed sites, subject to site-specific assessment, approvals and available budgets, including appropriate conservation, access management, community engagement and monitoring measures.

Appendix 1 - Summary of Main Legislation and Considerations

Summary of Main legislation and Considerations

The proposed beach cleaning and seaweed removal works are likely to require careful assessment because all four locations identified: Millisle, Cloughey, Seapark (Holywood) and Portavogie, are within or affected by sensitive coastal, marine or bird designations. The main legislative controls are likely to include marine licensing, protected site assent, Habitats Regulations Assessment, wildlife protection and waste/disposal controls.

Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, Part 4: A marine licence may be required where seaweed, sand, marine litter or other material is removed, deposited, disturbed or redistributed in the intertidal or marine environment. Returning material to the marine environment must be managed with particular care. Deposition activities can smother or degrade sensitive habitats, reefs, and benthic communities if not properly assessed. Any proposal to return material to the sea must therefore demonstrate that the location, method, and volume will not adversely affect ecological features, designated sites, or natural sediment processes. Prior to any return, all litter, plastics, contaminants, and anthropogenic debris must be fully removed to ensure that only clean, natural material is deposited, material must not be relocated or returned without confirmation of the lawful and environmentally accepted route. This requirement is essential to prevent pollution, protect water quality, and comply with recognised environmental standards.

Marine Licensing (Exempted Activities) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011: Some limited beach cleaning activities may be exempt from a marine licence, but only where the specific exemption conditions are met. An exemption would not remove the need for ASSI assent, HRA, waste controls or other environmental permissions.

The Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002: Where works are within or may affect an Area of Special Scientific Interest, ASSI assent is likely to be required, particularly if operations could damage coastal geomorphology, strandline habitat, dunes, intertidal features, bird interests or other notified features.

For a council or other public body, the key issue is whether the proposed seaweed removal is an operation likely to damage the special interest of the ASSI. If so, the public body would normally need **ASSI assent** from DAERA/NIEA before carrying out the activity.

Seaweed removal may be an issue for ASSI features such as:

- coastal geomorphology;
- dunes;
- intertidal habitats;
- strandline vegetation;

- bird feeding and roosting areas;
- rare plants or invertebrates;
- natural coastal processes.

The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995, as amended: A Habitats Regulations Assessment may be required where works could have a likely significant effect on an SPA, SAC or functionally linked habitat, either alone or in combination with other activities.

The key legislative issue is whether seaweed removal is likely to have a significant effect on a European site, either alone or in combination with other activities. If so, a Habitats Regulations Assessment is required.

Potential HRA concerns include:

- disturbance to wintering or breeding birds;
- loss of strandline feeding habitat;
- disturbance from machinery, people, noise or visual activity;
- damage to intertidal habitats;
- changes to nutrient cycling;
- impacts on species that depend on rotting seaweed;
- smothering of protected reef or sediment habitats if material is moved or redeposited.

Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013: Marine Conservation Zones and wider Marine Protected Area interests should be checked where works are within or near protected marine features or conservation objectives.

Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, as amended: may also be relevant, especially where seaweed removal could disturb protected birds or other species.

- Marine conservation concerns include:
- disturbance of wintering birds;
- disturbance of nesting birds, where relevant;
- removal of feeding material used by birds;
- displacement from roosting or foraging areas;
- repeated disturbance from vehicles, staff or machinery.
- If the birds are designated features of an SPA, Ramsar site or ASSI, the issue would also feed into **HRA** and/or **ASSI assent**.

Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and associated waste controls: if the seaweed is removed from the beach, the disposal route becomes a legal issues under the Waste and Contaminated Land (NI) Order 1997.

This becomes especially important where seaweed contains:

- plastics;
- marine litter;
- dead animals;
- contaminated sediment;
- invasive species;
- mixed beach debris.

The material may be treated as waste depending on how it is collected, stored, transported, reused or disposed of.

Invasive non-native species and biosecurity

Seaweed removal can create biosecurity risks if machinery, vehicles or collected material spread invasive non-native species between sites.

The legislative issue may arise through:

- protected site duties;
- marine licensing assessment;
- HRA mitigation;
- ASSI assent conditions;
- wider biodiversity obligations.

In practical terms, NIEA/DAERA may require cleaning protocols, restrictions on moving material, or controls on equipment movement between beaches. A proposed method for this is summarise in Appendix 3

Appendix 2 – Local Site Survey Reports

Cloughey Sand Dune Report **July 2026**



Introduction

An ecological survey was carried out at Cloughey beach on July 20th 2026. The survey was completed to understand several factors including what species are present at all zones of the beach and existing sand dune system, with the main focus of the survey investigating dune vegetation and plant zonation. These factors can indicate the condition of the dune system as well as provide insight into the appropriate mitigation required going forward to improve the system.

Cloughey beach is situated within the town of Cloughey and is located along the eastern coast of Northern Ireland (figure 1). The site itself is comprised of a public beach with associated dune system to the rear, with grassland vegetation, public boardwalks and car park. The site is within the Outer Ards ASSI (Area of Special Scientific Interest), SPA (Special Protection Area) and RAMSAR designated area as well as the North Channel SAC. This area is designated an ASSI for its geological features as well as the coastal animal and plant communities including the large quantity and variety of Earth tongue fungi that are found within the Cloughey dune systems. Cloughey beach has also been identified as being at high risk of coastal

erosion on the NIEA marine environment map viewer (figure 2), outlining the need for further protection.



Figure 1. Location of Survey Area



Figure 2. Site at high risk of coastal erosion (red indicates high risk)

The purpose of the survey was to investigate the overall condition of the existing sand dune system in a larger effort to improve our sand dunes across different coastal locations across Ards and North Down. This survey and report will relay information about the current condition of this sand dune system that will then inform the appropriate mitigation measures required to either manage the existing system or enhance the area into a stronger coastal sand dune habitat.

A wider objective of this work is to ultimately create greater coastal habitat resilience, which is important for coastal communities, where many people live and levels of ecosystem interference and disturbance is greatest (*Kutiel et al, 2004*). This resilience is the system's ability to recover from a disturbance and the ability to adjust to that

disturbance. Improving coastal ecosystem resilience has become more important in the last few decades due to the rapid rise of climate change factors such as increased storm frequency, harsher weather and sea level rise. Therefore, achieving coastal resilience is vital in supporting and defending our coastal communities as well as the flora and fauna within these habitats. Anthropogenic activities and natural systems should work together to achieve greater resilience that will allow coastal communities to cope with disturbances including the above listed factors.

What are sand dune systems

Sand dunes are formed over many years and are comprised of hills and mounds of deposited sand that usually form parallel to the beach. The sand is usually transported and deposited through aeolian processes i.e. wind along beach and the sand is deposited and builds up within certain areas by physical barriers such as dune vegetation and driftweed. Dunes establish just beyond the high-water mark and buildup over time, getting larger as you travel further inland from the beach. Vegetation within these areas is key in establishing sand dune systems, as seaweed and plants along with their root systems trap sand and other sediment, leading to the buildup of material over time, leading to the formation of taller and denser sand dunes. The vegetation that is located within these systems are rapid growers and are capable of dealing with harsher weather conditions such as winds and seawater spray (*Kutiel et al, 2004*). Dunes are dynamic systems that go through several changes over time through natural processes and anthropogenic interference. There are different stages and zones of a dune system which delineate the type of dune that is present, these include the below:

Embryo dune: The earliest stage of a dune system comprising mostly of bare exposed sand with little vegetation establishment. Some pioneer salt tolerant grasses may establish here, including sand couch grass and sea lyme grass.

Foredune: Sits behind an embryonic dune front, usually standing a couple of meters high. More vegetation growth in this zone with marram grass, which is less salt tolerant than the species mentioned above starting to establish.

Semi-fixed dune: Further back of the beach where plants have now established root systems with some exposed sand.

Dune slacks: A dipped, lower area in the dune system between the dunes. If low enough, pools can form and provide great habitat for many species including amphibians, birds and mammals.

Fixed (grey) dunes: Further back from beach, vegetation forms more of a grey colour due to the build-up of broken-down organic plant matter (humus) from the plant life and bacteria that are found in this area. These areas hold more water and therefore, can support larger shrubs.

Mature dunes: Dunes furthest away from the beach and have little/no exposed sand. Broken down organic matter means that larger vegetation including trees could form here.

Dune blowouts: Areas where large amounts of dune have been lost due factors such as human activity, leaving large gaps and areas of bare sand in the dune system.

Benefits of having seaweed and sand dunes

Seaweeds have several important roles in both the marine environment and coastal habitats (*El-Manaway & Rashedy, 2022*). They have great ecological importance, playing a role as primary producers, providing shelter for marine and coastal fauna and acting as a natural physical barrier to storm surges and extreme weather conditions (*Nabti, 2017*). Many research papers show that both marine seaweed and drift weed on beaches play ecological and economic roles. Seaweed, alongside other dune vegetation plays a crucial role in sand dune formation, trapping sand and sediment which overtime leads to the buildup and establishment of a dune system, as well as dissipating wave energy, therefore, helping to reduce coastal erosion alongside the developed sand dune system.

This build up in sand and material can over time, lead to a dune system that has many ecological benefits such as providing habitat for invertebrates which then act as food source for other fauna such as shorebirds and small mammals, as well as providing resting habitat for birds and mammals. A larger, built-up sand dune system will also act a greater natural barrier to coastal erosion and the harsher weather conditions and sea level rise that will come with climate change, with increased storms and harsher weather currently being experienced. Therefore, changes in sand dune dynamics would greatly affect local environments (*Vriend & Bacik, 2026*).

Survey Results

The survey identified that the extent of the dune system with associated dune vegetation to be approximately 600-650m along the coast within the remit of council land.

The survey looked at identifying species within the dune vegetation and surrounding areas within the site. The results will be split into different zones of the site including the grassland opposite the main car park/road within the eastern area of the site, the vegetation between the eastern area and main boardwalk of the site and the vegetation along the fore dune and beach front.

Grassland opposite car park / front of site: Ground level species included several grasses such as red fescue, cock's foot, common bent and sweet vernal. Lady's bedstraw on ground level coverage, ragwort with several cinnabar moth caterpillars on it, creeping thistle, curled docks, common hogweed and a line of Austrian pines at the front of the site beside the car park. Several paths of trampled vegetation were observed going across this habitat from the car park into the central boardwalk of the site. It would be recommended that people stick to using the designated boardwalks on site to avoid vegetation trampling. Other species such as restharrow was also observed within this more grassland area.

Going more south/southwest along the front of the site, the habitat is more dominated by dune grasses such as dense marram grass and sea lyme grass. This habitat covers

from opposite the playpark to the edge of the car park before it branches off into the main boardwalk into the centre of the site.

Opposite the playpark there is a large stand of the invasive sea buckthorn, as well as the non-native fuchsia. No other stands of buckthorn were observed, however, this observed stand should be cleared as soon as possible to prevent spread further into the site.

Vegetation between front of site and central boardwalk: Several large areas of dense bracken fern. These areas are dominated by dense fern, and therefore, stop growth of other vegetation such as marram and sea lyme grass in these areas which would be more beneficial to the site, however, several bird species were observed using the present bracken fern for nesting. Cat's ear was also observed lying opposite the main central boardwalk.

Foredune and beach front: The first species that was observed on the beach, a few meters in front of the dune vegetation buildup was sea rocket (distinct line of sea rocket across beach). Spear leaved orache and sea campion were also observed at the base of the raised dune vegetation at the very back of the beach. Species within the vegetation just opposite the beach included red fescue, wild radish, docks, false oat grass, sea mayweed, sea campion, some stands of sand couch grass, areas of dense marram grass with stands of sea lyme grass scattered within these areas too. Other species further along the beach border vegetation included cock's foot, Queen Anne's lace, tree mallow, horsetail and one small area of montbretia. Marram grass was the dominant dune grass along the foredune with sea lyme grass scattered throughout.

As outlined above, a wide range of floral species were observed and identified within different zones of the site during the site walkover. Some species may have been missed and therefore, not recorded during the day visit. Other species are listed in previous reports for the site. The wide diversity of floral species within the site provides food source and resting areas for any fauna that use the site. Many invertebrates were observed during the site visit, with several different bee and hoverfly species feeding on nectar, whilst several bird species were observed flying out of denser areas of vegetation in which they may have been nesting. The further creation and enhancement of the foredune at the front of the existing dune system will create habitat for these species and increase ecological diversity and resilience (*Ryan et al, 2023*).

The seaweed species present at the top of the beach towards the dune vegetation was also noted during this survey. This area is known as the strandline and is the area where debris and seaweed are deposited and build up above the high-water mark.



Figure 3. Top of beach showing strandline and seaweed deposition

Several different species were noted at the top of the beach such as bladder wrack, serrated wrack and oarweed. This strandline on the top of the beach where the seaweed is deposited (driftweed) is only a few meters away from the dune vegetation. This area of driftweed deposition also delineates the start of the softer sand build-up at the top of the beach (strandline), and the beginning of the dune system build-up a few meters beyond.

Several sources, including DAERA, have stated that the management of amenity beaches and the removal of seaweed and vegetation along the strandline will negatively affect the early stages of dune formation and development. This is due to this vegetation helping to capture and deposit sand and sediment, leading to the buildup of sand in this area, leading to the beginning of dune formation at the back of the beach. Other research has also stated that the removal or destruction of dune vegetation brings about abrupt changes in dune system morphology as it is the existing vegetation that initiates and regulates dune growth through the accumulation of sand and material over time (*Tsoar & Moller, 1986*).

Recommendations

Enhancing the existing sand dune system on site is important ecologically and socially. By improving these dune systems, it will allow the area to provide sufficient refugia and food source for many species of insects, birds and mammals as well as providing a natural coastal defence against a rapidly changing climate bringing harsher weather conditions and increased sea levels. Having a taller and denser dune system on site will aim to protect coastal homes and the wider coastal community.

There are several mitigation measures that can be implemented that will help to enhance the existing sand dune system within the site that may include but are not limited to the below:

- Planting and fencing to march dune system forward. There is approximately 5m gap on average between the strandline (area of deposition) and front of the dune vegetation, leaving that gap to potentially plant and fence.
- Signage and information to explain why areas are fenced off, not to walk into fenced areas of dunes and information on importance of dunes and seaweeds
- Bracken removal. There are large areas of dense bracken fern within the site, opposite the central boardwalk and adjacent to the front dune system. Management of this species is required to stop it becoming dominant throughout the system.
- Community involvement during fencing and planting zones of salt tolerant couch and lyme grass at front of planting area and marram grass behind as well as involvement in bracken removal
- Local community engagement activities and workshops to support any signage or site management plans.

Conclusion

Sand dunes are dynamic coastal systems that build up over time through years of sand and material deposition. Dune vegetation including the seaweed along the strandline directly adjacent to the dune system is crucial in dune establishment and enhancement, therefore, over time, helping to provide a natural defence at the back of the beach. In a time where we are seeing increased frequency of storms, harsher weather and sea level rise due to climate change, it has become even more important that we manage and further enhance our natural coastal defences. These natural defences can help to protect coastal communities against climate change and act as a more sustainable, long-term nature-based solution (*Van Der Biest, 2017*) without having to spend large amounts of money on anthropogenic coastal defences. In conclusion, this report outlines the importance and the need for sand dune system management and enhancement, which includes mitigation measures such as maintaining seaweed on our beaches, removing non-native invasive species and planting and fencing off dune vegetation such as sea lyme, couch and marram grass that will bolster our coastal defences. These measures will lead to the enhancement of our existing dunes at Cloughey, creating an overall, healthier environment for our local biodiversity and local coastal community.

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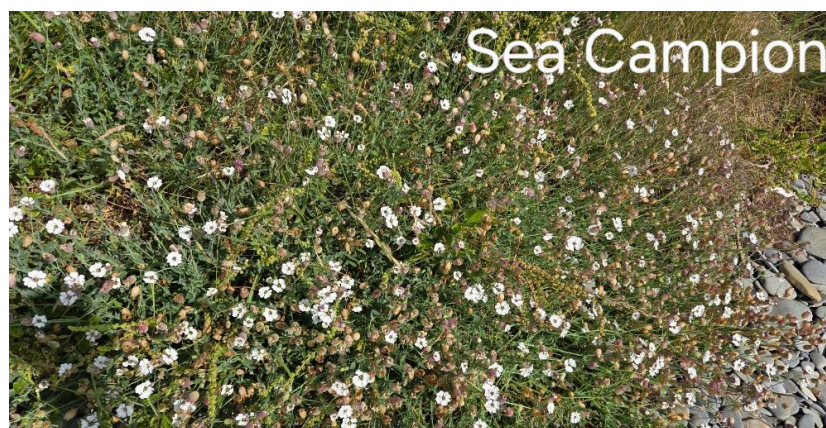
Figures



Trail creating large gap in dune system



Foredune dominated by sea lyme and marram grass



Sea campion at top of beach, embryonic dune area



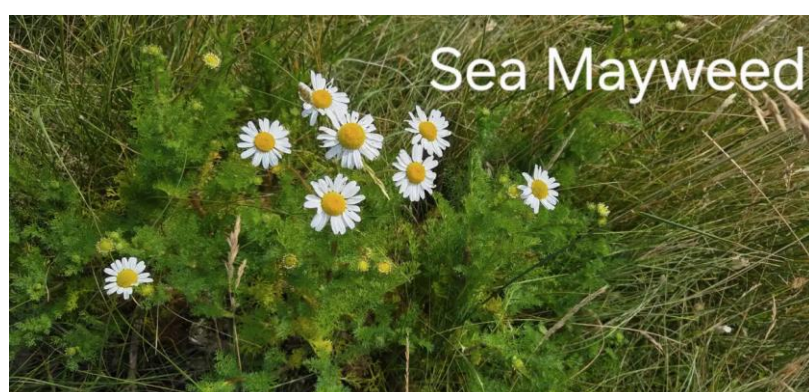
Front of site and back of dune system, marram grass dominated



Lady's bedstraw within dune system



Restharrow within dune vegetation



Sea mayweed within dune vegetation



Dense bracken areas on site



Central boardwalk surrounded by bracken fern



Cinnabar moth caterpillar on ragwort

Portavogie Sand Dune Report **July 2026**



Introduction

An ecological survey was carried out at Portavogie beach on July 17th 2026. The survey was completed to understand several factors including what species are present at all zones of the beach and existing sand dune system, with the main focus of the survey investigating dune vegetation and plant zonation. These factors can indicate the condition of the dune system as well as provide insight into the appropriate mitigation required going forward to improve the system.

Portavogie beach is situated within the town of Portavogie and is located along the eastern coast of Northern Ireland (figure 1). The site itself is comprised of a public beach with associated dune system to the rear, with grassland vegetation, public walkways and car park. The site is within the Outer Ards ASSI (Area of Special Scientific Interest), SPA (Special Protection Area) and RAMSAR designated area as well as the North Channel SAC. This area is designated an ASSI for its geological features as well as the coastal animal and plant communities. Portavogie beach has also been identified as being at moderate risk of coastal erosion on the NIEA marine environment map viewer (figure 2), outlining the need for further protection.

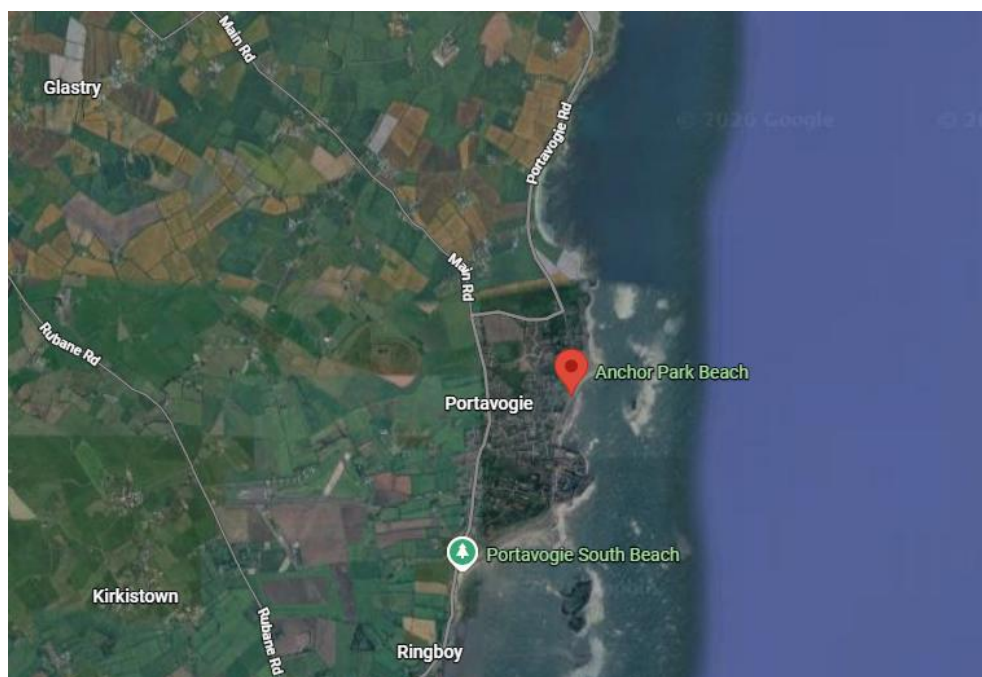


Figure 1. Location of survey area

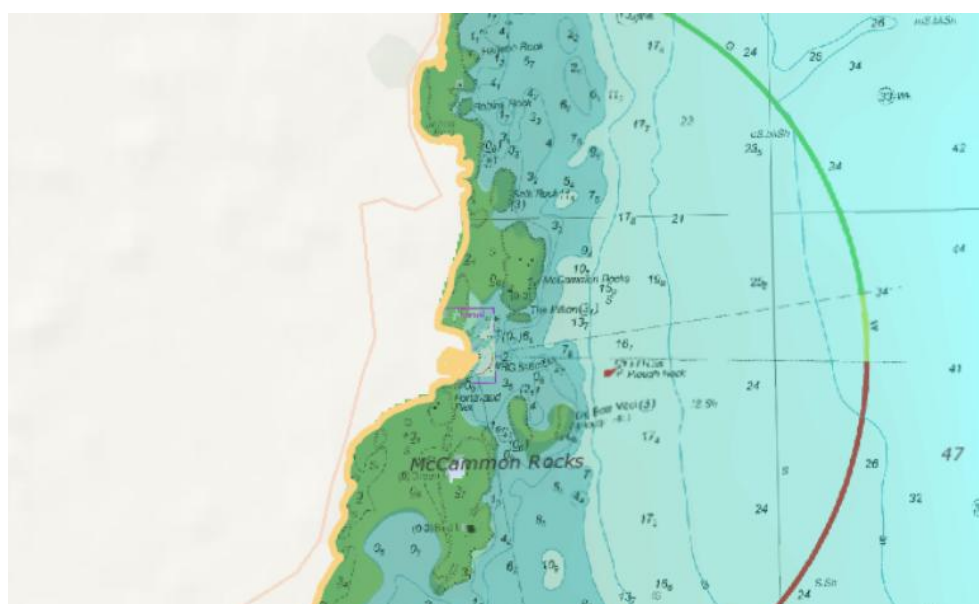


Figure 2. Site at moderate risk of coastal erosion (yellow indicates moderate risk)

The purpose of the survey was to investigate the overall condition of the existing sand dune system in a larger effort to improve our sand dunes across different coastal locations across Ards and North Down. This survey and report will relay information about the current condition of this sand dune system that will then inform the appropriate mitigation measures required to either manage the existing system or enhance the area into a stronger coastal sand dune habitat.

A wider objective of this work is to ultimately create greater coastal habitat resilience. This resilience is the system's ability to recover from a disturbance and the ability to adjust to that disturbance. Improving coastal ecosystem resilience has become more important in the last few decades due to the rapid rise of climate change factors such

as increased storm frequency, harsher weather and sea level rise. Therefore, achieving coastal resilience is vital in supporting and defending our coastal communities as well as the flora and fauna within these habitats. Anthropogenic activities and natural systems should work together to achieve greater resilience that will allow coastal communities to cope with disturbances including the above listed factors.

What are sand dune systems

Sand dunes are formed over many years and are comprised of hills and mounds of deposited sand that usually form parallel to the beach. The sand is usually transported and deposited through aeolian processes i.e. wind along beach and the sand is deposited and builds up within certain areas by physical barriers such as dune vegetation and driftweed. Dunes establish just beyond the high-water mark and buildup over time, getting larger as you travel further inland from the beach. Vegetation within these areas is key in establishing sand dune systems, as seaweed and plants along with their root systems trap sand and other sediment, leading to the buildup of material over time, leading to the formation of taller and denser sand dunes. The vegetation that is located within these systems are rapid growers and are capable of dealing with harsher weather conditions such as winds and seawater spray (*Kutiel et al, 2004*). Dunes are dynamic systems that go through several changes over time through natural processes and anthropogenic interference. There are different stages and zones of a dune system which delineate the type of dune that is present, these include the below:

Embryo dune: The earliest stage of a dune system comprising mostly of bare exposed sand with little vegetation establishment. Some pioneer salt tolerant grasses may establish here, including sand couch grass and sea lyme grass.

Foredune: Sits behind an embryonic dune front, usually standing a couple of meters high. More vegetation growth in this zone with marram grass, which is less salt tolerant than the species mentioned above starting to establish.

Semi-fixed dune: Further back of the beach where plants have now established root systems with some exposed sand.

Dune slacks: A dipped, lower area in the dune system between the dunes. If low enough, pools can form and provide great habitat for many species including amphibians, birds and mammals.

Fixed (grey) dunes: Further back from beach, vegetation forms more of a grey colour due to the build-up of broken-down organic plant matter (humus) from the plant life and bacteria that are found in this area. These areas hold more water and therefore, can support larger shrubs.

Mature dunes: Dunes furthest away from the beach and have little/no exposed sand. Broken down organic matter means that larger vegetation including trees could form here.

Dune blowouts: Areas where large amounts of dune have been lost due factors such as human activity, leaving large gaps and areas of bare sand in the dune system.

Benefits of having seaweed and sand dunes

Seaweeds have several important roles in both the marine environment and coastal habitats (*El-Manaway & Rashedy, 2022*). They have great ecological importance, playing a role as primary producers, providing shelter for marine and coastal fauna and acting as a natural physical barrier to storm surges and extreme weather conditions (*Nabti, 2017*). Many research papers show that both marine seaweed and drift weed on beaches play ecological and economic roles. Seaweed, alongside other dune vegetation plays a crucial role in sand dune formation, trapping sand and sediment which overtime leads to the buildup and establishment of a dune system, as well as dissipating wave energy, therefore, helping to reduce coastal erosion alongside the developed sand dune system.

This build up in sand and material can over time, lead to a dune system that has many ecological benefits such as providing habitat for invertebrates which then act as food source for other fauna such as shorebirds and small mammals, as well as providing resting habitat for birds and mammals. A larger, built-up sand dune system will also act a greater natural barrier to coastal erosion and the harsher weather conditions and sea level rise that will come with climate change, with increased storms and harsher weather currently being experienced.

Survey Results

The survey identified that the extent of the dune system with associated dune vegetation to be approximately 300m along the coast within the remit of council land. The majority of this vegetation lies directly opposite the main car park and north, with the southern area of the beach having less vegetation with only some small stands of sea lyme grass along the back of the beach, with this area of the site consisting more of sea wall and loose stone ground. A public path separates the main beach and bordering dune vegetation with the denser vegetation on the opposite side. There are several large gaps within the vegetation that leads from the path onto the beach where people have created paths through the vegetation, leaving gaps of bare sand. As you go further north, the site transitions more into a rocky shore with loose stone and rockpools with less obvious sand accumulation and vegetation, with only sporadic individual stands of lyme grass and sow thistle were observed.

The survey looked at identifying species within the dune vegetation and surrounding areas within the site. The results will be split into different zones of the site including vegetation along the main path and to the east and the dune vegetation at the top of the beach and within dune system.

Species along path and to east of path: Marram grass, sea lyme grass, red fescue, Queen Anne's lace, lady's bedstraw, bracken fern (dominant), common ragwort, ribwort plantain, Autumn hawkbit, montbretia, New Zealand hebe (spread from adjacent residential dwellings), bramble, nettle, bird's foot trefoil and tufted vetch.



Figure 3. Large gap in front dune system

Species above strandline and within dune vegetation: Spear leaved orache, sea rocket, sea mayweed, wild radish, sea lyme grass, marram grass, lady's bedstraw, Autumn hawkbit, sow thistle, Queen Anne's lace, common nettles, cock's foot and red fescue.

The seaweed species present at the top of the beach towards the dune vegetation was also noted during this survey. This area is known as the strandline and is the area where debris and seaweed are deposited and build up above the high-water mark.



Figure 4. Top of beach showing strandline and seaweed deposition

Several seaweed species were present within the strandline of the beach including sea lettuce, gutweed, oarweed, bladder wrack and serrated wrack. This area of driftweed deposition also delineates the start of the softer sand build-up at the top of the beach (strandline), and the beginning of the dune system build-up a few meters beyond.

Several sources, including DAERA, have stated that the management of amenity beaches and the removal of seaweed and vegetation along the strandline will negatively affect the early stages of dune formation and development. This is due to this vegetation helping to capture and deposit sand and sediment, leading to the buildup of sand in this area, leading to the beginning of dune formation at the back of the beach. Other research has also stated that the removal or destruction of dune vegetation brings about abrupt changes in dune system morphology as it is the

existing vegetation that initiates and regulates dune growth through the accumulation of sand and material over time (*Tsoar & Moller, 1986*).

Recommendations

Enhancing the existing sand dune system on site is important ecologically and socially. By improving these dune systems, it will allow the area to provide sufficient refugia and food source for many species of insects, birds and mammals as well as providing a natural coastal defence against a rapidly changing climate bringing harsher weather conditions and increased sea levels. Having a taller and denser dune system on site will aim to protect coastal homes and the wider coastal community.

There are several mitigation measures that can be implemented that will help to enhance the existing sand dune system within the site that may include but are not limited to the below:

- Fencing off areas of trampled vegetation and bare sand through front dune system. Some planting of sea lyme grass or sand couch grass within larger areas of bare sand (figure 3) to fill in bare areas at front of system. Still have designated entrances for public.
- Signage and information on sand dunes and seaweed around the site. Signs to explain fenced off and planted areas.
- Removal of areas of dense bracken vegetation
- Further fencing and planting along front of existing dune system to march dunes forward along beach. Planting plugs of sea lyme, couch grass and marram grass at back.

Conclusion

Sand dunes are dynamic coastal systems that build up over time through years of sand and material deposition. Dune vegetation including the seaweed along the strandline directly adjacent to the dune system is crucial in dune establishment and enhancement, therefore, over time, helping to provide a natural defence at the back of the beach. In a time where we are seeing increased frequency of storms, harsher weather and sea level rise due to climate change, it has become even more important that we manage and further enhance our natural coastal defences. These natural defences can help to protect coastal communities against climate change and act as a more sustainable, long-term nature-based solution (*Van Der Biest, 2017*) without having to spend large amounts of money on anthropogenic coastal defences. In conclusion, this report outlines the importance and the need for sand dune system management and enhancement, which includes mitigation measures such as maintaining seaweed on our beaches, removing areas of unwanted dense vegetation and planting and fencing off dune vegetation such as sea lyme, couch and marram grass that will bolster our coastal defences. These measures will lead to the enhancement of our existing dunes at Portavogie, creating an overall, healthier environment for our local biodiversity and local coastal community.

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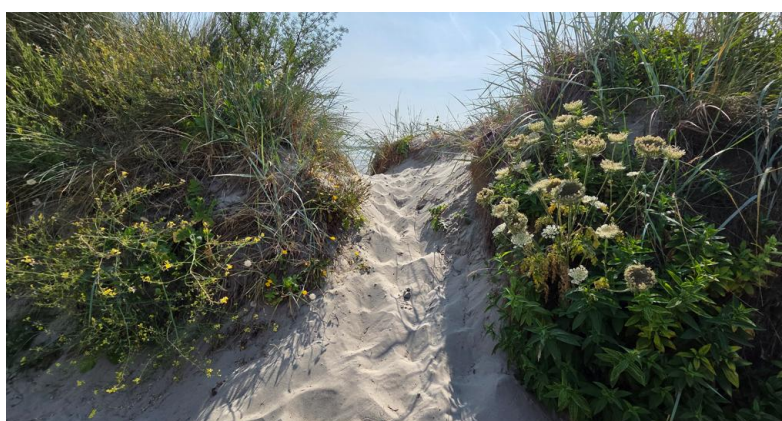
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[Ecosystem integrity of active sand dunes: A case study to implement and test the SEEA-EA global standard, from Aotearoa New Zealand - ScienceDirect](#)

[Figures](#)



Other man-made trails through dune vegetation creating gaps



Spear leaved orache that grows along top of beach



Sea mayweed within dune vegetation



Dense bracken stands within site opposite path



Sea rocket growing at front of dunes



Tufted vetch within dune vegetation



Some single stands of montbretia within vegetation

Millisle Sand Dune Report

July 2026



Introduction

An ecological survey was carried out at Millisle beach on July 16th 2026. The survey was completed to understand several factors including what species are present at all zones of the beach and existing sand dune system, with the main focus of the survey investigating dune vegetation and plant zonation. These factors can indicate the condition of the dune system as well as provide insight into the appropriate mitigation required going forward to improve the system.

Millisle beach is situated just outside the town of Millisle and is located along the eastern coast of Northern Ireland (figure 1). The site itself is comprised of a public beach with associated dune system to the rear and vegetation, a large main car park with several access points onto the beach, past the dune system and areas of amenity grass and hardstanding pathways further north. The site is within the Outer Ards ASSI (Area of Special Scientific Interest), SPA (Special Protection Area) and RAMSAR designated area as well as the North Channel SAC. This area is designated an ASSI for its geological features as well as the coastal animal and plant communities. Millisle beach has also been identified as being at high risk of coastal erosion on the NIEA marine environment map viewer (figure 2), outlining the need for further protection.

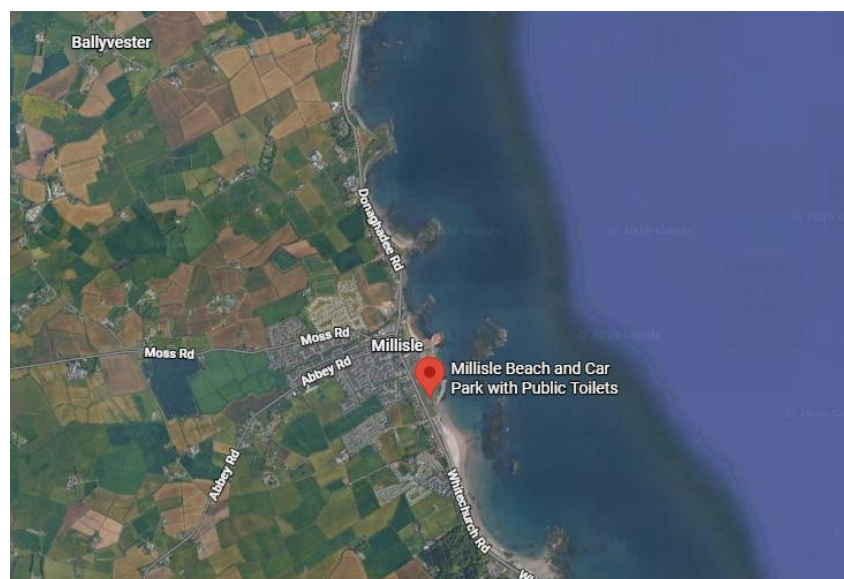


Figure 1. Location of Survey Area

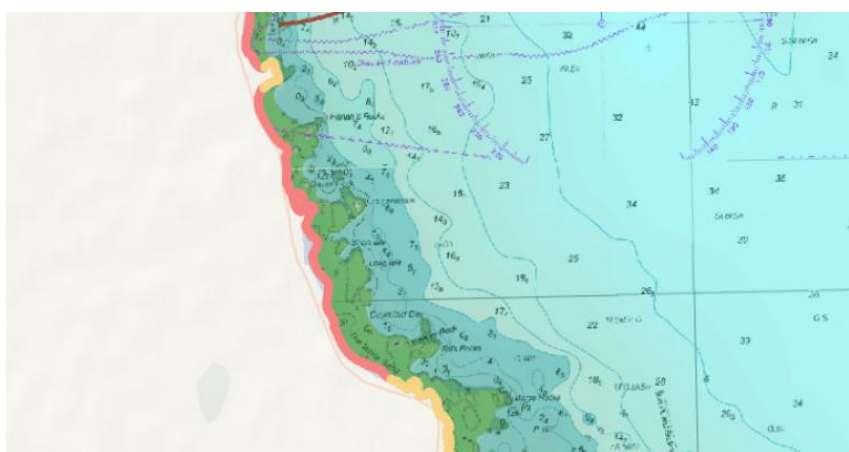


Figure 2. Site at high risk of coastal erosion (red indicates high risk)

The purpose of the survey was to investigate the overall condition of the existing sand dune system in a larger effort to improve our sand dunes across different coastal locations across Ards and North Down. This survey and report will relay information about the current condition of this sand dune system that will then inform the appropriate mitigation measures required to either manage the existing system or enhance the area into a stronger coastal sand dune habitat.

A wider objective of this work is to ultimately create greater coastal habitat resilience, which is important for coastal communities, where many people live and levels of ecosystem interference and disturbance is greatest (*Kutiel et al, 2004*). This resilience is the system's ability to recover from a disturbance and the ability to adjust to that disturbance. Improving coastal ecosystem resilience has become more important in the last few decades due to the rapid rise of climate change factors such as increased storm frequency, harsher weather and sea level rise. Therefore, achieving coastal resilience is vital in supporting and defending our coastal communities as well as the flora and fauna within these habitats. Anthropogenic activities and natural systems should work together to achieve greater resilience that will allow coastal communities to cope with disturbances including the above listed factors.

What are sand dune systems

Sand dunes are formed over many years and are comprised of hills and mounds of deposited sand that usually form parallel to the beach. The sand is usually transported and deposited through aeolian processes i.e. wind along beach and the sand is deposited and builds up within certain areas by physical barriers such as dune vegetation and driftweed. Dunes establish just beyond the high-water mark and buildup over time, getting larger as you travel further inland from the beach. Vegetation within these areas is key in establishing sand dune systems, as seaweed and plants along with their root systems trap sand and other sediment, leading to the buildup of material over time, leading to the formation of taller and denser sand dunes. The vegetation that is located within these systems are rapid growers and are capable of dealing with harsher weather conditions such as winds and seawater spray (*Kutiel et al, 2004*). Dunes are dynamic systems that go through several changes over time through natural processes and anthropogenic interference. There are different stages and zones of a dune system which delineate the type of dune that is present, these include the below:

Embryo dune: The earliest stage of a dune system comprising mostly of bare exposed sand with little vegetation establishment. Some pioneer salt tolerant grasses may establish here, including sand couch grass and sea lyme grass.

Foredune: Sits behind an embryonic dune front, usually standing a couple of meters high. More vegetation growth in this zone with marram grass, which is less salt tolerant than the species mentioned above starting to establish.

Semi-fixed dune: Further back of the beach where plants have now established root systems with some exposed sand.

Dune slacks: A dipped, lower area in the dune system between the dunes. If low enough, pools can form and provide great habitat for many species including amphibians, birds and mammals.

Fixed (grey) dunes: Further back from beach, vegetation forms more of a grey colour due to the build-up of broken-down organic plant matter (humus) from the plant life and bacteria that are found in this area. These areas hold more water and therefore, can support larger shrubs.

Mature dunes: Dunes furthest away from the beach and have little/no exposed sand. Broken down organic matter means that larger vegetation including trees could form here.

Dune blowouts: Areas where large amounts of dune have been lost due factors such as human activity, leaving large gaps and areas of bare sand in the dune system.

Benefits of having seaweed and sand dunes

Seaweeds have several important roles in both the marine environment and coastal habitats (*El-Manaway & Rashedy, 2022*). They have great ecological importance,

playing a role as primary producers, providing shelter for marine and coastal fauna and acting as a natural physical barrier to storm surges and extreme weather conditions (*Nabti, 2017*). Many research papers show that both marine seaweed and drift weed on beaches play ecological and economic roles. Seaweed, alongside other dune vegetation plays a crucial role in sand dune formation, trapping sand and sediment which overtime leads to the buildup and establishment of a dune system, as well as dissipating wave energy, therefore, helping to reduce coastal erosion alongside the developed sand dune system.

This build up in sand and material can over time, lead to a dune system that has many ecological benefits such as providing habitat for invertebrates which then act as food source for other fauna such as shorebirds and small mammals, as well as providing resting habitat for birds and mammals. A larger, built-up sand dune system will also act a greater natural barrier to coastal erosion and the harsher weather conditions and sea level rise that will come with climate change, with increased storms and harsher weather currently being experienced. Therefore, changes in sand dune dynamics would greatly affect local environments (*Vriend & Bacik, 2026*).

Survey Results

The survey identified that the extent of the dune system with associated dune vegetation to be approximately 290-300m along the beach from south/southeast to north/northwest within the remit of council land. The site consists of a large open beach with a smaller sand dune system with associated dune vegetation at the back. Species within this system were found throughout the extent of the dunes from front to back towards the main rock wall that separates the beach and the public car park. Other species were located within zones, such as some species being found at the embryonic dune and foredune at the front of the system and some within the denser vegetation in the middle and back of the area.

Species such as spear leaved orache were found in front of the dune system, as this is a pioneer species that can inhabit these areas of more bare sand at the front of a system. Other species that were found throughout the dune vegetation included sea mayweed, wild radish, sow thistle, sand couch grass and sea lyme grass. Several butterflies, bees and beetles were observed throughout the dune vegetation during the survey. All species listed above were found within the small strip of dune vegetation that was located at the back of the beach with mostly more sand tolerant species of grasses being observed, indicating the early development of this dune system, with no dune buildup being over 1m in height. There is a large area of bare sand buildup in front of the existing dune vegetation, leaving room for more planting to march this dune system forward towards the strandline by planting salt tolerant grasses and ground level pioneer species.

The seaweed species present at the top of the beach towards the dune vegetation was also noted during this survey. This area is known as the strandline and is the area where debris and seaweed are deposited and build up above the high-water mark.



Figure 3. Top of beach showing strandline and seaweed deposition

Several different seaweed species were noted along the top of the beach and along the strandline during this survey. Species found included oarweed, gutweed, knotted wrack and serrated wrack. This strandline on the top of the beach where the seaweed is deposited (driftweed) is around 50m away from the rock wall at the back of the beach. This area of driftweed deposition also delineates the start of the softer sand build-up at the top of the beach (strandline), and the beginning of the dune system build-up a few meters beyond.

Recommendations

Enhancing the existing sand dune system on site is important ecologically and socially. By improving these dune systems, it will allow the area to provide sufficient refugia and food source for many species of insects, birds and mammals as well as providing a natural coastal defence against a rapidly changing climate bringing harsher weather conditions and increased sea levels. Having a taller and denser dune system on site will aim to protect coastal homes and the wider coastal community.

There are several mitigation measures that can be implemented that will help to enhance the existing sand dune system within the site that may include but are not limited to the below:

- Signage and information boards outlining the importance of seaweed on the beach, especially along the strandline along the top of the beach.
- Signage to explain fencing and planting – explaining that these areas are helping to build up the existing dunes system and march them forward along the beach to create a larger, denser dune system that will improve natural coastal defences for the local community.
- Planting of sea lyme grass and sand couch grass at front of the system with marram grass planting behind. Lyme grass and sand couch grass are more salt tolerant than marram grass and so are better suited for the front of a dune system. These areas of planting are to be fenced off with sand dune fencing. This will not only keep people from trampling over the new planted areas, but also help to accumulate sand and material, which over time, will lead to the

creation of a further dunes at the front of the existing system. Large area of bare sand buildup between existing vegetation and strandline that could be used for planting.

- There are several access points from the main car park onto the beach. It is recommended that these are left open, with only any paths through the existing vegetation being fenced off to stop the trampling of existing dune vegetation.
- Local community engagement activities and workshops to support any signage or site management plans.

Conclusion

Sand dunes are dynamic coastal systems that build up over time through years of sand and material deposition. Dune vegetation including the seaweed along the strandline directly adjacent to the dune system is crucial in dune establishment and enhancement, therefore, over time, helping to provide a natural defence at the back of the beach. In a time where we are seeing increased frequency of storms, harsher weather and sea level rise due to climate change, it has become even more important that we manage and further enhance our natural coastal defences. These natural defences can help to protect coastal communities against climate change and act as a more sustainable, long-term nature-based solution (*Van Der Biest, 2017*) without having to spend large amounts of money on anthropogenic coastal defences. In conclusion, this report outlines the importance and the need for sand dune system management and enhancement, which includes mitigation measures such as maintaining seaweed on our beaches and planting and fencing off dune vegetation such as sea lyme, couch and marram grass that will bolster our coastal defences. These measures will lead to the enhancement of our existing dunes at Millisle, creating an overall, healthier environment for our local biodiversity and local coastal community.

References

[The Ecology and Physiology of Seaweeds: An Overview | Springer Nature Link](#)

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Figures



Sand couch grass and sea mayweed within dune vegetation



Dune vegetation strip with large gap to back wall



Sea lyme grass within vegetation



Spear leaved orache within dune system



Beetle on wild radish

Seapark Sand Dune Report **July 2026**



Introduction

An ecological survey was carried out at Seapark beach, Holywood on July 15th 2026. The survey was completed to understand several factors including what species are present at all zones of the beach and existing sand dune system, with the main focus of the survey investigating dune vegetation and plant zonation. These factors can indicate the condition of the dune system as well as provide insight into the appropriate mitigation required going forward to improve the system.

Seapark beach is situated just outside of the town of Holywood and is located along the eastern border of Belfast Lough. The site itself is part of a wider public park with car parks, play park, public pathways, amenity grassland and a rewilded area, along with the main beach and dune system. The site is within the Belfast Lough ASSI (Area of Special Scientific Interest), SPA (Special Protection Area) and RAMSAR designated area. This area is designated an ASSI due to the fauna and habitats it supports. These include intertidal mudflats which act as feeding grounds for wildfowl and lagoons and inland habitats for other waders. The site has RAMSAR designation also for its lagoon and inland habitats that support species such as redshank and great crested grebe. Seapark beach has also been identified as being at high risk of coastal erosion on the NIEA marine environment map viewer (figure 2), outlining the need for further protection.

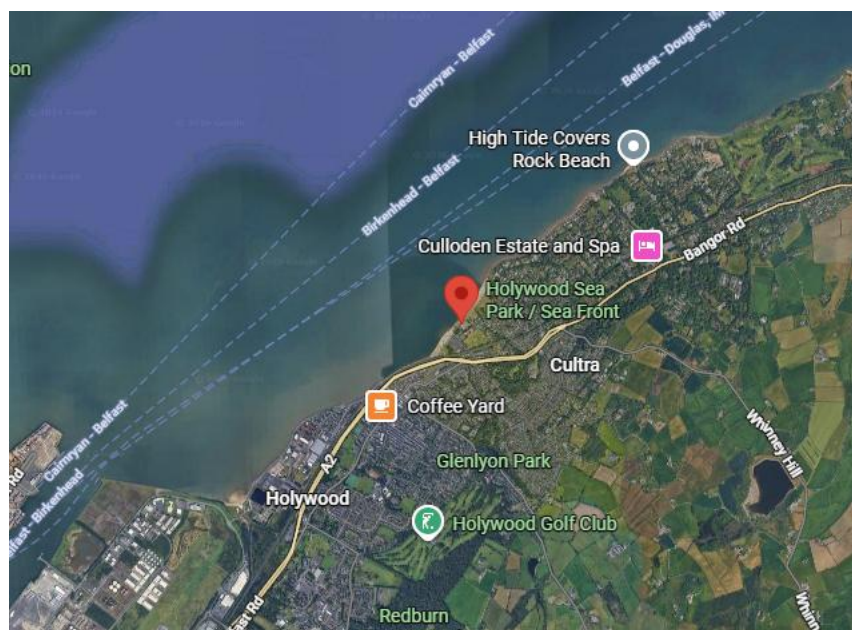


Figure 1. Location of Survey Area

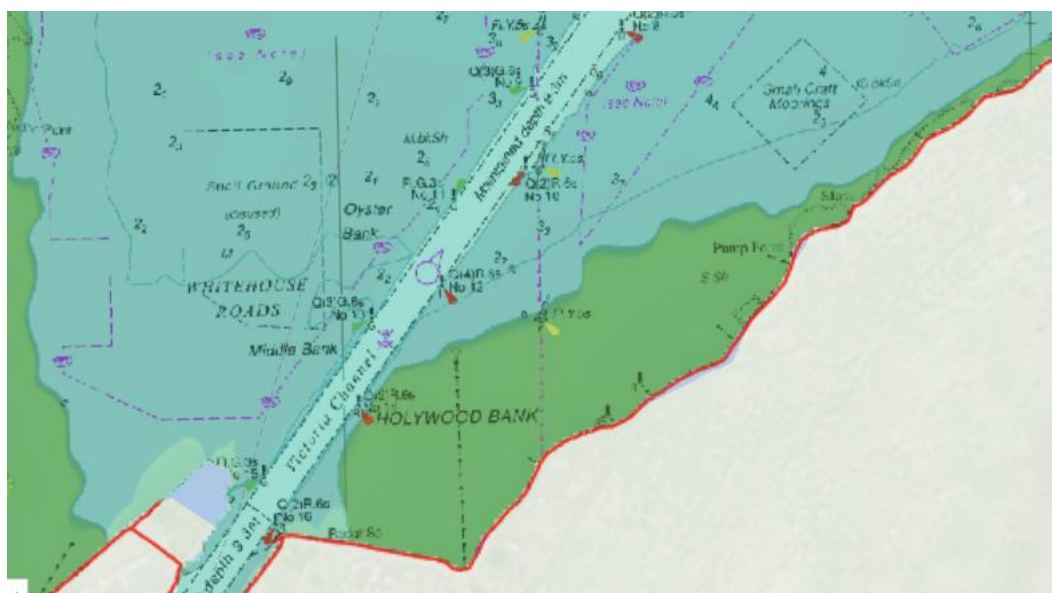


Figure 2. Site at high risk of coastal erosion (red indicates high risk)

The purpose of the survey was to investigate the overall condition of the existing sand dune system in a larger effort to improve our sand dunes across different coastal locations across Ards and North Down. This survey and report will relay information about the current condition of this sand dune system that will then inform the appropriate mitigation measures required to either manage the existing system or enhance the area into a stronger coastal sand dune habitat.

A wider objective of this work is to ultimately create greater coastal habitat resilience, which is important for coastal communities, where many people live and levels of ecosystem interference and disturbance is greatest (*Kutiel et al, 2004*). This resilience is the system's ability to recover from a disturbance and the ability to adjust to that disturbance. Improving coastal ecosystem resilience has become more important in the last few decades due to the rapid rise of climate change factors such as increased

storm frequency, harsher weather and sea level rise. Therefore, achieving coastal resilience is vital in supporting and defending our coastal communities as well as the flora and fauna within these habitats. Anthropogenic activities and natural systems should work together to achieve greater resilience that will allow coastal communities to cope with disturbances including the above listed factors.

What are sand dune systems

Sand dunes are formed over many years and are comprised of hills and mounds of deposited sand that usually form parallel to the beach. The sand is usually transported and deposited through aeolian processes i.e. wind along beach and the sand is deposited and builds up within certain areas by physical barriers such as dune vegetation and driftweed. Dunes establish just beyond the high-water mark and buildup over time, getting larger as you travel further inland from the beach. Vegetation within these areas is key in establishing sand dune systems, as seaweed and plants along with their root systems trap sand and other sediment, leading to the buildup of material over time, leading to the formation of taller and denser sand dunes. The vegetation that is located within these systems are rapid growers and are capable of dealing with harsher weather conditions such as winds and seawater spray (*Kutiel et al, 2004*). Dunes are dynamic systems that go through several changes over time through natural processes and anthropogenic interference. There are different stages and zones of a dune system which delineate the type of dune that is present, these include the below:

Embryo dune: The earliest stage of a dune system comprising mostly of bare exposed sand with little vegetation establishment. Some pioneer salt tolerant grasses may establish here, including sand couch grass and sea lyme grass.

Foredune: Sits behind an embryonic dune front, usually standing a couple of meters high. More vegetation growth in this zone with marram grass, which is less salt tolerant than the species mentioned above starting to establish.

Semi-fixed dune: Further back of the beach where plants have now established root systems with some exposed sand.

Dune slacks: A dipped, lower area in the dune system between the dunes. If low enough, pools can form and provide great habitat for many species including amphibians, birds and mammals.

Fixed (grey) dunes: Further back from beach, vegetation forms more of a grey colour due to the build-up of broken-down organic plant matter (humus) from the plant life and bacteria that are found in this area. These areas hold more water and therefore, can support larger shrubs.

Mature dunes: Dunes furthest away from the beach and have little/no exposed sand. Broken down organic matter means that larger vegetation including trees could form here.

Dune blowouts: Areas where large amounts of dune have been lost due factors such as human activity, leaving large gaps and areas of bare sand in the dune system.

Benefits of having seaweed and sand dunes

Seaweeds have several important roles in both the marine environment and coastal habitats (*El-Manaway & Rashedy, 2022*). They have great ecological importance, playing a role as primary producers, providing shelter for marine and coastal fauna and acting as a natural physical barrier to storm surges and extreme weather conditions (*Nabti, 2017*). Many research papers show that both marine seaweed and drift weed on beaches play ecological and economic roles. Seaweed, alongside other dune vegetation plays a crucial role in sand dune formation, trapping sand and sediment which overtime leads to the buildup and establishment of a dune system, as well as dissipating wave energy, therefore, helping to reduce coastal erosion alongside the developed sand dune system.

This build up in sand and material can over time, lead to a dune system that has many ecological benefits such as providing habitat for invertebrates which then act as food source for other fauna such as shorebirds and small mammals, as well as providing resting habitat for birds and mammals. A larger, built-up sand dune system will also act a greater natural barrier to coastal erosion and the harsher weather conditions and sea level rise that will come with climate change, with increased storms and harsher weather currently being experienced. Therefore, changes in sand dune dynamics would greatly affect local environments (*Vriend & Bacik, 2026*).

Survey Results

The survey identified that the extent of the dune system with associated dune vegetation to be approximately 110m along the beach from southwest to northeast within the remit of council land. The site consists of a large public park with amenity grassland and paths, alongside a large public beach along Belfast Lough. There is a small wall at the back of the beach that delineates the public path that runs parallel to the beach. Species found on the beach were observed throughout the dune grassland strip that exists on the beach, whilst other growth occurs towards the back of the beach and along the back wall. The dune system here is not expansive, with the dune buildup being confined to a several meter wide strip along the back of the beach, with all sand buildup being less than 1m in height. There was still plant zonation observed, with some plants being found at the front of the existing dunes whilst others grew throughout and along the back wall.

Species found at the back of the system and along the back wall included yarrow, ribwort plantain, perennial rye grass, red fescue, hedge mustard, sea mayweed and rugosa rose.

The dominant dune grass throughout the system was sea lyme grass, with sand couch grass also being observed. Also, within the dune system were several large open areas with less longer grasses and more ground level species such as wild radish, plantain patches of bird's foot trefoil. Sea lyme grass and sand couch grass dominate the front of the vegetation as they are salt tolerant dune grasses, with lyme grass dominating throughout.

The seaweed species present at the top of the beach towards the dune vegetation was also noted during this survey. This area is known as the strandline and is the area where debris and seaweed are deposited and build up above the high-water mark.



Figure 3. Top of beach showing strandline and seaweed deposition

Several different seaweed species were noted along the beach and along the strandline during this survey. Species found included Oarweed a large, long brown/green seaweed and sea lettuce a smaller more delicate green leafed seaweed.

Recommendations

Due to the public nature and heavy recreational use of this beach, it may not be possible to enhance this dune system with planting and fencing. However, signage and information outlining the importance of the seaweed and existing dune system with associated dune vegetation to the local community may be the most suitable mitigation measure for this site. This signage could include messages to try to stay out of the dune vegetation and avoid trampling over vegetation as well as leaving seaweed on the beach. This will then allow the existing dune system to improve and grow over time, with more sand building up beyond the strandline, being trapped by the seaweed and existing dune grasses such as the dominant sea lyme grass throughout the system. Over time, as this sand dune system improves and grows over time, it will form a greater and denser habitat for flora and fauna as well as providing food source at different trophic levels, therefore, providing several ecological benefits for the local biodiversity.

Conclusion

Sand dunes are dynamic coastal systems that build up over time through years of sand and material deposition. Dune vegetation including the seaweed along the strandline directly adjacent to the dune system is crucial in dune establishment and enhancement, therefore, over time, helping to provide a natural defence at the back of the beach. In a time where we are seeing increased frequency of storms, harsher weather and sea level rise due to climate change, it has become even more important

that we manage and further enhance our natural coastal defences. These natural defences can help to protect coastal communities against climate change and act as a more sustainable, long-term nature-based solution (*Van Der Biest, 2017*) without having to spend large amounts of money on anthropogenic coastal defences. In conclusion, this report outlines the importance and the need for sand dune system management and enhancement at this site. Mitigation measures involved may include signage and information boards to explain the importance of seaweed, dunes and associated vegetation and enhancing dune systems for coastal defence. Due to the heavy public recreational use of this site, and the nature of the dune system on the existing beach, fencing and planting may not be possible, therefore, signage and education may be the best option to allow this dune system to grow naturally by keeping the existing seaweed and dune vegetation, that over time, will accumulate sand and material and lead to the further natural development of this sand dune system. This will then lead to a healthier environment for the local biodiversity and local coastal community.

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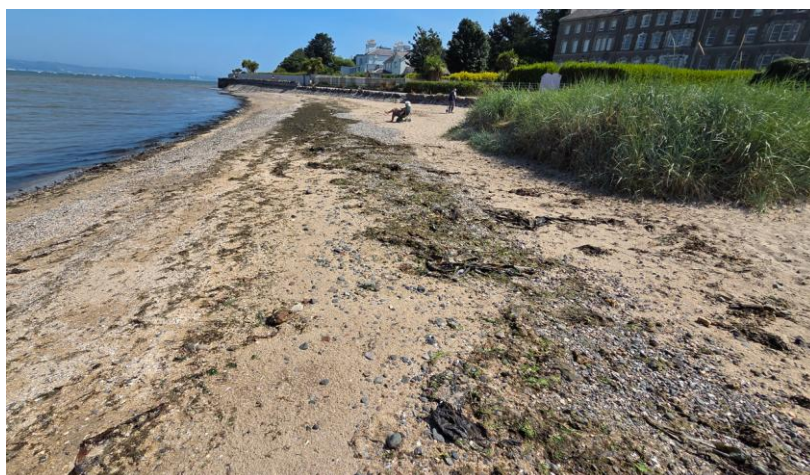
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[Ecosystem integrity of active sand dunes: A case study to implement and test the SEEA-EA global standard, from Aotearoa New Zealand - ScienceDirect](#)

Figures



Dense seaweed deposition along front of dune system



Lyme grass dominated dune vegetation



Yarrow vegetation growth along back wall



Example of trail through vegetation leaving large gap

Appendix 3: Example of Mechanical Beach Cleaning Procedure

This is an illustrative example of Standard Operating Procedures (SoB's) based on current information available. It is not an approved Standard Operating Procedure and does not authorise mechanical beach cleaning at any location. Any proposal would require site-specific ecological and operational assessment and, where applicable, Habitats Regulations Assessment, ASSI assent, marine licensing or confirmation of an exemption, landowner permission, identified funding and further Council approval. The operating controls, exclusion areas, timings, monitoring arrangements and mitigation measures would be determined through the relevant assessment and approval processes. Any subsequent operational procedure would require approval before works commenced.

1. Seasonal Restrictions

Mechanical clearance must avoid periods when disturbance could harm designated species:

- Wintering Bird Season (October–March) — No mechanical clearance unless essential for public health or safety. Any activity must be ecologist-approved and scheduled during low-tide periods with minimal bird presence.
- Seal Pupping Season (typically September–December) — No machinery within 100–300 m of known haul-out or pupping areas. If pups are present, mechanical works must cease immediately and only resume following ecological sign-off.
- Nesting Season (April–August) — Additional caution required; hand-tools preferred near dune edges or vegetated areas.

These restrictions must be confirmed annually with the site's conservation objectives and local statutory nature conservation body.

2. Pre-Works Ecological Assessment

A qualified ecologist must undertake:

- A daily pre-works walkover to identify wintering bird concentrations, seal pups, haul-out sites, roosting areas, strandline invertebrate communities, and any temporary sensitivities.
- A weekly impact review during active clearance periods.
- A seasonal risk assessment before the start of any programmed works.

No mechanical works may proceed without ecological approval.

3. Litter and Contaminant Removal

Before any mechanical seaweed clearance:

- All litter, plastics, fishing gear, and anthropogenic debris must be removed manually.

- Only clean, natural seaweed may be mechanically lifted.
- Contaminated or mixed material must be segregated and disposed of appropriately following all Waste Management legislation and controls.

This prevents pollution and protects designated site integrity.

4. Mechanical Clearance Method

Machinery must be low-impact and approved for use on designated beaches:

- Light tractors or quad-based beach cleaners with low ground pressure.
- No deep raking; equipment must skim the surface to avoid disturbing sand fauna.
- Machinery must operate below the high-tide line unless ecologist-approved.
- Avoid dune toes, vegetated areas, roosting zones, and haul-out sites.

Work must stop immediately if wintering birds congregate or seal pups appear.

5. Frequency and Timelines

To minimise ecological disturbance:

- Routine clearance:
 - Maximum 1–2 mechanical sessions per week outside restricted seasons.
 - Only when seaweed accumulation exceeds agreed thresholds (e.g., >20–30 cm depth or causing odour/public health issues). This will be assessed by a staff member.
- Peak visitor season (June–August):
 - Up to 3 sessions per week, subject to ecological approval.
- Wintering bird season:
 - Mechanical clearance only under exceptional circumstances.
- Seal pupping season:
 - No mechanical clearance within exclusion zones.

All timelines must be agreed annually with conservation authorities.

6. Resource Requirements

Minimum resources required:

- Personnel:
 - 1 lead operator

- 1 ecological monitor
- 1–2 support staff for litter removal, vehicle wash down and observation
- Equipment:
 - Low-ground-pressure mechanical beach cleaner
 - Manual tools (rakes, litter pickers)
 - Radios for communication
 - Temporary exclusion signage and equipment
- Ecological Monitoring Tools:
 - Binoculars
 - Species sensitivity maps
 - Daily log sheets for disturbance recording
- Designated area:
 - Area allocated within nearby car park for vehicle wash down
 - NI Water effluent approval/discharge consent when established
 - Mobile wash down equipment & water supply

7. Post-Works Review

After each session:

- Ecologist completes a disturbance log.
- Operator records volumes removed, areas covered, and any deviations.
- Weekly summary submitted to DAERA/NIEA.
- Seasonal review evaluates compliance and recommends adjustments.

8. Illustrative daily work sequence, this will vary depending on tide times:

Time	Activity	Lead
08:00–08:45	Pre-clean ecological assessment	Ecological Monitor
08:45–09:00	Amenity assessment & briefing	Supervisor
09:00–12:00	Hand-cleaning in sensitive zones	Manual Team
09:30–11:30	Mechanical cleaning	Operations Team

11:30–12:30	Waste segregation & transport	Operations Team
12:30–13:00	Post-clean ecological sweep	Ecological Monitor
13:00–14:00	Daily reporting & planning	Supervisor

Biosecurity Measures

Where machinery is used:

- Equipment must be cleaned before entering and leaving each beach to prevent spread of invasive species.
- Wash-down facilities or mobile cleaning units should be used.

‘Clean-check-record’

Operational biosecurity controls must be applied whenever machinery, vehicles, trailers, hand tools or PPE are used on the beach. All equipment must be inspected and cleaned before entering the beach, before moving between beaches, and before leaving site.

Before arriving on site: machinery, tyres, buckets, rakes, trailers, tools and PPE should be visibly clean and free from seaweed, mud, sand, seeds, marine organisms or standing water.

Designated wash-down point: cleaning should take place at a hardstanding or agreed area where wash water and removed material can be contained and will not drain directly back onto the beach, into dunes, rock pools or the sea.

Designated wash-down area controls

- Use only an agreed wash-down location — not on the foreshore, dunes, intertidal zone, slipway edge or beside surface water drains.
- Hardstanding surface preferred so wash water does not soak directly into sand, shingle, dune habitat or soft ground.
- Wash water must be contained using a sump, bund, drain cover, portable containment mat, interceptor or collection system.
- No direct discharge to the sea, beach, storm drains, rock pools, watercourses or bathing water areas.
- Dry brushing/scraping first to remove seaweed, sand, mud and organic matter before water is used.
- Removed debris must be collected and disposed of through the agreed waste/organic material route, not washed back onto the beach.
- Low-pressure washing preferred unless higher pressure is needed, to reduce spray drift and spread of fragments.

- Clean from top down, with particular attention to tyres, wheel arches, tracks, buckets, rake tines, trailers and undercarriage.
- Avoid chemical detergents/disinfectants unless specifically approved by the environmental officer and suitable for the receiving environment.
- Temporary exclusion zone around the wash-down area to keep the public away from moving machinery, hoses and wet/slippery surfaces.
- Spill kit available where machinery is being washed down, particularly where fuel, oil or hydraulic contamination could be present.
- Supervisor sign-off required before machinery leaves site or moves to another beach.
- Record completion on the daily operational sheet, including beach, equipment cleaned, location used and any contamination noted.

Between beaches: equipment should not move directly from one beach to another without inspection and cleaning.

After completing work: machinery should be cleaned before leaving the site, with particular attention to tyres, wheel arches, undercarriage, rake tines, buckets and trailers.

Waste containment: removed seaweed, sand, litter or wash-down debris should be contained during transport so material is not dropped between sites.

Inspection by supervisor: the operative or supervisor should confirm that cleaning has been completed before equipment is moved.

Record keeping: the daily job sheet should note the beach, equipment used, whether pre- and post-use cleaning was completed, and any suspected invasive species or unusual material observed.

If invasive species are suspected: stop moving the affected equipment/material, isolate it where practicable, photograph and record the location, and seek environmental advice before disposal or transfer.

Appendix 4 - Sand Dune Restoration Recommendations

This document sets out suggested actions that could be taken to meet a nature-based solution and softer approach to coastal management. The recommendations are intended to work with, support and enhance existing natural coastal processes, including sand movement, dune formation and vegetation establishment, rather than undermine or restrict them. Any proposed planting, fencing or signage should therefore be considered as measures to assist natural dune recovery, reduce avoidable human disturbance and strengthen the resilience of the coastline in a way that remains sympathetic to the dynamic nature of the coastal environment. Planting and protective fencing are proposed for consideration at Cloughey, Portavogie and Millisle, subject to detailed site design, landowner agreement, ecological assessment and all required approvals. At Seapark, the initial recommendation is limited to interpretation, education and protection of existing vegetation. Any physical intervention at Seapark would require further site assessment and regulatory advice.

Sites

- Cloughey
- Portavogie
- Millisle
- Seapark, Holywood

Recommendations Summary

1. Native dune grass planting
2. Fencing off planting areas and creating/keeping defined paths for public use whilst protecting rest of works area
3. Signage to inform people to keep out of fenced off areas and information on dunes, planting and seaweed

Native Species Planting

3 most useful perennial dune grass species:

Marram Grass – Most commonly used in dune restoration. It has less salt tolerance than the other listed grasses below, and therefore, need to be planted behind other species and not directly along the foredune. However, it has greater ability to create taller dune systems.

Sea Lyme Grass - High salt tolerance species, can grow along foredune and beyond, however, can be susceptible to strong winds.

Sand Couch grass - High salt tolerance, growing close to high tides and therefore, a species that is observed in early dune systems (pioneer species). Extensive root system with new shoots growing above sand deposition. Less ability for this species to be transplanted from another location due to extensive root systems. More

horizontal growth along a dune system, rather than vertical like with marram or sea lyme grass.

All 3 species have ability to have extensive growth along different zones of a sand dune system, ability in slowing winds and coastal erosion processes and trap sand to build up sand dune systems.

Ideally these species should be planted and then allowed time to establish and propagate across the system, before introducing other foredune/beach plant species such as sea radish, sea mayweed, tree mallow and sand sedge.

Goal is to establish these plant species that can help to enhance an existing sand dune system to a level where it can be used as a natural barrier to increasing storms, harsher weather conditions and coastal erosion whilst also providing a habitat for coastal flora and fauna.

Regeneration of an existing dune system affected by human activity and enhancement with mitigation measures in place to reduce human disturbance such as signage and fencing.

Site Work

Planting of appropriate dune grasses along appropriate zones along the beach in front of the existing dune system on three sites. Note where softer sand and sand buildup starts on each beach system, will indicate the space between the dune system and the start of buildup to where possible planting can occur (planting occur above high-water mark of beach). This would hopefully lead to an extension of the dune systems outwards, towards the beach and water. This alongside possible planting of dune grass in large gaps e.g. in the Portavogie site where large gaps in existing vegetation are present due to human activity, these areas would also then be fenced off to public to allow for more efficient growth of planted grasses. Possible fencing off paths running through vegetation, with signage outlining that public must only use certain paths to access the beach and must avoid disturbance to dune system.

Species Planting Zones

Will depend on the habitat type that planting is scheduled for, e.g. is the top of the beach bare sand with rocks, complete bare sand or more of a shingle/stone beach. If shingle: Plant couch grass at front of zone to help with creation of embryo dunes, with lyme grass planting towards the back of the zone. If bare sand patches with rocks: Can plant with lyme grass just beyond rocky/shingle area to create new front dune buildup with marram grass to the back of the planting zone. Completely bare sand: Most appropriate for recently lost dune systems. Lyme grass planting at front and marram grass planting to rear. Large gaps in dunes 'Blowouts': This is where you would plant with marram grass and use fencing to protect the area, along with signage. Where these areas are severe, may need to plant couch and lyme grass in front to help establish a new front layer, protecting the less salt tolerant marram grass behind.

Protection of Dune System

Type of protection used will depend on the beach and its use.

Two types of fencing for the front edge of dune planting:

Minimalist – Cheaper roped fencing with many small notice boards with information for the public. Information may outline to 'stay out' of planting area and avoid trampling through dune system onto the beach.

Controlled – Fenced off with sheep fencing to keep all public activity out of area. Fence posts must be put in deep enough that they will stay with the growth and build-up of sand and therefore, the foredune system over time. Fence must be around 1m in front of wood palings placed in a zig-zag pattern. This allows for the grasses planted (lyme and couch) to build up dunes rapidly around these palings. Over time, sand will accumulate quickly around the palings with them getting covered by the sand.

Posts/palings used in projects before by Lecale Conservation were 2.3m long and dipped in preservatives for 16 weeks to stop wood rot, helping them last over 20 years. Need to be long posts due to sand build up over time, and better at withstanding wind, waves etc if posts are placed with at least 1m of the post under the ground. However, other councils had used cheaper 1.8m posts dipped in copper and only lasted a few years and are susceptible to breaking and being removed in stormy weather. If properly installed, these chestnut palings/posts can create several foot tall dunes within 18 months, creating a natural defence against storms, higher and more vigorous waves etc.

Pattern of Post Planting

Posts should be placed in a zig-zag pattern instead of the conventional straight-line planting. This pattern allows for more strength and stability, giving more resistance during storms, heavy waves and high tides. This pattern also slows winds and allows for more rapid dune accumulation and creation. There are structural problems with planting the fence and posts in a straight line. The line of the waves and therefore, the wave energy is not broken with a straight fence, therefore the force will be felt on the posts and fencing resulting in their removal. Straight planting also results in less sand accumulation due to the angle of wind etc; therefore, the zig-zag pattern is needed.

The zigzag design of post planting is required for several reasons, with some listed above and others listed below:

- Sand trapping – slows wind speed. When wind-blown sand hits these areas, it loses energy and lands, building up over time and creating a foredune system.
- Erosion control – By trapping sand along the fenced and planted areas, gaps in the dune system will build up whilst also creating a new foredune system, therefore, providing a natural coastal defence. The zigzag design breaks up wind flow and lessens the force of water and wind that can accelerate erosion along coastal ecosystems.
- Palings and fences allow build-up of sand at forefront of dune system, helping them build up over time and march forward, creating an extra layer to the dune system and bolstering coastal defence.

Unmanaged 'blowout' Areas

Areas where large amounts of dune have been lost due to human activity, leaving large gaps and areas of bare sand in the dune system, Portavogie beach is the best example of these. These blown out areas can lead to further dune erosion in both directions over time with every high tide.

It is important to keep the dune system 'marching forward' to stop the creation of a fixed front edge system. Marram grass (less salt tolerant) will grow from the rear of the dune as dune height increases and will grow towards the front of the dune where the other foredune grasses grow (sea lyme and couch grass). The marram grass will therefore squeeze out and grow over these front dune grasses, leading to a marram dominated foredune. This creates a problem, as marram grass is less salt tolerant and therefore, less suited to the front of the dune and exposure to the waves and high tide. This can lead to a collapse of the foredune into the sea and increased coastal erosion.

Community project opportunity on any beach that will involve planting and fencing – get community groups / volunteers to help with planting grasses, collecting and depositing seaweed around planting/fencing and can help erect zigzag fencing.

Positive indicator species found on some of the sites: Lady's bedstraw, bird's foot trefoil and common restharrow.

Negative indicator species found: Creeping and spear thistle, sea buckthorn, perennial rye grass, nettle, bracken and ragwort.

Unclassified

ITEM 5

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Environment Committee
Date of Meeting	07 October 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Environmental Services
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Parks and Cemeteries
Report title	Donaghadee Local Nature Reserve Proposal
Attachments	N/A
File Reference (if applicable)	NOM 707 / PCA151
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 The Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 The Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985
Resource Implications	Budget and Staffing Narrative: resources in place
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 decision not required
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Priority 2: Environmental 2. An environmentally sustainable and resilient Council and Borough meeting our net zero carbon targets

If multiple:

	If multiple:
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Background

In March 2026, Council agreed to the following Motion: “That this Council notes with deep concern the recent destruction caused to bushes, trees and wild grass in The Commons, Donaghadee. Further to this, Council agrees to write to the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, calling upon him to designate The Commons, Donaghadee as either an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI), or another appropriate form of protected status, in order to help safeguard this important green space.” At the May 2026 Environment Committee a response to the Notice of Motion report was submitted along with a response from DEARA which indicated that such as designation was not appropriate. Members further agreed therefore to investigate the option of designating the area as a Local Nature Reserve.

The specific area is known locally as ‘the second Commons’. The removal work was not carried out or authorised by Council and did not form part of any planned maintenance. The machinery was used to remove hedges, shrubs, trees and wild grasses, resulting in the loss of a naturally evolved habitat that had developed over decades. The area is known for its biodiversity value and is well used by the public, particularly walkers. The incident was reported to Police Service of Northern Ireland and Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) Environmental Crime Division.

As the works occurred outside a protected site, the matter was passed by the Environmental Crime Division to the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) Wildlife Team. Council Officers were advised by the NIEA Wildlife Team to report the matter to the PSNI as a wildlife crime, which had already been completed. Although the affected area is not currently designated, it sits close to a number of protected sites:

- Outer Ards Special Protected Area (SPA)
- Outer Ards Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Outer Ards Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI)

Key Issues

The second Commons is located immediately adjacent to the Outer Ards ASSI, SPA and Ramsar designated area, with the North Channel SAC located further east. While these designations do not currently extend to the second Commons itself, they provide important environmental context and highlight the contribution the site makes to the wider ecological network.

Members will recall that, at the May 2026 Environment Committee, discussion focused on opportunities to enhance biodiversity within the site and potential mechanisms for securing greater protection for the area in the future. Officers subsequently explored those options through engagement with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA).

The second Commons is not currently designated, as it does not contain the existing features required to qualify for designation as an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI), Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA) or Ramsar

Site. Officers are therefore exploring whether another form of designation, such as Local Nature Reserve (LNR) status, may be appropriate and what criteria the site would need to meet.

Historically, the second Commons comprised areas of dense and scattered gorse scrub interspersed with longer grassland. The unauthorised vegetation clearance in January 2026 highlighted both the ecological value of the site and its vulnerability to damage. The incident reinforced the need to consider an appropriate framework for future site protection, habitat restoration and biodiversity enhancement.

Initial discussions with DAERA indicate that Local Nature Reserve designation may represent a suitable option for further investigation. However, designation cannot be assumed and would be subject to the completion of ecological assessments, consideration of site boundaries and consultation with relevant statutory bodies.

In addition to its biodiversity value, the site contributes to habitat connectivity within an area surrounded by nationally and internationally designated sites. It also provides an accessible natural space for local residents and visitors and presents opportunities for environmental education, community involvement and future habitat enhancement.

Should Council agree to progress consideration of Local Nature Reserve designation, Officers will work with NIEA and DAERA to identify an appropriate site boundary and determine any survey work required to support the process. Information required for consideration may include:

- Ecological and geological survey information
- Proposed site boundary
- Long-term site management plan
- Opportunities for local community involvement and education
- Public access arrangements
- Biodiversity enhancement proposals.

Once a site has been identified and accepted by Council for potential Local Nature Reserve designation, consultation with the Nature Conservation and the Countryside will begin. This process will be facilitated by NIEA, which will present the relevant site information to the CNCC. The CNCC will then decide whether to endorse the proposal.

Below is the recommended criteria for Local Nature Reserve designation:

- A site of high natural heritage and/or earth sciences interest or value in a local context.
- A site of moderate natural heritage and/or earth sciences interest or value locally, and of high value for environmental education or research.
- A site of moderate natural heritage and/or earth sciences interest or value, and of high value within the Council area for the informal enjoyment of nature by the public. and
- The site must be capable of being managed for nature conservation and/or earth sciences, and/or for maintaining special opportunities for study or research as a priority concern.

The Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, Article 22, gives local councils the power to acquire, declare and manage Local Nature Reserves. It also enables councils to make byelaws for the protection of nature reserves.

Should designation ultimately be approved, a detailed management plan would be prepared setting out conservation objectives, habitat enhancement measures, maintenance requirements, monitoring arrangements and opportunities for community engagement.

Council Officers are scheduled to meet DAERA representatives on site in the coming months to assess the current condition of the second Commons and determine what further work may be required to support consideration of Local Nature Reserve designation.

In parallel with the designation assessment process, habitat restoration measures will continue. Through the 2026/27 planting season, the Council's Tree and Woodland Officer will coordinate the planting of approximately 1,000 native tree whips across suitable areas of the second Commons to assist natural regeneration and improve habitat diversity.

Next Steps

Following the planned site meeting with DAERA, Officers will:

- Confirm the most appropriate designation route for the site;
- Establish the requirement for any ecological, geological or boundary surveys;
- Develop an indicative programme for progressing any designation proposal;
- Continue habitat restoration measures, including the planting of approximately 1,000 native tree whips during the 2026/27 planting season; and
- Report back to Committee with recommendations on the preferred way forward.

Summary

The unauthorised clearance of vegetation at the second Commons in January 2026 highlighted the ecological importance of the site and the need to consider appropriate measures to support its future protection, management and enhancement.

While the site does not currently meet the criteria required for national or international environmental designations such as Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI), Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA) or Ramsar status, initial discussions with Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs indicate that Local Nature Reserve designation may warrant further consideration.

Approval is therefore sought to continue engagement with DAERA and NIEA, undertake any necessary ecological and boundary assessments, and, subject to the outcome of those assessments, progress consideration of Local Nature Reserve designation and associated consultation, whilst continuing to deliver habitat restoration measures across the site.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council **Agrees** to proceed with the process of the potential designating of the second Commons, Donaghadee, as a Local Nature Reserve, including the completion of any required ecological assessments, boundary reviews and consultation processes, and notes the habitat restoration measures currently being progressed by Council Officers.

Unclassified

ITEM 6

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Environment Committee
Date of Meeting	07 October 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Environmental Services
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Estates
Report title	Name to be added to Bangor War Memorial
Attachments	Appendix 1 CWGC Certificate for FL Fuge Appendix 2 MoD Service Details for FL Fuge
File Reference (if applicable)	65321
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 None
Resource Implications	None Narrative:
Screening Requirements	<i>The Council will commit to consider the implication of all reports under the categories of Section 75, Rural Needs, Data Protection, Climate and Sustainability:</i> Screening of decision not required
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Priority 3: Social 5. Safe, welcoming and inclusive communities that are flourishing If multiple: None

Background

Officers have received representations requesting that Council consider adding the name of Flight Lieutenant Brian Kenneth Levinge Fuge, Service Number 41394, 541 Squadron, Royal Air Force, to the existing Bangor War Memorial.

Flight Lieutenant Fuge died on 19 March 1945, aged 28, and is commemorated by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission at the Runnymede Memorial, Panel 265.

The supporting evidence confirms that Flight Lieutenant Fuge was the husband of Olive M. Fuge, of Bangor, County Down. Ministry of Defence correspondence further confirms that he joined the RAF in 1938, served with distinction across a varied wartime career, and was killed in action while flying daylight photographic reconnaissance sorties over Bremen and Berlin.

Key Issues

Flight Lieutenant Fuge's service record provides clear grounds for local commemoration. He served with No. 47 Squadron in Khartoum from January 1940, was involved in operations against Italian colonies in East Africa following Italy's entry into the war, was shot down on 13 June 1940 and held as a prisoner of war until spring 1941. He subsequently served with No. 267 Squadron in Egypt before retraining as a photographic reconnaissance pilot and joining No. 541 Squadron at RAF Benson in April 1944.

The current Bangor War Memorial plaques do not have sufficient space available to accommodate an additional name. If permission is granted, a further plaque would therefore be required. Any additional plaque should be designed, specified and installed in a style, material, lettering and finish that is in keeping with the existing plaques and the dignity of the memorial.

Next Steps

Subject to Council approval, officers will confirm the design of the additional plaque, seek specialist quotations for manufacture and installation, and ensure that the proposed plaque is sympathetic to the existing memorial. Officers will also liaise with relevant stakeholders as required before the works are progressed.

Summary

Flight Lieutenant Brian Kenneth Levinge Fuge is formally commemorated by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and the Ministry of Defence has confirmed his RAF service, his death in action on 19 March 1945 and his Bangor connection through his wife, Olive M. Fuge. The addition of his name to Bangor War Memorial would provide appropriate local recognition of his sacrifice.

As no space remains within the existing plaques, the proposal requires the addition of a new plaque designed to match, as closely as practicable, the appearance and character of the current memorial plaques.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council approves the addition of Flight Lieutenant Brian Kenneth Levinge Fuge, Royal Air Force, to Bangor War Memorial and authorises officers to progress the design, procurement and installation of an additional plaque in keeping with the existing memorial plaques.

In Memory Of
Flight Lieutenant

BRIAN KENNETH LEVINGE FUGE

Service Number: 41394

541 Sqdn., Royal Air Force who died on 19 March 1945 Age 28

Son of T. L. Marshal Fuge and Francis Fuge, husband of Olive M Fuge, of Bangor, Co. Down.

Remembered with Honour

RUNNYMEDE MEMORIAL

Panel 265.



COMMEMORATED IN PERPETUITY BY THE COMMONWEALTH
WAR GRAVES COMMISSION



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
FLOOR 5, MAIN BUILDING
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2HB

Tel: 020 7218 9000 (switchboard)

LOUISE SANDHER-JONES MP
Minister for Veterans and People

Our ref: MC2026/01398

10 February 2026

Dear Alex,

Thank you for your email of 19 January 2026 to the Ministry of Defence (MOD), regarding your request for the service details for Flight Lieutenant Brian Kenneth Levinge Fuge. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this matter.

I was delighted to learn of your campaign to ensure that Second World War veteran Flight Lieutenant Fuge is commemorated on the Bangor War Memorial. To assist with this, officials in the Air Historical Branch have located his Service record, and I can confirm that Flt Lt Brian Fuge joined the RAF in 1938 and was killed in action on 19 March 1945. At the time of his death, his wife was living in Bangor.

Flt Lt Fuge had an interesting and varied service. After training as a pilot, he was posted to No. 47 Squadron in Khartoum on 3 January 1940, where they were operating Vickers Vincent (biplane) and Vickers Wellesley (monoplane) light bombers.

After Italy entered the war on Germany's side on 10 June 1940, Flt Lt Fuge was involved in air operations against Italian colonies in East Africa. He was shot down in a Wellesley on 13 June 1940 and was held as a prisoner of war until his release in the spring of 1941. In May 1941, he joined No. 267 Squadron, a transport unit based in Egypt.

In late 1943 Flt Lt Fuge retrained as a photo-reconnaissance pilot, and in April 1944 joined No. 541 Squadron flying Spitfires out of RAF Benson. He was shot down again on 19 March 1945 while flying daylight photo-recce sorties over Bremen and Berlin, but sadly that time he did not survive.

In addition to the information above, I can also provide the enclosed certificate from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, confirming his Service number, date of death, and residency in Bangor, County Down, at the time of his death.

As a veteran myself, I recognise the huge sacrifice that these brave individuals made, and I am immensely proud of the contribution of the millions of Service men and women whose courage and tenacity secured Allied victory in the Second World War. The MOD remains firmly committed to ensuring that they are properly and rightfully commemorated in perpetuity in their local communities, so that future generations may recognise and remember their sacrifice.

Alex Easton MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

I hope this information is helpful and I wish you every future success with your campaign.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Louise Sandher-Jones', with a stylized, flowing script.

LOUISE SANDHER-JONES MP

Unclassified

ITEM 7

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Environment Committee
Date of Meeting	07 October 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Environmental Services
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Estates
Report title	Notice of Motion 684 Lighting between Donaghadee Harbour and Donaghadee Community Centre
Attachments	Appendix 1: Ddee Harbour Pedestrian Improvements Appendix 2: Copeland CP Town Centre Signs
File Reference (if applicable)	NOM 684
Legislation	Other None
Resource Implications	None Narrative:
Screening Requirements	<i>The Council will commit to consider the implication of all reports under the categories of Section 75, Rural Needs, Data Protection, Climate and Sustainability:</i> Screening of decision not required
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Priority 2: Environmental 5. Safe, welcoming and inclusive communities that are flourishing If multiple:

Background

Notice of Motion 684 Lighting between Donaghadee Harbour and Donaghadee Community Centre requested that Council investigate measures to improve pedestrian safety on the roadway between Donaghadee Harbour and The Parade, Donaghadee.

Officers undertook a site assessment and considered a range of potential measures to reduce conflict between pedestrians and vehicles. Particular consideration was given to the feasibility of providing a dedicated pedestrian footpath, together with other measures aimed at improving pedestrian safety and visibility.

The location presents a number of significant physical constraints, including a narrow carriageway, limited visibility at the adjoining road junction, existing residential properties and the presence of the heritage listed seawall and coastal defence infrastructure.

Key Issues

Option 1 - Provision of a Pedestrian Footpath

Officers investigated the feasibility of providing a dedicated pedestrian footpath along the roadway. However, the available road width is insufficient to accommodate both the recommended carriageway width and the minimum recommended footpath width of 0.75m as outlined within *Manual for Streets* guidance.

The narrowest point occurs adjacent to the steps leading to the seawall, where insufficient space exists to safely accommodate both vehicular traffic and pedestrian infrastructure.

Officers also considered priority narrowing arrangements or chicanes. However, the acute angle of the adjoining road junction significantly restricts driver visibility. Sightlines are limited to approximately 20m in places, which is below the average stopping distance required for vehicles travelling at 30mph.

Furthermore, the end of The Parade is regularly utilised as a vehicle turning area. The introduction of traffic management measures in this location would adversely impact vehicle manoeuvrability and could create additional safety concerns.

The potential for widening the roadway was also examined. However, such works would be constrained by existing properties on one side and the seawall/coastal defence structures on the other. Consequently, officers do not consider the provision of a pedestrian footpath to be a viable option.

Option 2 - Directional Signage

Officers identified an alternative route which would direct pedestrians from the Marina car park through Copelands Car Park and onto The Parade via Manor Street. The proposal would require the installation of four wayfinding signs mounted on existing Council lighting columns or suitable structures, as shown on the attached plan at Appendix 1.

Estimated cost: **£1,200**. This can be completed within existing Estates budgets.

Option 3 - Improved Lighting

Officers have worked with street lighting providers to develop a lighting scheme that would improve pedestrian visibility along this section of roadway.

The proposed design comprises four lighting columns located on Council-owned land, as illustrated on the attached lighting design at Appendix 2.

Estimated costs are:

- Lighting provision: **£8,000**
- Provisional installation costs: **£10,000**

Total estimated cost: £18,000

This sum has provisionally been included within the scope of works to be completed from the DfC-funded “Clean City and Tidy Towns” initiative, which will go to Place and Prosperity Committee for approval on 8 October 2026. Option 3 remains subject to that approval. The Local Action Group for Donaghadee is supportive of the proposal.

Planning permission would be required due to the height of the proposed lighting columns necessary to achieve the required light distribution. Installation cannot proceed unless planning approval and funding are confirmed.

Next Steps

Should Members wish to progress measures to improve pedestrian safety at this location, officers would proceed with the detailed design and implementation of the preferred option, subject to the availability of funding and any necessary statutory approvals.

Where Option 3 is selected, it would be dependent on approval of the “Clean City and Tidy Towns” initiative at Place and Prosperity Committee. Planning approval would also be required prior to installation.

Summary

Officers have investigated a range of options aimed at improving pedestrian safety on the roadway at Donaghadee Harbour and The Parade.

Following assessment, officers have concluded that the provision of a pedestrian footpath is not feasible due to insufficient road width, restricted visibility and site constraints.

Two alternative and deliverable measures have been identified:

- Option 2: Installation of directional wayfinding signage (£1,200).
- Option 3: Installation of improved street lighting (£18,000).

Both options would contribute to improving pedestrian safety. Option 2 provides a low-cost, immediate wayfinding measure by encouraging use of an alternative route, while Option 3 provides a higher-cost lighting scheme to improve pedestrian visibility during periods of darkness, subject to planning approval and funding.

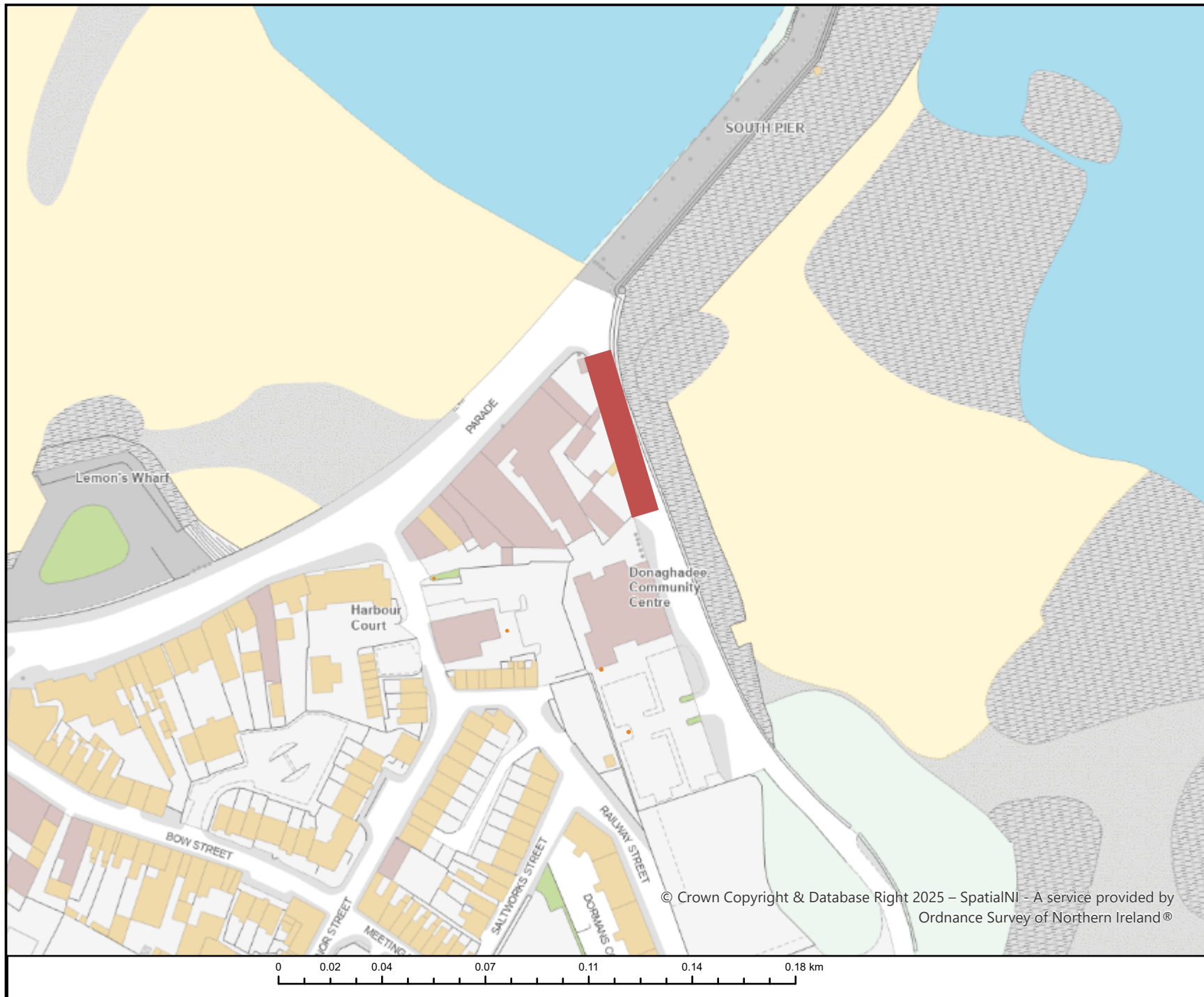
Both Options 2 and 3 could be progressed to provide reasonable improvements to pedestrian safety during daylight hours and during the hours of darkness.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council agrees whether to progress Option 2, Option 3, or both Options 2 and 3, subject to the availability of funding and, where applicable, planning approval.

- A:** Progress Option 2 - Directional Signage as an immediate low-cost pedestrian safety measure.
- B:** Progress Option 3 - Improved Lighting, subject to planning approval and confirmation of funding.
- C:** Progress both Option 2 and Option 3, subject to planning approval and confirmation of funding.

The Parade - pedestrian improvements



--- AND Borough Boundary



**Ards and
North Down
Borough Council**

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Copelands proposed signage



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--- AND Borough Boundary



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Scale: 1:500

Date: 13/08/2026

Author:

Unclassified

ITEM 8

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Environment Committee
Date of Meeting	07 October 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Environmental Services
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Parks and Cemeteries
Report title	Future Cemetery Provision - Strategic Need and Capacity Update
Attachments	N/A
File Reference (if applicable)	88004 / PCA28
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 Public Health (Ireland) Act 1878 Burial Grounds Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1992 Welfare Services Act (Northern Ireland) 1971
Resource Implications	Budget and Staffing Narrative: additional resources 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 decision not required
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Priority 3: Social 7. Ards and North Down Borough Council is a high performing organisation If multiple:

Background

The purpose of this report is to update Elected Members on the current cemetery provision, strategic need and capacity. The last cemetery capacity update was reported in March 2026.

The Council provides and manages cemetery and burial services across Ards and North Down. The availability of new grave space varies significantly between locations and, in a number of cemeteries, capacity for new graves is now severely restricted.

The requirement to plan for future cemetery provision is longstanding. Following a review of site options in 2016, an Outline Business Case (OBC) for future cemetery provision was completed in March 2022. This was followed by a Feasibility Study in May 2023 and a further OBC Addendum in April 2024. The April 2024 work considered a number of further potential sites and identified a site near Six Road Ends as the preferred option, at that time, for a new cemetery, in addition to extending the existing facility at Movilla in Newtownards. Subsequent land availability and site investigation work demonstrated that this and other alternatives were either unavailable or unsuitable.

The search for suitable land has been extensive. Approximately 20 sites were considered between 2012 and 2020 and approximately 30 sites in total had been considered by March 2026. Constraints included landowner willingness, shallow rock, groundwater and drainage, topography, location, insufficient site area, title issues and planning considerations.

In January 2025, the Council undertook a targeted search for approximately 14 hectares within a defined 1,500-acre area between the A21, Bangor Road and Gransha Road South. 47 identified landowners, together with local and larger commercial agents, were contacted, but no suitable offer was received. A subsequent Borough-wide exercise identified additional lands as reported to Council in August 2026; however, following initial investigation, Ballymacormick Road remained the only viable option.

In March 2026, the Corporate Services Committee considered the diminishing cemetery capacity position and the history of the site search. Members agreed that acquisition of the Ballymacormick Road site by agreement was preferred, with vesting retained as a fallback should agreement not be achieved. The Committee also supported progressing planning.

On 26 August 2026 Council subsequently agreed to acquire approximately 22.6 acres at Ballymacormick Road, Bangor, with each party responsible for its own legal and valuation costs, and to progress a planning application at the earliest practical date. The report presented to Council advised that approximately five years could be required from acquisition until a new cemetery was developed and available for use, subject to planning, approvals, procurement and construction timelines.

Legal completion of the land transaction remains subject to the normal due diligence and conveyancing process.

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with a wider strategic update on cemetery provision across the Borough, including current capacity, actual burial activity, demographic change and the requirement for medium and long-term planning. A separate report will include recommending approval of an updated Outline Business Case in respect of the Ballymacormick Road project, as the previous business case was based on other potential sites.

The development of future cemetery provision and ongoing capacity monitoring will require officer resources and may result in future revenue and capital requirements. Any additional financial commitments will be subject to separate approval through the Council's business case and budget processes.

Key Issues

Current Cemetery Capacity: Updated operational information at the end of July 2026 demonstrates that the availability of new grave space varies significantly across the Council's cemetery estate. The July 2026 capacity assessment covers nine cemeteries. The figures are approximate and assume that identified graves are ultimately available for use, which cannot be guaranteed.

Cemetery	New burial plots available at end of July 2026	Average burials into new graves per annum*	Approximate remaining capacity
Clandeboyne	1,390	226	6.5 years
Movilla	68 (extension in planning)	89	End 2026
Ballyvester	38	29	1.3 years
Redburn	16	34	End 2026
Loughview	1,752	36	50+ years
Whitechurch	157	13	12+ years
Kirkistown	685	15	30+ years
Greyabbey	82 (testing underway)	10	Under Review
Kircubbin	438	2	100+ years

Remaining capacity estimates are indicative only and may vary depending on actual demand, plot availability, site constraints and future operational factors. The table above demonstrates two important issues.

Firstly, there is an immediate capacity pressure at a number of locations. Movilla and Redburn are projected to exhaust current new-grave capacity by the end of 2026, Ballyvester has approximately 1.3 years remaining.

Secondly, the headline Borough-wide figure for remaining plots does not reflect how cemetery demand operates in practice. Of the approximately 4,490 new burial plots identified in the nine cemeteries, a significant proportion is concentrated in

Clandeboyne and Loughview. Demand, however, is not evenly distributed across the Borough.

Factors including family connections, existing burial rights, settlement patterns, accessibility and longstanding local preferences influence where families wish burials to take place. Capacity in one part of the Borough cannot therefore automatically be regarded as a direct substitute for capacity which has been exhausted elsewhere.

This is particularly relevant to Clandeboyne. While it currently provides a significant medium-term capacity buffer, demand transferred from other cemeteries as they close to new graves may accelerate its rate of depletion.

Actual Burial Demand:

The data in the table below demonstrates that reopening existing graves accommodates a significant proportion of current demand. Approximately 44% of the interments represented in the assessment nevertheless require a new grave. There is also significant variation in activity by location. Clandeboyne records an average of 507 interments per year and Movilla 242, compared with much lower annual activity at some cemeteries with substantial remaining capacity. For all nine cemeteries included in the assessment, average annual activity between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2026 was:

Type of interment	Average per annum
Burials into new graves	454
Burials into existing graves	588
Total interments	1,042

This further demonstrates why future cemetery provision should be considered in terms of both capacity and geographical demand, rather than solely by reference to the aggregate number of plots remaining across the Borough. The current operational evidence therefore confirms that additional long-term provision is required alongside measures to manage the period before any new cemetery becomes operational.

Demographic Change: The latest NISRA 2022-based sub-national population projections were published in February 2026 and provide an important additional consideration for long-term cemetery planning. These are the latest official projections available specifically at Local Government District level and run to 2047. For Ards and North Down, the projected change over the first ten years is:

Age Group	2022	2032	Change	% Change
0-15	29,700	24,900	-4,800	-16.2%
16-64	97,400	95,700	-1,600	-1.7%
65-84	32,800	38,600	+5,800	+17.7%
85+	4,400	7,500	+3,100	+70.3%

Age Group	2022	2032	Change	% Change
65+ total	37,200	46,100	+8,900	+24.0%
All ages	164,200	166,700	+2,500	+1.5%

Source: NISRA, 2022-based Sub-national Population Projections for Areas within Northern Ireland (published February 2026).

NISRA also projects a natural population decrease of approximately 5,300 people between 2022 and 2032, meaning projected deaths exceed projected births over that period, with net inward migration offsetting that reduction.

The significance for cemetery planning is that relatively modest projected growth in the overall population masks a substantial change in its age structure.

Ards and North Down's median age is projected to rise from 45.2 years in 2022 to 48.3 years in 2032, the highest projected median age of any Northern Ireland council area.

Population projections should not be interpreted as precise forecasts of future burial demand. Demand will also be influenced by mortality rates, cremation, the reopening of family graves, church and other burial provision and changing funeral preferences.

Nevertheless, the demographic direction is material when considered alongside actual Council burial activity and existing cemetery capacity. It reinforces the importance of undertaking long-term cemetery planning in advance of existing provision being exhausted.

Changing Burial and Cremation Preferences: Traditional burial remains an important component of bereavement provision in Northern Ireland. It is also recognised that cremation is becoming increasingly available and that funeral preferences are likely to change over the operational life of any future cemetery. The Council should therefore avoid basing long-term provision on an assumption that current patterns will remain unchanged. Future provision should be sufficiently flexible to consider:

- traditional coffin burial
- the reopening of existing family graves
- dedicated provision for cremated remains
- appropriate memorialisation
- potential woodland or nature-based burial
- future changes in public preference

This approach is consistent with the current OBC, which identifies coffin and cremated-remains provision and opportunities for nature-based burial as matters for the site-specific master-planning process.

Statutory and Service Context: Council burial grounds operate within an established legislative and regulatory framework, including the Public Health (Ireland) Act 1878 and the Burial Grounds Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1992. Specific duties also arise under the Welfare Services Act (Northern Ireland) 1971 where arrangements for the disposal of a deceased person would not otherwise be made.

The Council therefore has statutory powers and regulatory responsibilities associated with the provision and management of burial grounds, together with a clear public-service responsibility to ensure that its bereavement services are planned and managed appropriately.

Cemetery provision is specialist infrastructure. Potential sites require consideration of ground conditions, groundwater, drainage, access, planning, ecology, neighbouring amenity, operational requirements and other technical matters before burial use can commence.

This substantially limits the number of sites capable of providing appropriate cemetery provision and helps explain the extensive search process undertaken by the Council.

Lead Time for New Cemetery Provision: A significant consideration is the period required to bring a new cemetery into operation. The report presented to Council in August 2026 advised that approximately five years could be obtained from developing the Ballymacormick Road land until the site was developed and available for use, subject to planning, approvals, procurement and construction timelines.

The draft OBC Addendum illustrates an indicative sequence comprising:

- land acquisition and project mobilisation
- master-planning and technical investigations
- pre-application engagement
- planning application and determination
- detailed design
- updated business case and funding approval
- procurement
- construction and commissioning
- operational readiness

The current indicative programme identifies an opening by approximately 2031, subject to the relevant approvals and project programme being confirmed. This lead-in period must be considered alongside the current position at Movilla, Redburn, Ballyvester and Whitechurch. Waiting until existing cemetery capacity is exhausted before securing and developing replacement provision would therefore create a significant risk to continuity of service.

Strategic Need: The strategic requirement for future cemetery provision and the detailed development of a particular site are related but distinct matters. The need for additional provision is demonstrated through:

- actual cemetery capacity;
- actual rates of new-grave usage;
- the geographical distribution of available capacity;
- demographic change;
- the transfer of demand as individual sites reach capacity; and

- the lengthy period required to identify, approve and develop additional cemetery land.

The Ballymacormick Road project represents the Council's response to this wider strategic requirement following an extensive search and appraisal process. The updated OBC Addendum relating specifically to Ballymacormick Road is therefore being presented as a separate report on this agenda.

This separation is important. Acquisition of land does not constitute approval of the final cemetery design or construction expenditure. The current Addendum identifies that the Ballymacormick site is approximately 22.6 acres and is smaller than the site assumption used in the April 2024 OBC. A site-specific masterplan and plot-yield assessment are consequently required to establish the precise level and duration of future burial provision, although a conservative estimate would suggest 25 years is possible

Public engagement will be undertaken during the design and service delivery planning for the site, in addition to the statutory consultation required by the planning application process.

Similarly, the historic April 2024 capital estimate related to the previous preferred site and should not be treated as a current construction cost for Ballymacormick. An detailed updated financial appraisal will be required before any construction commitment is sought.

Interim Capacity: a new cemetery will not address the immediate capacity pressures at individual sites. An interim capacity plan is therefore required for the period before new long-term provision becomes operational. This should include:

- bi-monthly reporting of new grave allocations and remaining capacity
- burials into new and reopened graves
- cremated-remains interments
- unusable or obstructed plots
- the impact of redirected demand on Clandeboye and other cemeteries
- continue to explore opportunities for minor extensions and layout efficiencies
- operational requirements as activity transfers between sites
- clear communications with funeral directors and bereaved families
- contingency arrangements should individual cemeteries reach capacity earlier than anticipated

The draft OBC Addendum recommends this approach and regular reporting through the Council's project governance arrangements.

Next Steps

It is proposed that the Parks and Cemeteries Service continues to develop and maintain a Borough-wide Cemetery Capacity and Demand Plan. The Plan will maintain a live assessment of capacity using actual burial and grave-allocation information and will be updated as demand transfers between locations. The Plan should progressively incorporate:

- cemetery-by-cemetery new grave capacity
- actual annual and monthly interments
- new graves and reopenings
- cremated-remains activity
- remaining usable plots
- future plots capable of being brought into use through works
- demographic information
- changing funeral preferences
- operational implications of transferred demand
- medium and long-term capacity requirements

Further historic burial information will also be incorporated to provide a longer-term trend and strengthen future demand modelling.

In parallel, the Ballymacormick Road project will continue through the staged business-case and project-governance process. The separate report on this agenda presents the updated OBC Addendum and the proposed next project gateway.

The subsequent stages will include site-specific master-planning, confirmation of plot yield, technical investigations, planning, community and stakeholder engagement, updated cost information and a refreshed business case before any construction approval is sought.

Public engagement will be undertaken as part of the design and service delivery planning for the site, in addition to the statutory consultation required by the planning application process.

It is proposed that Members receive periodic updates on both the Borough-wide cemetery capacity position and progress with future cemetery provision.

Summary

The requirement to plan for future cemetery provision within Ards and North Down is longstanding and has been considered through successive business cases, feasibility studies and land-search exercises.

Updated July 2026 operational information provides further evidence of the pressures now facing the service.

Movilla and Redburn are projected to exhaust current new-grave capacity by the end of 2026, Ballyvester has approximately 1.3 years' capacity remaining.

While substantial numerical capacity exists at some other locations, that capacity is unevenly distributed and cannot simply be regarded as interchangeable across the Borough.

The burial information also demonstrates continuing demand for new grave space. Across the nine cemeteries assessed, there were on average 1,042 interments per

year between April 2023 and March 2026, comprising 454 burials into new graves and 588 into existing graves.

The latest NISRA demographic projections provide additional strategic context. The overall population of Ards and North Down is projected to increase relatively modestly between 2022 and 2032; however, the number of residents aged 65 and over is projected to increase by 24%, with the population aged 85 and over increasing by approximately 70%.

Demographic change does not in itself determine future grave demand. However, when considered alongside current cemetery capacity, actual burial activity, the distribution of demand and the approximately five-year period required (subject to planning, approvals, procurement and construction timelines) to bring new cemetery provision into operation, there remains a clear need for medium and long-term cemetery planning.

The evidence presented in this report demonstrates a clear strategic requirement for additional cemetery provision and the need for continued monitoring and management of existing capacity whilst long-term provision is progressed.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council Notes the updated cemetery capacity and burial-demand position set out within this report.

Unclassified

ITEM 9

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Environment Committee
Date of Meeting	07 October 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Environmental Services
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Estates
Report title	Response to Notice of Motion 716 Donaghadee Harboured Shared Island Funding Request
Attachments	N/A
File Reference (if applicable)	NOM 716
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	None
	Narrative: Update for noting
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 decision not required
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Priority 2: Environmental 4. A vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors If multiple:

Background

In June 2026, Council made the following decision as a result of a motion brought by members.

That this Council notes the need for adequate coastal defences and the ongoing issues affecting Donaghadee Harbour.

Council further acknowledges the continued work and contribution of Donaghadee Sailing Club and Donaghadee Community Development Association in seeking solutions to these challenges. It further notes that significant engagement has already taken place with some public representatives and government bodies to this regard.

Council therefore agrees to instruct officers to engage with counterparts in Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council to explore the potential for Shared Island Funding as a means of supporting the delivery of necessary coastal defence infrastructure

Key Issues

In preparation for this meeting, Peter Martin MLA approached the Chief Executive and Director of Environmental Services to suggest that a meeting first be held with the Shared Island Funding body, in order to ascertain if there was any potential scope within its funding criteria that might look on such an application favourably.

A Meeting was held on 24 July 2026 and was attended by the Council's Chief Executive and Director of Environmental Services, Peter Martin MLA, Councillor Cochrane and two representatives of the Taoiseach's office, representing the funder.

The discussion focussed on the importance of being able to demonstrate the all-island strategic cross border significance of any project that the fund might be used to support. However after some discussion, the conclusion from the funders representatives was that this was unclear. Officials from the fund also highlighted that to be eligible for funding, government ministers from both jurisdictions need to agree and name cross boarder projects. Examples of projects that might secure the funding were given as cross border rail network or other transport corridors. So in terms of marine infrastructure developments therefore, there would need to be Irish harbours or ports upgrading in parallel to which any investment in Donaghadee could be demonstrated to link to specifically, in order to deliver an all-island shared economic benefit.

The advise was therefore that a positive outcome to a funding application under Shared Island was extremely unlikely. Those at the meeting agreed therefore that there would be no benefit in putting resources into pursuing this further.

Other possible funding sources were suggested such as the next round of Peace Funding should it come to fruition. This could be investigated in due course when information becomes available.

Next Steps

It is not envisaged that there is any further value in pursuing Shared Island Funding for a project at Donaghadee Harbour as proposed.

Summary

Council asked officers to engage with counterparts in Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council to explore the potential for Shared Island Funding as a means of supporting the delivery of necessary coastal defence infrastructure. An investigatory meeting with the funder has led to the conclusion that the likelihood of securing such funding was very unlikely but that future Peace programmes may offer an opportunity, which officers will investigate should that opportunity arise.

RECOMMENDATION

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

Unclassified

ITEM 10

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Environment Committee
Date of Meeting	07 October 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Environmental Services
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Parks and Cemeteries
Report title	Bangor Castle Walled Garden Social Value Analysis
Attachments	Appendix 1: Social Value Analysis of Bangor Castle Walled Garden
File Reference (if applicable)	88003 / PCA154
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 PPN 01/21 Social Value in Procurement Climate Change Act (NI) 2022
Resource Implications	Budget and Staffing Narrative: resources in place
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 decision not required
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Priority 3: Social 1. An engaged Borough with citizens and businesses who have opportunities to influence the delivery of services, plans and investment If multiple:

Background

In 2025, Ards and North Down Borough Council commissioned Queen's University Belfast, through the GroundsWell research programme and the Centre for Sustainability, Equality and Climate Action, to undertake an independent assessment of the social value generated by Bangor Castle Walled Garden (Appendix 1). The commissioning of this social value assessment reflects the Council's commitment under its Corporate Plan to better understand, measure and evidence the wider social, environmental and community outcomes arising from Council investment. In particular, it supports Priority 3: Social, which seeks to create an engaged Borough where citizens and businesses have opportunities to influence the delivery of services, plans and investment.

The study was commissioned to provide an evidence-based assessment of the wider social, health, educational and community benefits arising from the Council's ongoing investment in the management and maintenance of this flagship facility.

The research utilised a mixed-method approach incorporating a literature review, focus groups with volunteers and Council staff, stakeholder interviews and an online public survey which received 591 responses. The assessment examined the social value generated through five key areas of impact:

- Mental wellbeing;
- Physical health;
- Social connectedness;
- Volunteering; and
- Education.

The study applied recognised Social Return on Investment (SROI) and social value methodologies, drawing upon HM Treasury Green Book guidance and other established valuation frameworks to estimate the wider social benefits arising from the Walled Garden.

Key Issues

Independent Evidence of Significant Social Value: The research concludes that Bangor Castle Walled Garden generates substantial social value for residents, visitors, volunteers and the wider community. The study estimates that the facility generates approximately £1.68 million of social value annually. When compared with annual maintenance costs of approximately £250,000, this represents a social value return of £6.71 for every £1 invested by the Council. The analysis also demonstrates a positive return under all scenarios tested by the researchers, indicating a robust and consistent social benefit from the facility. The report further notes that the findings are likely to represent a conservative assessment, as a number of wider benefits including ecological value, climate resilience, place identity, civic pride and benefits to children and young people could not be fully quantified within the scope of the study.

Contribution to Health and Wellbeing: The strongest impacts identified by the research relate to physical and mental wellbeing. The findings demonstrate that the Walled Garden provides an accessible, safe and welcoming environment that supports relaxation, emotional wellbeing, gentle physical activity and opportunities for recovery

and reflection. The study found strong evidence that the Walled Garden contributes positively to quality of life and wellbeing, particularly through reducing stress, improving mood and providing opportunities for regular engagement with nature. Participants also highlighted the importance of the facility in supporting individuals experiencing social isolation, bereavement and health-related challenges.

Supporting Community Cohesion and Inclusion: The research identifies the Walled Garden as an important community asset that strengthens social connections and promotes inclusion. Respondents highlighted its role as a place where individuals, families and community groups can meet, interact and participate in shared activities. The report found strong evidence that the facility helps reduce social isolation and fosters a sense of belonging within the local community. The importance of maintaining free public access was consistently highlighted as a key factor in ensuring the Walled Garden remains inclusive and accessible to all sections of the community.

Educational, Environmental and Sustainability Benefits: The research identified Bangor Castle Walled Garden as an important educational resource, supporting greater understanding of horticulture, biodiversity, seasonal change and environmental stewardship among visitors. The report further concludes that the Walled Garden contributes to a number of wider sustainability objectives and aligns with several United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, including good health and wellbeing, quality education, sustainable communities, climate action and partnership working.

The Importance of Volunteering: The study recognises volunteers as a key contributor to the success and sustainability of the Walled Garden. In addition to supporting the operation and development of the site, volunteering activities generate benefits including improved wellbeing, enhanced social interaction, skills development, community pride and environmental stewardship. The report highlights the significant contribution volunteers make as ambassadors for the facility and as an important source of horticultural knowledge and community engagement.

Strategic Relevance: As the Council's first pilot assessment of social value, the findings provide independent evidence of the value generated through Council investment in Bangor Castle Walled Garden and demonstrate the facility's contribution towards a range of corporate priorities, including health and wellbeing, sustainability, community development, social inclusion, volunteering and lifelong learning. The report also provides a useful evidence base to support the Council's developing approach to social value, community wealth building and wider consideration of social return on investment within future planning and decision-making processes.

Strategic and Legislative Context: As part of the Council's broader work to explore and embed social value considerations within service planning and investment decisions, this pilot study provides practical evidence of how social value can be assessed and measured in a local government context. The findings of this research align with the Council's wider objectives in relation to community wellbeing, sustainability, social inclusion and social value. The outcomes identified support the community planning and wellbeing ambitions of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, the environmental and sustainability objectives of the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, and the principles of the Northern Ireland Executive's

PPN 01/21 Social Value in Procurement. The report provides independent evidence of the social value generated through the Council's investment in Bangor Castle Walled Garden and supports the Council's ongoing work in relation to social value, sustainable development, community wealth building and the development of a Social Value and Procurement Framework, whilst also demonstrating a positive contribution towards a number of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Next Steps

Elected Members are asked to note the findings of the research and recognise the important contribution Bangor Castle Walled Garden makes to the wellbeing of residents, visitors and local communities. The report presents a number of recommendations which Council may wish to consider as part of future service planning, including:

- Expanding educational and organised visits;
- Developing further partnerships with educational institutions, including Queen's University Belfast, Ulster University and SERC;
- Increase volunteering opportunities and participation;
- Embed social value metrics more systematically within future Council investment and decision-making processes;
- Support the development of the Council's Social Value and Procurement Framework;
- Maintain free public access to the Walled Garden and its facilities;
- Enhance promotion and awareness of the Walled Garden; and
- Undertaking additional research into specific wellbeing and health outcomes associated with use of the site.

Summary

The independent assessment demonstrates that Bangor Castle Walled Garden delivers significant and measurable benefits for residents, visitors and the wider community. The research estimates that the facility generates approximately £1.68 million of social value annually, representing a return of £6.71 for every £1 invested by the Council.

The findings confirm that the Walled Garden is much more than a horticultural attraction. It is a strategically important community asset that contributes to improved health and wellbeing, stronger and more connected communities, volunteering, education, environmental awareness and wider sustainability objectives.

The report provides a robust evidence base demonstrating the value generated through the Council's investment in the Walled Garden and highlights the importance of continued stewardship of this flagship facility for the benefit of current and future generations.

RECOMMENDATION

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

Social value analysis of the Bangor Castle Walled Garden

Impact report



Social value analysis of the Bangor Castle Walled Garden Impact report

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Impact Report.



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FOREWORD

“The Bangor Castle Walled Garden is a fantastic setting that enables people of all ages and backgrounds to come together and learn about horticulture, heritage, biodiversity, and the natural environment. The Walled Garden has evolved into a truly multi-functional and valued community asset. This report demonstrates that its value extends well beyond its historic and horticultural significance, generating important social, health, educational, environmental, and wellbeing benefits that contribute to stronger, healthier, and more connected communities while providing a welcoming and inclusive space for local residents and visitors alike.

”

DR CHRISTOPHER TATE
QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST



“

The Walled Garden inspires, uplifts, rejuvenates and soothes those who visit and work in it. It represents and encapsulates so much, and the deep affection and gratitude felt by many people was wonderful to witness as a researcher. This project has demonstrated the value in research teams and communities working closely together to co-create project outcomes and results that reflect the true essence and significance of our green public spaces. The focus groups were an excellent opportunity for those who have helped establish, create and maintain the garden to share their stories. I truly believe this is a pioneering piece of research, which I hope to see more of in the future from communities and local councils.

”



DR LOUISE TAYLOR
QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

CENTRE FOR SUSTAINABILITY, EQUALITY AND CLIMATE ACTION

The Centre for Sustainability, Equality and Climate Action encourages collaborative links across Schools, Faculties and Directorates in Queen's University Belfast to investigate the interconnections between socio-economic (in)equality and the interlinked climate and ecological crisis as determined by natural and social sciences. There are three pillars to the Centre across which the challenge of the planetary emergency is investigated from an interdisciplinary and engaged perspective:

1. Sustainability
2. Equality
3. Climate action

GROUNDSWELL

The GroundsWell Consortium is a team of researchers, local communities, implementers and policymakers who aim to better understand and evidence the role of **green and blue spaces** within wider social, economic, environmental, cultural and health systems. GroundsWell's research activity is based in Edinburgh, Liverpool and Belfast, where it is being led by researchers at Queen's University Belfast.

A key aim of GroundsWell is to encourage, enable, and collaborate on community-engagement and community-led research.



Scan the QR code to learn more about GroundsWell



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This report presents an analysis of the social value of the Bangor Castle Walled Garden. To identify the relevant impacts of the Walled Garden within the local community, we carried out a series of focus groups with horticultural volunteers and Council staff, and administered an online survey. This was supported by a review of the existing literature that pertains to the role of urban green spaces in promoting better social outcomes. The social value calculation was based on data that were available across five domains:

- 1.Mental wellbeing
- 2.Physical health
- 3.Social connectedness
- 4.Volunteering
- 5.Education

This report estimates that the Walled Garden generates £1,678,733 in social benefits annually. Based on an annual maintenance cost of £250,000, this results in a cost-benefit ratio of 1 : 6.71 meaning that for every £1 spent of maintaining this space, the local community that engages with and animates the space will gain £6.71 in social value. This is a conservative estimate as many other benefits exist for which empirical evidence was limited, but nevertheless confer significant benefits for visitors, such as connectedness with nature and recreational value.

URBAN GREEN SPACES AND THE SOCIAL VALUE MODEL

There is a large body of evidence that describes the benefits linked to the provision of accessible, high-quality urban green spaces (UGS). These benefits include better physical and mental health, increased social connectedness, creating a sense of place, and improved biodiversity (1).

The Bangor Castle Walled Garden is one such example of the many high-quality, curated natural spaces that are being recognised as critical public assets that create environmental, social, and economic value. This is reflected in the general trajectory of recent research that increasingly views UGS as important components of the social fabric of local communities, contributing to broader eco-social systems as well as public health, social cohesion, and climate resilience.

In order to understand how these benefits are realised, evaluation frameworks are required that acknowledge the broad spectrum of outcomes linked to UGS, as well as the interdependencies and synergies that sustain them (2).

Botanical gardens, in particular, provide substantial value in relation to peoples' understanding and experiences of nature, sustainability, and climate change. As Catahan, Hopwood and Suraweera point out (3):

"Botanic gardens provide an optimal environment for transformative experiences given their rich sensory dimensions, interactions with living collections, and integration of cultural and natural heritage. Botanic garden experiences have been linked to cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and behavioral transformations related to environmental attitudes, knowledge, and experiences. In particular, social interactions during botanic garden visits help reinforce shared values and norms around sustainability."



URBAN GREEN SPACES AND THE SOCIAL VALUE MODEL



Given that the literature for historic walled gardens is limited, this review focuses on contemporaneous evidence as it relates to the social value of UGS, as well as the extent to which existing methodologies designed to measure social value are equipped to capture the full range of benefits associated with these spaces.

The aim of the present review was therefore to contextualise the Bangor Castle Walled Garden within the wider evidence base on UGS and to critically examine how existing approaches to social value assessment identify, measure, and value their diverse social, environmental, economic, and health-related outcomes. This review is organised around four themes: i) the conceptualisation of urban green spaces as eco-social systems; ii) the creation of multidimensional public value; iii) the role of collaborative governance in shaping outcomes; and iv) the implications of these perspectives for the evaluation and measurement of social value.

Furthermore, this thematic synthesis provides a rationale for an **Eco-Social Value** (ESV) framework that augments existing social value frameworks with a socio-ecological systems perspective.

Social return on investment (SROI) has been employed to assess the value of various community-based assets, including other types of green infrastructure such as urban farms, community gardens, and parks (4).

With this in mind, rather than departing from the established principles of SROI, the ESV framework builds upon recognised best practice by intentionally extending SROI's evaluative capacity to incorporate the ecological, governance, and resilience dimensions of public value increasingly recognised within the UGS literature. As such, it represents a novel but necessary evolution in evaluative practice, strengthening the evidence base for understanding the wider value generated by the Bangor Castle Walled Garden while remaining firmly grounded in established social value principles.

URBAN GREEN SPACES AS INTEGRATED ECO- SOCIAL SYSTEMS



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As previously alluded to, the literature recognises UGS as dynamic, multifunctional eco-social systems rather than isolated environmental amenities. Frank et al. argue that healthy urban environments depend upon integrated relationships that are “politically, socially, and ecologically interwoven”, while Breuste et al. similarly observe that UGS perform multiple social and ecological functions (5).

Zambrano et al. elaborate on this socio-ecological systems-based perspective, positing that UGS facilitate the co-evolution of ecological processes and human activity (6). In addition to their role as a physical space, UGS create value as a setting for interactions between people and the natural environment. In line with Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, this relational perspective of UGS recognises that outcomes emerge from interactions among different factors that exist across multiple environmental and social contexts (7).

UGS are textured and dynamic eco-social systems whose value emerges through the mutually reinforcing interactions of ecological processes, human activity, and institutional stewardship. This explains how public value is realised through people's everyday interactions.

MEASURING SOCIAL VALUE

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The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 requires public authorities, before procuring public services, to consider how what is being procured "might improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the relevant area". Although the Act does not provide a formal definition of social value, it establishes the principle that public expenditure should seek to deliver wider benefits alongside the direct provision of goods and services. Subsequent government guidance has interpreted this as encouraging commissioners to consider the broader social, economic, and environmental outcomes that procurement can generate for communities, rather than focusing solely on financial cost or service delivery.

One of the principle means by which to assess social value is through SROI analysis. Consistent with HM Treasury Green Book appraisal guidelines, SROI takes a full account of the costs and benefits attached to a project or intervention with the aim of deriving a summary measure of social welfare (8).

SROI enables organisations to identify and quantify values that are not captured in conventional financial performance indicators. Given that the Walled Garden is an existing amenity, we adopted an approach that draws on SROI while maintaining focus on social value impact, rather than a return on investment.

An important step in SROI analysis is identifying the full range of outcomes generated by a project through meaningful stakeholder engagement. This process ensures that the valuation reflects the changes that matter most to those directly affected, rather than relying solely on researcher assumptions. Stakeholder perspectives are typically gathered through methods such as focus groups, interviews, workshops, surveys, and follow-up consultations, which help identify intended and unintended outcomes. By embedding co-production throughout the evaluation, SROI provides a more comprehensive and credible assessment of the social value created by a project.

MEASURING SOCIAL VALUE



The next stage of SROI analysis involves measuring and valuing the outcomes identified through stakeholder engagement. This requires selecting appropriate indicators, demonstrating that observed changes can reasonably be attributed to the project, and assigning monetary values to each outcome using transparent, evidence-based methods. Finally, the annual stream of benefits is compared with the total costs of delivering the project to estimate its net social value and the social return generated for every £1 invested. Social Value International published a set of seven guiding principles for measuring social value (9), summarised in Table 1.

Table 1

Principle	Description
Involve stakeholders	Inform what gets measured and how this is measured and valued by involving stakeholders
Understand what changes	Articulate how change is created and evaluate this through evidence gathered, recognising positive and negative changes as well as those that are intended or unintended
Value the things that matter	Use financial proxies in order that the value of the outcomes can be recognised. Many outcomes are not traded in markets and as a result their value is not recognised
Only include what is material	Determine what information and evidence must be included in the accounts to give a true and fair picture, such that stakeholders can draw reasonable conclusions about impact
Do not over-claim	Only claim the value that organisations are responsible for creating
Be transparent	Demonstrate the basis on which the analysis may be considered accurate and honest, and show that it will be reported to and discussed with stakeholders
Verify the result	Ensure independent appropriate assurance

URBAN GREEN SPACES AND SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

Interdisciplinary evidence is growing that demonstrates how UGS contribute towards the mental wellbeing of local communities, while also supporting social connectedness and community resilience (10). The evidence suggests that the mental health value produced by UGS is realised not just by the provision of natural space but by sustaining positive interactions between people and nature. These eco-social interactions provide “calming and restorative” atmospheres that promote relaxation and mental rejuvenation helping people to recover from “the mental fatigue often associated with urban living”. This point is further underlined by Vačková et al., who state that community gardens “[foster social interaction, a sense of belonging, and civic participation](#)” (11).



Studies have also examined the public value generated through the contribution of UGS to perceptions of safety within communities. For example, He et al (12) reported a consistent positive association between the presence of green space and perceived neighbourhood safety across a range of urban contexts, suggesting that the preservation and enhancement of green spaces may contribute to both community safety and wider wellbeing. Similarly, Sadeghi et al. (13) demonstrated that the design, accessibility, and quality of urban green spaces influence how different population groups experience safety and social inclusion. Collectively, these findings indicate that perceptions of safety represent an important dimension of the broader public value generated by well-designed and well-managed UGS.

SOCIAL INCLUSION, EQUITY, AND PUBLIC VALUE OF GREEN SPACES

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Gender represents an important dimension of social inclusion and equitable access to UGS, with perceptions of safety strongly influencing whether women and girls are able to use these environments confidently and without constraint. Sadeghi et al. (2023) identify safety as a fundamental prerequisite for creating accessible and inclusive public spaces, demonstrating that women experience disproportionately higher levels of fear and insecurity than men, which can limit their use of urban environments. The authors further argue that both objective and perceived safety are essential for fostering healthy and inclusive public spaces, as feelings of insecurity may discourage participation in social, recreational, and voluntary activities, and contribute to the avoidance of particular locations. Consequently, ensuring that women and girls feel safe within UGS is integral to promoting equitable access and enabling the health, wellbeing, and social benefits of these spaces to be experienced across all sections of society.

Following this argument, Maas et al. (14) extend the discussion beyond gender to include other groups, noting that safety concerns may be particularly relevant not only to women, but also to ethnic minorities and older users. Perceptions of safety may be socially patterned, with women and girls expressing concerns around personal safety, older UGS users indicating that issues arise from their reduced mobility which heightens their sense of vulnerability, and ethnic minorities fearing targeted racial abuse. Some of these issues stem from the physical characteristics of UGS, such as poor lighting, dense vegetation that restricts visibility, isolated pathways, concealed areas, inadequate maintenance, and limited natural surveillance. Conversely, well-designed and well-managed UGS that incorporate clear sightlines, appropriate lighting, accessible pathways, regular maintenance, and opportunities for passive surveillance can enhance perceptions of safety, encourage more frequent use, and promote more equitable access across diverse population groups.

SOCIAL INCLUSION, EQUITY, AND PUBLIC VALUE OF GREEN SPACES

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An important element of how UGS are animated is sustained social engagement, which can enhance perceptions of safety by fostering familiarity, informal surveillance, and collective stewardship. As settings for positive social interaction, He et al. argue that well-designed UGS can strengthen social cohesion and reinforce community efficacy by encouraging regular use and interaction among residents. They advocate for continued investment in parks, community gardens, and other forms of urban greenery as a means of facilitating social connections, strengthening community ownership, and informing future urban planning and policy. This suggests that the social value of UGS extends beyond their physical attributes, with ongoing community engagement playing a key role in creating safe, inclusive, and well-used public spaces.

Previous evaluations of existing UGS have demonstrated how investment in high-quality, multifunctional UGS can generate measurable impacts across different domains (15). These impacts are realised through interconnected ecological, social, and economic processes. Understanding how these forms of value are cultivated, sustained, and distributed requires us to pay closer attention to the collaborative relationships, institutional arrangements and governance processes through which they are realised. It is these enabling conditions that form the focus of the next section.



COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE AND CO-PRODUCTION

If UGS generate multidimensional forms of public value, a further question concerns how these outcomes are created and sustained over time. As noted earlier, public value does not emerge automatically from the physical existence of UGS ecological assets themselves but through the collaborative relationships that connect communities, institutions, and place. Collaborative governance therefore represents more than an administrative process; it is one of the principal mechanisms through which environmental, social, and institutional value is co-produced.



Juntti and Özsezer-Kurnuç (16) provide the theoretical basis for this perspective by arguing that “the impact of urban nature, its benefits and dis-benefits, are co-produced by humans and nature”. Further, they contend that these outcomes are “produced through active and passive engagements between people and nature as a part of the everyday experience in cities”. Their analysis shows that environmental, social, and institutional benefits emerge through continuing interactions between ecological systems, public use, and collective stewardship. Collaborative governance therefore becomes integral to creating the conditions through which comprehensive eco-social public value is ultimately realised. Forde, McElduff, and Rafferty (17) reiterate that these collaborative relationships cannot be assumed, and that “contemporary governance arrangements for alleys are elusive and convoluted, with responsibilities spread across various institutional actors”.

COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE AND CO-PRODUCTION

Creating and sustaining places that generate lasting eco-social value requires community participation, social inclusion, and environmental stewardship. As Athokpam et al. (21) observe, UGS "act as hubs for social interaction, bringing together people from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and age groups" providing places where individuals engage in recreation, participate in community events, and collectively enjoy being in nature.

The practical significance of collaborative governance has been evidenced by the Connswater Community Greenway. Tate et al. describe an intervention delivered through a partnership between EastSide Partnership, Belfast City Council, statutory agencies, community development organisations, and local residents. Multi-stakeholder governance arrangements were embedded throughout the implementation of the project.

This collaborative model was expressed through community participation during design stages, through stakeholder forums, educational programmes involving local schools, the use of a dedicated community support officer, and later through the use of group model-building workshops that informed evaluation. Rather than treating stewardship as a post-project responsibility, the authors emphasise that UGS interventions represent long-term investments. This is reflected in the development of a 40-year management and maintenance plan for the Connswater Community Greenway, thereby demonstrating that governance is not simply concerned with maintaining environmental assets, but with sustaining the partnerships, institutional capacity, and the relationships that enable those assets to remain accessible, safe, and well-used over time.

TOWARDS ECO-SOCIAL VALUE

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The public value generated by UGS emerges through the interaction of relational eco-social systems, sensitive stewardship, meaningful public use, collaborative governance, public engagement, and co-production. This raises an important methodological question concerning whether conventional approaches evaluating social value impact are capable of recognising the mechanisms through which this value is created.

Traditional SROI approaches provide a robust framework for evidencing social value through the systematic assessment of project inputs, outputs, stakeholder outcomes, and long-term impacts. These are fundamental components of public sector evaluation, and important for demonstrating value for money. However, the value generated by UGS cannot be understood solely through discrete project outcomes or monetised returns. Rather, eco-social value emerges through dynamic relationships between social and ecological systems.



Therefore, evaluation processes need to recognise not only what value is created but also the interrelated mechanisms through which that value is generated. Accordingly, the literature increasingly supports a broader methodological understanding of social valuation. This reinforces the proposition that public value reflects lived experience, collective preferences, and social relationships alongside economic valuation. Vačková et al. state highlight the inherent complexity of evaluating interventions whose outcomes emerge through multiple stakeholders, pathways, and contextual situations.

TOWARDS ECO-SOCIAL VALUE

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Therefore, this literature review attempts to provide a justification for augmenting the conventional social value model to better understand the mechanisms through which eco-social value is generated in addition to those conventionally captured through project outputs and monetised outcomes. Governance, partnerships, institutional capacity, long-term stewardship and meaningful public use viewed through an ecological lens are not peripheral dimensions of evaluation; they constitute integral mechanisms through which eco-social value is created, sustained, and experienced. Recognising these dimensions does not diminish the strengths of traditional SROI, rather, it extends its evaluative capacity to reflect the complexity of UGS.

Eco-social value thus retains the key methodological strengths of traditional social value models, while recognising the “complex and multi-scalar” character of eco-social systems, collaborative governance, and meaningful public use through which eco-social value is generated. In summary, the eco-social value elaboration provides a proportionate evaluative adjustment for understanding the full public value generated by UGS.

CONTEXTUALISING THE CLIMATE CHANGE ACT (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2022

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This policy direction aligns closely with the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, which establishes Northern Ireland's statutory framework for climate mitigation, adaptation and the establishing of a Climate Commissioner and a Just Transition Commission (18). While the Act introduces legally binding emissions reduction targets and places new responsibilities upon public authorities, it also embeds the principle of just transition, requiring climate action to be delivered in ways that promote fairness, address inequality and develop consensus through civic engagement. In so doing, the provides a statutory foundation increasingly collaborative, place-based approaches to climate governance that emphasise intersectoral partnership working, public engagement and sensitive stewardship of the environment. Although the Act does not prescribe specific eco-social evaluation methodologies, it creates a policy environment in which councils are expected to demonstrate how environmental assets contribute not only to emissions reduction and biodiversity recovery, but also to wider social resilience, community wellbeing and sustainable local development.

Within this context, the Council's collaborative stewardship of the Walled Garden represents an important achievement in its own right. The evidence presented indicates that the Walled Garden generates substantial environmental, social, and economic value through heritage conservation, recreation, volunteering, education, and community engagement.

The Climate Change Act provides councils with a practical opportunity not only to evidence the considerable public value already generated through the stewardship of assets such as the historic Walled Garden, but also to demonstrate how that stewardship contributes to climate resilience, biodiversity recovery, stronger healthier communities and collaborative local governance. In doing so, the concept of eco-social value brings the evaluation of UGS into closer alignment with both the empirical evidence reviewed throughout this report and the increasingly integrated approach to public value underpinning Northern Ireland's evolving climate governance framework.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

UGS such as the Walled Garden also contribute to the council's efforts to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Specifically, SDG 3: Good health and wellbeing; SDG 4: Quality education; SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth; SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities; SDG 13: Climate action; SDG 15: Life on land; and SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals.



FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

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Methodology

The methodology used for this project was mixed methods with qualitative, semi-structured focus groups and interview being conducted, as well as a detailed questionnaire to collect the data needed for this project (see Part III). This section will analyse and present the information collected from the three focus groups and one interview completed. There were twenty participants who contributed to these in-depth analyses, and they consisted of volunteers and paid members of staff. They were interviewed as they had worked on the walled garden when it was first opened to the general public in 2009. The participants were selected as they had knowledge of the space, as well as were keen to contribute to the project.

From the outset of this project, it was clear that the community and most notably the local people who used the walled garden most were keen to engage with the project and share their views. This was indicated by the large volume of participants who responded to the online questionnaire and the people who were willing and wanted to be involved in the more in-depth focus groups and interviewed. Most interviewed were from a horticultural background or were interested in gardening, whether they be seasoned or aspiring gardeners. There were contributions from others in the groups from those who admired and enjoyed the space and wanted to volunteer as a way of giving back to their community.

FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

Methodology

It was originally planned that two focus groups would be used; however, data collection was concluded after three focus groups and one interview was conducted. The three focus groups were with the Bangor Horticultural society; Bangor Walled Garden Council volunteers and the last one was with council staff members. We would like to extend our gratitude for all those who participated in these research sessions as the data collected was instrumental in creating the findings for this research project.

The focus groups and interview ranged were around an hour in length each. Names and other personal details have not been included. The findings will be explored through the six domains previously identified and the contributions from participants will be evidenced by surmising their comments and providing direct quotations to support.

The main domains are:

- 1.Mental wellbeing
- 2.Physical health
- 3.Social connectedness
- 4.Volunteering
- 5.Connection with nature*
6. Recreation Value*

* While 'Connection with nature' and 'Recreational value' were themes that came up in the focus groups, and it important to highlight these benefits, we have not included social value estimates as there was insufficient data



FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

Mental wellbeing

In the three focus groups and interview the mental health benefits were discussed and evidenced convincingly. All volunteers and staff believed that the garden was most used by the public for the feelings of wellness and positive mental and psychological effects of spending time in the space. The volunteers for both Bangor Horticultural society and the council stated that it benefited their own mental health and they provided many examples of other users visiting the space for mental health and wellbeing reasons.

There were contributions from people who had used the space to destress and appreciate the peace and tranquillity that the space provides during difficult times

*“The walled garden for me is a place that I can come to a
enjoy and meet people I know who have similar thoughts to
me.”*

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The walled garden was considered a safe and inclusive space for all, which was treated with respect by all who used it. *“The crows would be the nearest to anti-social behaviour in the garden.”* The sense of safety and security in a public space, particularly a nature space, is good for mental health and wellness. The peace and quiet, as well as the beauty and enclosed and manicured aspects of the space, meant that people behaved differently when interacting and spending time in the walled garden.

Focus group participants mentioned a variety of mental benefits of their experience of and in the Walled Garden, from reducing racing thoughts, help with addiction, and processing grief and loss. Another stated that research already recognises that time spent in nature boosts chemical processes involving serotonin and dopamine and that it works as a natural anti-depressant for people.

Impact on mental wellbeing



Time in nature



Sense of achievement



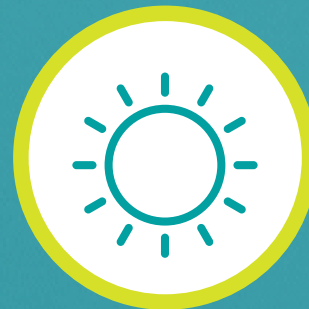
Improved mood



Social interactions



Reduced stress and
tranquility



Process grief



Safe and inclusive space

MENTAL WELLBEING



CONTRIBUTION TO THE COMMUNITY

Volunteering has given people an opportunity to give back to their local communities and this comes with a sense of achievement and pride.

“I’m a double volunteer and I love gardening but the reason I do it is because I think people should put something back into their community.”



SENSORY EXPERIENCES

The Walled Garden offers visitors a sensory experience in which they can enjoy the colours, sounds, and smells of being in nature.

“The colours and the scents and I think there is a sensory aspect that gives you that peace of mind.”



ENGAGEMENT AND INTERACTION

Visitors to the Walled Garden have highlighted the value in meeting new people and enjoying social interactions in a safe, welcoming environment where nature is respected and appreciated by everyone.

“The walled garden for me is a place that I can come to and enjoy and meet people I know and who have similar thoughts to me.”



FEELING INCLUDED

Volunteers and visitors alike have developed close social bonds that have contributed positively to their experiences of the Walled Garden.

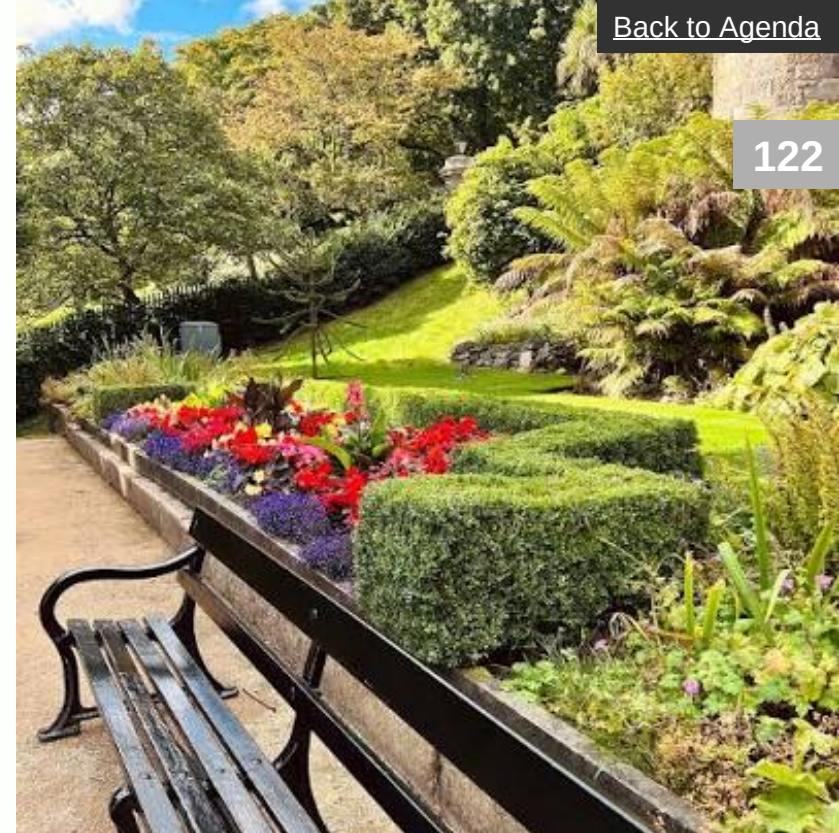
“Another thing that we get out of it, is the fact we are friends, if not mates. And whenever we come into the garden, we are able to see people and talk to them.”

FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

Physical health

The space was used by walkers, runners, new mothers pushing their babies in prams, toddlers running along the paths, wheelchair users, gardeners, as well as different social and community groups and those recovering from surgery and medical issues. Most of those who took part in the focus groups were volunteers who spent time working the garden and assisting the paid staff to maintain and upkeep the well-manicured and widely respected “ornamental working garden”. The space was used for many different types of exercise put predominantly relating to horticulture and walking. It was well used by all age ranges including children as a space for them to run around and play in.

“There’s a wee bit of everything for everybody.”



FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

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Physical health

Other users noted were dog walkers, joggers and those visiting the aurora complex, as well as those recovering from surgery and using the space for rehabilitation purposes. One of the main reasons that it was able to be used by a wide variety of people, with various forms of fitness and physical abilities was because the garden is flat and wheelchair accessible. This means that this nature space is utilised by young and old and offers an opportunity for nature based physical exercise that often involved mild to moderate physical exertion.

While the garden was not first established to be used as such a space, the data and information gathered maintained that the space is multi-purpose and multi-functional. The findings concluded that many people, volunteers, staff and visitors, use it to maintain their physical, as well as mental and psychological health.



Impact on physical health



Exercise



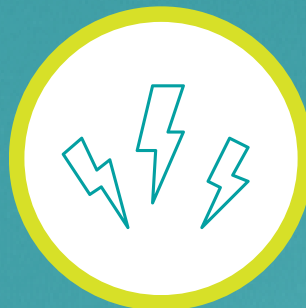
Improved fitness



Sensory benefits



Play



Rehabilitation



Fresh air &
time outdoors

FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

"I went out there mainly to meet other people and then I started to get interested in the plants."

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Social Connectedness

The walled garden was used by many social groups, community groups and schools. The focus group participants noted that many different groups, organisations and individuals use the walled garden for many reasons. Some of the groups mentioned were Sure Start, schools- secondary and primary, special educational needs organisations, Aurora visitors, sports clubs and their supporters. It was stated that people often cut through the garden and used it as a walkthrough or a stop gap between tasks and events. The coffee shop offers a space for people to visit with friends and family and to connect socially and enjoy the space.

The sense of safety and security was discussed, as well as the garden being a well-used tourist destination for people touring the island as well as cruise ship visitors. When discussing tourism, it was highlighted the pride and importance for many people that a garden of this high quality is free to the public. This was a source of pride and was something everyone spoken with believes in important to continue and protect. A free public space where people can meet and socially engage with others. It was clear that the garden is highly regarded by those who volunteer and work here and that is considered a special, beautiful place, where they enjoy conversing and meeting other people. The space was considered important and significant for people who may at times feel isolated and lonely and it could help reduce social isolation for local people.

FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

Social Connectedness

The standard of the garden was something that generated expressions of pride and enthusiasm, people want to volunteer to work there because the community are invested and connected to the space. They feel part of it and feel a sense of belonging and community when spending time with others caring for it. They seemed to engage connecting with other people in the garden and also being socially connected with the space.

The walled garden was something that all three focus groups agreed was a source of pride for them and everyone agreed that it should be free to the public, so that it is inclusive to all people from all economic backgrounds. This public space encourages people to socially connect with others in an inclusive and different way and was valued as it was non-political and welcome to all people from all backgrounds.



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FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

Volunteering

The main themes that emerged were around serving the community, producing food and using the profits collected to support the community- a circular economy was in operation which was helping people to help each other. At the heart of the matter was growing and gardening and the love and enthusiasm for plants. The volunteers described how they had benefitted from being connected to the walled garden and what inspired, motivated and impressed them. It was evident that there were high levels of expert knowledge on plants within the group and that people who visited the garden would ask them about their plants and how to best care for them. This demonstrated that the volunteers and staff were providing a horticultural information service that may be easily unacknowledged or overlooked as a valuable and valued service to the community.

“I suppose when you are a volunteer you are an ambassador for the garden.”



FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

Volunteering

The volunteers work with and tend to a vast range of plants, as well as are involved in assisting paid staff to manage seasonal changes and maintenance needed to upkeep an ornamental and working garden. The focus groups established that the garden also added social value in terms of food production, social networking, a plant library and information source, a support to local charities, businesses and enterprises as well as a place that is strongly linked with improving the mental health and sense of wellbeing.

The overall sentiments were that the volunteers believed that their experiences were overwhelming positive and they benefitted greatly from their time spent at the walled garden. The staff interviewed also believed that the volunteers greatly enhanced and helped with maintaining the garden and the public space. *“Volunteers and staff have formed a bond and are a team.”*

The pride of the walled garden felt amongst volunteers was also evident as it was described as *“the best walled garden in the country”*, and all were delighted that they had the opportunity to work in it.

“Doing this work, we are doing a triple good. We are engaging with the public, telling them, but you are also selling them good organic vegetables. And the profits of that go back into the community. For every pound’s worth of work that I put in, you are getting three pounds out.”

FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

Connection with Nature

Several participants commented that the garden represented the cycle of life, and they felt a sense of pride as they considered the walled garden to have a really good name and reputation nationally and internationally. Many participants in each of the focus groups commented on how it had the 'wow factor'. This group affirmed that to know the walled garden was to love it. The walled garden represented a nature experience that combined the natural world with a high level of horticultural management and hard work from the management team and the volunteers.

“The number of people who say it is the best walled garden they have seen. People coming to visit from other places say this is the best walled garden in the country.”

“It gives us and the general public a chance to see plants that you wouldn’t normally see.”

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The enjoyment and rewards from this nature experience was different to other nature spaces, such as forests and beaches largely due to the aesthetics and the wide range of native and non-native plant species grown. The space provided a unique and different nature experience that seemingly fostered a strong sense of civic pride, curiosity and awe from many people who visited. One interviewee commented that it represented Bangor’s legacy of horticultural excellence that peaked when it won it’s Britain in Bloom Gold Award in 2012. The garden is celebrated and enjoyed largely because of the beautiful horticultural displays as well as the impressive public growing of fruit and vegetables which can be purchased at their weekend market every year.

FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

Connection with Nature

It was agreed that people change for the space when they use it as it is such a special, magical place. The high level of management and maintenance could account for how users engage with the space and how well behaved all users are when using the walled garden. The nature experience in a well-manicured space suggested that those who visited considered it somewhere to enjoy but not disturb. Some people might not be as respectful or reserved in nature spaces that are less curated and maintained to such a high horticultural standard.

The fact the natural space is always evolving and maturing, and a source of inspiration and pride for many was attributed to the garden improving and maturing yearly. Even for those who work in it professionally, they feel inspired by how much it changes and improves with every passing year. Every visit is unique and the garden is always growing, evolving and changing. The participants enjoyed watching these changes and these nature experiences create and foster a strong emotional and personal bond with the space, which appears to strengthen with each visit and encounter.



FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

“I just enjoy the place; I think it’s brilliant.”

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Recreation Value

The focus groups emphasised that for many of the volunteers and staff, they enjoyed using the space in their free time for recreational purposes. Many participants visited regularly to spend time in the space at their leisure and as a source of entertainment and relaxation. This was often for the simple reason that they enjoyed the space and had a good time when they were in it. It was described as an ‘ornamental working garden’ by some staff, but for many people it was a well-respected and much-loved public space.

The garden was considered to be accessible, inclusive, safe and an integral part of the community. It could be described as a plant library, a sanctuary, a place to relax and de-stress, an open-air art gallery, as well as a place to connect with other horticulturists and where volunteers could give back to their community. The exchange of knowledge and ideas was something that members of the group seemed to enjoy the most, as well as the social and uplifting effects of using the space.

It is significant that the only ‘anti-social behaviour’ that the group was able to recall happening in the confines of the walled garden came from the crows who threatened their food production system and output. However, even they were handled with care, concern and respect. This sense of safety and security was reinforced by other groups and local people who spoke with the researchers and made this an ideal location for many recreational activities. This also means that recreationally people can use it freely to sit and enjoy fresh air, as well as relax with friends and family and enjoy coffee and treats at the coffee shop. Or enjoy the ‘banter’ at the fresh fruit and vegetable market that sells produce grown in the garden. The opportunities for recreational use were many and varied.

FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

Recreation Value

The garden was considered a space where as soon as people entered, they adapted their behaviour in alignment with the space – *“makes me slow down”*. The walled and confined aspect of the garden created a safe enclosed space and boundary which allowed for the space to generate an experience which people understood meant that they were required to respect the space. All the hard work and commitment that goes into maintaining and looking after Bangor Walled Garden has undoubtedly created a very relaxing and tranquil recreational experience for the public. This was supported by all of the focus group participants.

The pace, rhythm and “vibe” of the garden meant that people behaved differently in the space and that it provided a sanctuary that was honoured and treated as sacred by those who enjoyed and used it. It was considered to be an antidote to the stress of modern living and the stresses and pressures that come with keeping up with its demands. It was also a welcoming public space for people of all generations, cultural and religious backgrounds.

“Last Saturday in March last year they had a festival day, the Gardening Awakening. There were five and a half thousand people here in one day, between 11am and 4pm.”

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There are many children using the space with parents and the garden is a public space that is child friendly and free from anti-social behaviour. It also sees festivals and events, and these events are often a chance to experience the garden differently and they can feel very different and exciting. The garden serves many purposes for users, and it seems that is one of the garden’s greatest strengths in terms of social value, it means many things to many people. It was also noted that this space was not consumerism driven, it was not focused on profit and financial enterprise, it was a space where that was less prevalent or centred. The market selling garden produce, does generate a profit, however the profits are donated to local charities and therefore generating a circular economy which benefits the local people and stays within the community. This brought a sense of pride and belonging to people in participated in these activities. The act of giving back to the community was something that was mentioned in both focus groups.

FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

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Recreation Value

The events were discussed and the disadvantages as well as advantages were discussed in terms of how the events can impact the lawns and horticulture. However, it was agreed that they are important so that as many people as possible can access and enjoy the garden and it be a space within which people can enjoy different activities. The needs of the garden and plants being balanced with council activities and funding initiatives was a balancing act that required discussion and compromise. All staff were respectful and mindful of the need to find balance and respect the horticulture and the fact it was a working and ornamental garden, and it is because of the high standard of the work and plant life in the space that compromises and consideration is required more than in other local spaces. The standard of the horticulture is one of the things that makes the site so popular and respected by those who work and visit recreationally.

“I just think it is a little oasis in the middle of Bangor and when you walk into it, the beauty of it and the serenity and you also have that lovely feel of this wonderful community space as well.”

ANALYSIS OF ONLINE SURVEY

Introduction

The survey for this research project on the Bangor Castle Walled Garden was conducted online via Google Docs in March 2026. It was shared in relevant Facebook groups and received a total of 591 responses, at the time of writing. The survey was broken down into 7 different sections, and each one covers one domain or aspect the value that the Walled Garden provides as perceived by those users of the Garden who completed the survey.



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ANALYSIS OF ONLINE SURVEY

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Results

Section 1: Reasons and Frequency of Visits

Section one focused on the local aspect of the Walled Garden. 93.1% of respondents said that they were from the local area, with 61.1% stating that they were within a 10 to 20-minute walk to the Gardens. Respondents provided the information that their visits to the Walled Gardens were only a few times per year (45.6%), or monthly (31.9%).

The main reasons for visits to the Walled Gardens were as follows:

- Enjoying nature, flowers or plants at 85.4%
- Peace and quiet at 70.3%
- Walk or gentle exercise at 62.4%
- Mental wellbeing or emotional calm at 50%

Respondents were also provided a space to input their own reasons for visiting the Walled Garden, and these included fond memories of weddings and family time, attending council events and the space being a dog friendly environment.

291 respondents responded to the question “If you rarely or only occasionally visit the garden, why?”, with 67.7% of them selecting the option that they lack the time to visit, which had the greatest number of responses. The second highest chosen option was “prefer other green spaces” at 5.8%. Despite this, at 98.3%, an overwhelming number of respondents agreed that even if they don’t visit, the Garden still provides value through the scenery and heritage that it provides. This can be taken as a measure of the ‘existence social value’ of the Garden, that people value it in terms of knowing it is there, even if they do not visit it. This provides a strong argument for the importance of the Walled Garden in the local context. People value the space for what it provides, and even if they do not make use of it due to lack of time or other reasons, they still value the Walled Garden nonetheless.

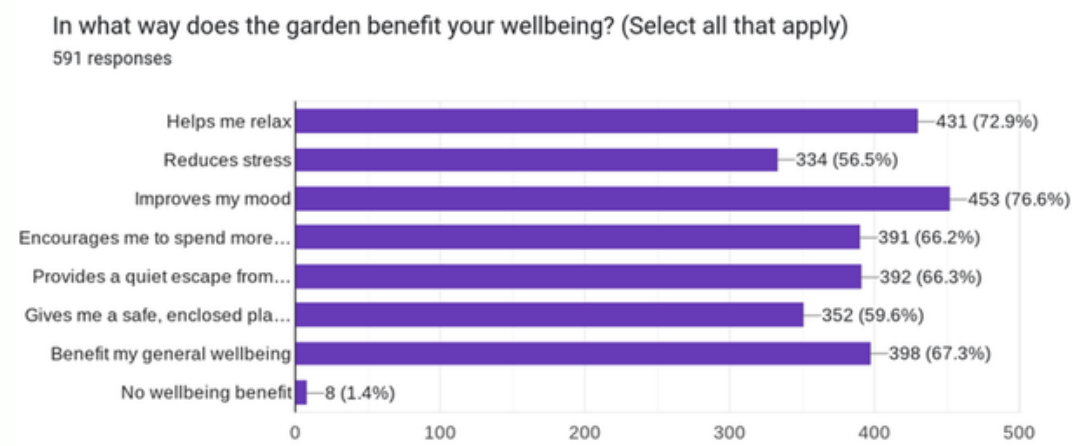
ANALYSIS OF ONLINE SURVEY

Results

Section 2: Health and wellbeing

The second section focused on the health and wellbeing impact that respondents felt the Walled Garden had on them. Only 1.4% of respondents claimed that they felt there were no wellbeing benefits from the Walled Gardens. The rest of options given received over 50%, when asked “In what way does the garden benefit your wellbeing?”.

The responses that received the most support were: “Improves my mood” (76.6%) and “Helps me relax” (72.9%). 76.5% of respondents either agreed (26.3%) or strongly agreed (70.2%) with the statement "Spending time in the walled garden improves my physical and/or mental wellbeing". The overwhelming majority of respondents have demonstrated that the Walled Garden is valued by users by providing these mental and physical wellbeing benefits of visiting and experiencing what the Garden has to offer.

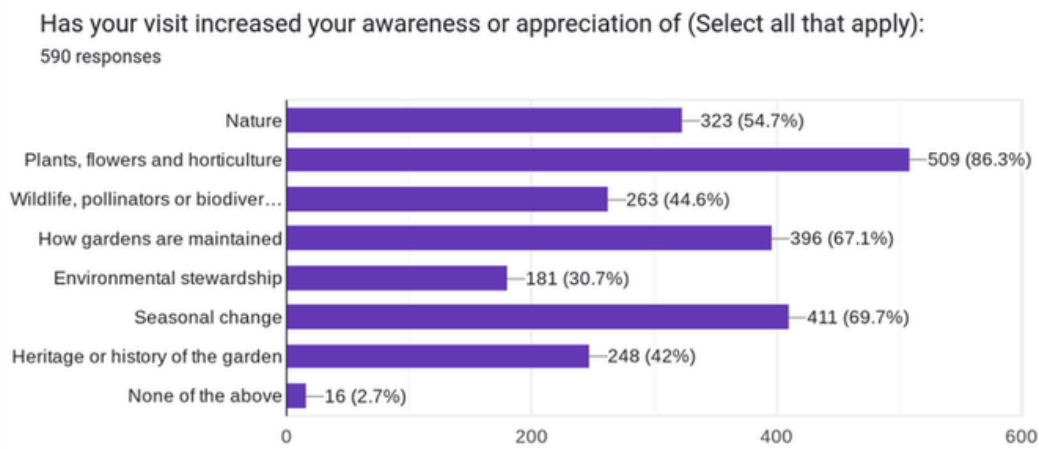


ANALYSIS OF ONLINE SURVEY

Results

Section 3: Learning about nature

Access to the Walled Gardens has also provided a space for learning about nature, which is the focus of this section. Once again, an overwhelming number of people responding to this survey said that the Walled Garden provides value and benefits in terms of learning about and increasing their knowledge and education about the natural world. Of the options provided, 86.3% of respondents answered that the Walled Garden has enhanced their education about plants, flowers and horticulture, with 69.7% stating they have gained more knowledge about seasonal change, followed closely by 67.1% who feel better educated on how and in what ways gardens are maintained.



When asked “Do you feel more confident enjoying and respecting natural spaces because of this garden?”67% of respondents said yes, 23.1% said a little and the remaining 9.9% said no.The value for educating people is displayed clearly in these responses, showing how access to and experience of a green space has helped to improve their knowledge of the natural world.

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Section 4: Sensory and experiential benefits

Section 4 focused on any calm and sensory benefits. Only 0.2% of respondents selected the option that they feel less calm in the Walled Garden, when asked “How does the walled garden make you feel compared with other parks or green spaces?”. 73.1% of respondents selected either much calmer (46.1%) or a bit calmer (27%). Additionally, 71.4% selected “yes, very much” when asked “Do you value the sense of enclosure, or refuge the walled garden provides?”. 23.9% also selected the “somewhat” option. Additionally, 89% selected “yes” when asked “Does the sensory environment (sounds, scents, colours, textures, paths/walkways) contribute positively to your experience?”. 10.3% selected somewhat on this question as well. The respondents have told us here that an additional aspect of educational, health and wellbeing and community, the Walled Garden also provides value through providing a space that can help visitors to relax and escape from the busyness and hustle and bustle of everyday life and the outside world.

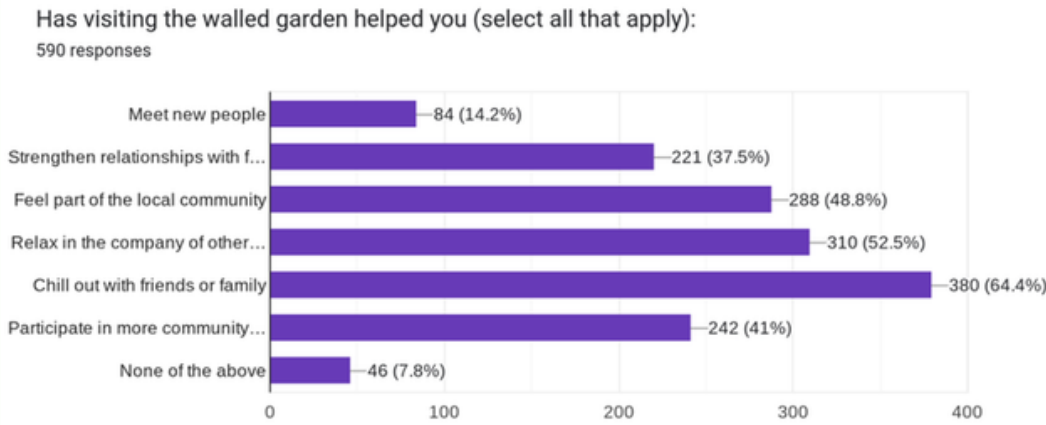
ANALYSIS OF ONLINE SURVEY

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Section 5: Social and community benefits

Section 5 focuses on the social and community benefits. When asked “Has visiting the Walled Garden helped you (select all that apply)”, the majority of respondents were supportive of the prompts for “chill out with friends and family”, which had 64.4% of people agreeing with it. Then, 52.5% valuing it as a space to “relax in the company of others and de-stress”, which is followed closely by 48.8% of respondents who believe the Walled Gardens has made them feel part of the community.

When asked “Is the walled garden an important space for spending quality time with others?” 73.1% of respondents said yes, with a further 22.9% responding sometimes.



ANALYSIS OF ONLINE SURVEY

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Results

Section 6: Local spending and economic contribution

Section 6 focused on the local spending and economic contribution. This provides an insight into the economic value that the Walled Gardens provide to the city of Bangor and its local businesses and economy. 61.2% of respondents stated that they would typically spend money while visiting the Walled Garden. There was then a space provided for respondents to inform us of how much they would spend in a visit. Out of the 348 respondents who chose to disclose how much they spent during a day at the Walled Garden, an average of £12 was reported, with a high of £150 and lows of £3. An overall average given was £12, but some people responded that in one day they spend from £10-20. The economic value is important for providing for the local economy, and showcases the popularity of the Walled Garden as a destination for a day out from people nearby.

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Section 7: Additional comments

Section 7 was an open space for respondents to provide any written feedback. The value of the Walled Garden is proven once again, when respondents are given the opportunity to write their own responses to questions. When asked “What is the greatest benefit you received from the walled garden?” 526 responses were provided. Among the many responses, the most frequently mentioned answers included peace, calm, enjoyment of nature and a space for family time.

When asked “Are there improvements that would increase the value of this garden to you?” 416 responses were provided. The overall theme of answers was one of “no/it’s perfect”, however suggestions for improving the park include increasing opening hours, upgrading the cafe facility to seat more and take debit or credit card, and improving the overall infrastructure of the garden via making the paths smoother and providing more sheltered seats.

Finally, 269 respondents wrote an answer to “Any additional comments on how the walled garden supports your wellbeing, learning or sense of community?”, with once again most responses being “no”. However, among the rest of the answers, the main stand outs from respondents mentioned community events like concerts and family activities during Halloween and Christmas, an overview of the changing of the seasons and a safe space to escape from the business of the world.

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Results

Section 7: Additional comments

The value of the park is shown in this section with how respondents are interacting with, and expressing their interests in the running of the Walled Garden. They have expressed how they feel they have benefitted from having access to the Walled Garden, while also expressing a desire to see the facilities of the Walled Garden modernised. This final section also interlinks with all of the previous sections.

As shown, the majority of respondents were local, within a 10-20 minute walk, so they value the Walled Garden and get the chance to state how they view a part of their local community and how they want their local area to be improved. With respondents writing of the calming impact of the Walled Garden, the positive impact on physical and mental wellbeing, as well as the sensory impact on visitors, is shown. Respondents also display the educational benefits by referencing how the Walled Garden lets them see how seasons are changed.

The local community also expressed the value in the local activities organised with the Walled Garden as the venue, showing the positive value that the space provides for social and community benefits. And finally, the respondents have expressed how they wish the cafe facilities are upgraded to be bigger and accept credit and debit cards, which can provide a boost to the economic value of having the Walled Garden free to access for members of the public, as they are wanting to be able to spend more money.

To conclude, it is clear that respondents who completed the survey highly valued the Walled Garden. There is a clear consensus from those that did respond that the Walled Garden was a valuable aspect of the local community, and that residents on a whole value it for the space and natural environment that it provides.

SOCIAL VALUE CALCULATIONS

Summary

The following outcomes were assessed as part of the present evaluation:

- 1.Physical health
- 2.Mental wellbeing
- 3.Social connectedness
- 4.Volunteering
- 5.Education

Table 2 provides a summary of the outcomes, the relavent stakeholders affected, the proxy, value, and source for information.

Table 2

Stakeholders	Outcome	Proxy	Value	Source
All	Physical health	Quality-adjusted life year	£183 per person	ENCA 3.3 Data Handbook DEFRA HM Treasury Green Book
All	Mental wellbeing	Wellbeing-adjusted life year	£171.35 per person	HM Treasury Green Book
All	Social connectedness	Reduced loneliness	£9,100 per person	HM Treasury Green Book Peytrignet et al (2020)
Volunteers	Volunteering	Subjective wellbeing	£911 per person	Lawton et al (2020)
School students	Education	Ecological knowledge	£3.45 per person	ENCA 3.3 Data Handbook Natural England

SOCIAL VALUE CALCULATIONS

Physical health

Physical health benefits were valued using the quality-adjusted life year (QALY) approach described in the ENCA 3.3 Data Handbook. The handbook reports DEFRA estimates, drawing on the HM Treasury Green Book, of the annual welfare value associated with 52 recreational visits to green spaces per year. For the present analysis, this value was scaled to reflect the observed frequency of 12 recreational visits to the Bangor Walled Garden per year. The resulting annual value per visitor was then multiplied by the estimated number of individuals visiting the Bangor Walled Garden at least once per month and engaging in light exercise to derive the total annual physical health benefit, expressed as:

$$PHB = N \times \left(\frac{V_{52}}{52} \times F \right)$$

where N is the estimated number of individuals visiting the Bangor Walled Garden each month to engage in light exercise; V_{52} is the annual physical health value for one person making 52 visits per year; 52 is the assumed number of weekly visits used in the ENCA methodology; and F is the number of visits made per year based on the available survey data (i.e., 12).

The number of annual visitors to the Bangor Walled Garden was $n=169,520$ in 2025. This equates to $n=14,127$ visitors each month. Of these visitors, the survey indicated that 31.9% (or $n=4,507$) return on a monthly basis and of these, 62.4% (or 2,812) visit the garden to engage in light exercise.

The ENCA 3.3 Data Handbook reports an annual welfare value of £747 (2024 prices) for an individual undertaking one active visit per week (52 visits annually), based on an estimated gain of 0.010677 QALYs and a welfare value of £70,000 per QALY. This is equivalent to approximately £14.37 per active visit. In May 2026 prices, this equates to £793 per person per year for 52 visits (or £15.26 per visit). When this annual QALY gain is scaled pro rata from 52 to 12 visits per year, the estimated QALY gain corresponds to an annual physical health benefit of approximately £183 per person.

Applying this value to the estimated monthly visitors who engage in light exercise ($n=2,812$) gives a total annual physical health benefit of £514,596. The calculation is shown below:

$$2,812 \times \left(\frac{£793}{52} \times 12 \right) = 2,812 \times £183 = £514,596$$

SOCIAL VALUE CALCULATIONS

Physical health

To calculate lower and upper estimates of the value of improvements in physical health attributable to the Bangor Walled Garden, two alternative annual QALY gains were applied: 0.005 (lower estimate) and 0.015 (upper estimate). These values were selected to reflect uncertainty regarding the magnitude of the physical health benefits associated with regular use of the Bangor Walled Garden, while also recognising that the health gains may be lower or higher than the central estimate. The lower and upper estimates are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3

	Monthly visitors	QALY gain	QALY value	Total value
Lower estimate	2,812	0.005	£372	£241,832 ¹
Upper estimate	2,812	0.015	£1,115	£722,684 ²
¹ $2,812 \times (\pounds372/52 \times 12) = 2,812 \times \pounds86 = \pounds241,832$				
² $2,812 \times (\pounds1,115/52 \times 12) = 2,812 \times \pounds257 = \pounds722,684$				

SOCIAL VALUE CALCULATIONS

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Mental wellbeing

To evaluate the mental wellbeing benefits associated with the Bangor Walled Garden, we applied the wellbeing-adjusted life year (WELLBY) approach outlined in the HM Treasury Green Book. Unlike the QALY approach used to estimate physical health benefits, the WELLBY framework captures broader aspects of subjective wellbeing, including relaxation, social interaction, connectedness to nature, enjoyment, and overall life satisfaction. Accordingly, the WELLBY estimates are intended to represent mental wellbeing rather than clinically defined mental health improvements. To avoid overlap with the QALY-based valuation, the analysis assumes that the wellbeing gains associated with visiting the Bangor Walled Garden are additional to the physical health benefits already captured.

Survey findings support the application of the WELLBY approach. Half of respondents reported visiting the Bangor Walled Garden to support their mental wellbeing and emotional calm. Furthermore, 72.9% indicated that visiting the Walled Garden helped them to relax, 76.6% reported improvements in mood, and 67.3% considered that it enhanced their general wellbeing. Collectively, these findings provide empirical support for applying the WELLBY framework to estimate the monetary value of the mental wellbeing benefits associated with the Bangor Walled Garden.

In line with UK Government guidelines, to calculate an increase in life satisfaction attributable to visiting the Bangor Walled Garden, we used the standard value of one WELLBY (or one unit increase in life satisfaction on a 0-10 scale) which is valued at £13,000 per person per year in 2019 prices. This is equivalent to £17,135 in 2026 (May) prices based on an average annual inflation rate of 3.84%.

SOCIAL VALUE CALCULATIONS

Mental wellbeing

For the present analysis, a conservative increase of 0.01 WELLBYs attributable to regular use of the Bangor Walled Garden was assumed and applied only to individuals who reported visiting at least once per month (n=4,507) and visited the Bangor Walled Garden to support their mental wellbeing (50% or n=2,254). This reflects the expectation that any improvement in subjective wellbeing is most likely to arise through sustained engagement with the space over the course of a year rather than occasional visits.

Although visitors frequently reported benefits such as improved mood, relaxation and enhanced wellbeing, there is currently no robust causal evidence quantifying the annual gain in life satisfaction attributable specifically to use of the Bangor Walled Garden. Consequently, a conservative assumption of +0.01 WELLBY was adopted, representing a small annual improvement in subjective wellbeing.

Restricting the valuation to regular monthly visitors provides a more realistic estimate of the Walled Garden's contribution to mental wellbeing while reducing the risk of overstating benefits through infrequent or incidental use. This is expressed as:

$$MWB = N \times (W \times V_{WELLBY})$$

where N is the estimated number of individuals visiting the Bangor Walled Garden at least once per month to support their mental wellbeing (n=2,254); W is the assumed WELLBY gain attributable to regular use of the Walled Garden per year (+0.01); and V_{WELLBY} is the monetary value of one WELLBY (£17,135).

Substituting these values gives a total annual value for improved mental wellbeing of £385,434. The calculation is shown below:

$$2,254 \times (0.01 \times £17,135) = 2,254 \times £171 = £385,434$$

SOCIAL VALUE CALCULATIONS

Mental wellbeing

Lower and upper estimates for the value of mental wellbeing improvements attributable to the Bangor Walled Garden were derived by applying a 50% decrease and increase to the base WELLBY gain (0.01), resulting in alternative annual WELLBY gains of 0.005 and 0.015, respectively. These values were used as part of a sensitivity analysis to reflect uncertainty surrounding the magnitude of the subjective wellbeing benefits associated with regular use of the Garden. In the absence of empirical evidence to define confidence intervals for the assumed WELLBY gain, this approach provides a plausible range of values while avoiding reliance on an arbitrary single estimate. This is summarised in Table 4

Table 4

	Monthly visitors	WELLBY gain	WELLBY value	Total value
Lower estimate	2,254	0.005	£86	£193,844 ¹
Upper estimate	2,254	0.015	£257	£579,278 ²
¹ $2,254 \times (0.005 \times £17,135) = 2,254 \times £86 = £193,844$				
² $2,254 \times (0.015 \times £17,135) = 2,254 \times £257 = £579,278$				

SOCIAL VALUE CALCULATIONS

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Social connectedness

14.2% of survey respondents (n = 84) reported that the Bangor Walled Garden enables them to meet new people. Although this proportion equates to an estimated 24,072 annual visitors, this was not applied to the full visitor population because the survey did not establish that all such individuals experienced a measurable reduction in loneliness. Instead, to provide a conservative estimate of the value of social connectedness and minimise the risk of overestimating benefits, the valuation was restricted to the n=84 respondents who directly reported this outcome.

A reduction in loneliness from moderate to mild is valued at £9,100 per person per year (95% CI: £5,900–£12,960) according to the HM Treasury Green Book Supplementary Guidance on Wellbeing which cites a report by Peytrignet et al conducted in 2020 (19). Applying this value to the n=84 respondents provides an estimate of the annual monetary value associated with improved social connectedness attributable to the Bangor Walled Garden.

The annual monetary value of was estimated by multiplying the number of survey respondents who reported that the Bangor Walled Garden enabled them to meet new people by the HM Treasury Green Book value associated with reducing loneliness from moderate to mild. This is expressed as:

$$RLB = R \times V_{RL}$$

where R is the number of survey respondents reporting that the Bangor Walled Garden enables them to meet new people (n=84); and V_{RL} is the annual value of reducing loneliness from moderate to mild (£9,100 per person per year).

Substituting these values, the calculation for the value of improved social connectedness is as follows:

$$84 \times £9,100 = £764,400$$

SOCIAL VALUE CALCULATIONS

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Social connectedness

To calculate lower and upper estimates of the value of improved social connectedness, we used the 95% confidence intervals reported in the HM Treasury Green Book Supplementary Guidance on Wellbeing for the value of reducing loneliness from moderate to mild - £5,900 and £12,960, respectively. Using the same formula presented in the previous section, this results in a lower and upper estimate range for the value of improved social connectedness of between £495,600 and £1,088,640.

SOCIAL VALUE CALCULATIONS

Volunteering

Volunteering is associated with improved subjective wellbeing. Using the wellbeing valuation approach developed by Lawton et al. (2020) (20), the average annual wellbeing benefit of volunteering is estimated at £911 per volunteer. n=14 individuals (9 of whom participated in the focus groups) were identified as volunteers associated with the Bangor Walled Garden. Given that the focus group discussions consistently highlighted a range of wellbeing benefits arising from volunteering, this valuation was applied to these individuals. Reported benefits included a stronger sense of contributing positively to the community, greater connectedness to nature, increased knowledge of horticultural practices and food production systems, improved mental health and wellbeing, enhanced social interaction, and an increased sense of safety. Based on these findings, the estimated annual wellbeing value generated through volunteering at the Bangor Walled Garden is £12,754 (14 volunteers × £911 per volunteer per year).

To calculate lower and upper estimates for the value of volunteering, we used the estimated life satisfaction coefficients reported by Lawton et al. for male (0.020 or £536) and female (0.050 or £1,340) participants. This approach was adopted because 95% confidence intervals were not reported in the original study. Using the sex-specific coefficients provides an evidence-based range around the pooled estimate (0.034 or £911), reflecting observed variation in the wellbeing benefits of volunteering between males and females while avoiding the need to apply an arbitrary sensitivity bound. This is summarised in Table 5.

Table 5

	Number of volunteers	Reported life satisfaction increase	Value of volunteering per person	Total value
Lower estimate	14	0.020	£536	£7,504
Upper estimate	14	0.050	£1,340	£18,760

SOCIAL VALUE CALCULATIONS

Education

Natural England estimates the educational value of a half-day school visit with educational input from staff or volunteers at £3.45 per pupil (2017 prices), equivalent to £4.74 per pupil in 2026 prices. Where no educational input is provided, the estimated value is £2.08 per pupil (equivalent to £2.86 in 2026 prices). These values were derived from educational visits to National Nature Reserves in England. Although the Bangor Walled Garden differs in setting, it provides comparable opportunities for environmental education, horticultural learning, biodiversity awareness, and outdoor experiential learning. In the absence of site-specific valuation evidence, the Natural England estimates were therefore adopted as a reasonable proxy for valuing the educational benefits generated by school visits to the Bangor Walled Garden.

The number of school trips for this outcome and therefore the number of pupils that this value can be applied to, were unknown so we have estimated the social value for this domain, based on 2 schools (Bangor Central and Bangor Integrated) bringing one class (34 total) once a month (x12).

We also note, but exclude that in March 2025, 75 children from Trinity Nursery and Bangor Integrated Nursery planted this season's peas and beans. The activity, led by Ards and North Down Borough Council's dedicated staff and volunteers, aimed to spark a love for nature and gardening in the young participants while promoting environmental awareness.

We include these calculations (with the above qualification) for illustrative purposes and completeness (see Table 6).

Table 6

	Number of pupils	Educational value per pupil per visit	Number of visits	Total value
Lower estimate	34	£2.86	12	£1,166
Central estimate	34	£3.80		£1,550
Upper estimate	34	£4.74	12	£1,933

SOCIAL VALUE CALCULATIONS

Summary

The social value assessment (summarised in Table 7) estimated a total social present value ranging from £939,946 (lower estimate) to £2,411,295 (upper estimate), with a central estimate of £1,678,734. Physical health (£514,596), mental wellbeing (£385,434), and social connection (£764,400) accounted for the largest share of the estimated benefits, while volunteering (£12,754) and educational activities (£1,550) made smaller but positive contributions. After deducting annual maintenance costs of £250,000, the net social value was estimated at £1,428,734 under the central scenario (range: £689,946–£2,161,295). This equates to a cost-benefit ratio of 6.71, indicating that every £1 invested in the Bangor Castle Walled Garden generates an estimated £6.71 in social value. Sensitivity analysis produced a range of £3.76 to £9.65 of social value for every £1 invested, demonstrating that the Walled Garden generates a positive social return across all scenarios considered.

Table 7

	Social present value estimates		
	Lower	Central	Upper
Outcomes			
Physical health	£241,832	£514,596	£722,684
Mental wellbeing	£193,844	£385,434	£579,278
Social connection	£495,600	£764,400	£1,088,640
Volunteering	£7,504	£12,754	£18,760
Education	£1,166	£1,550	£1,933
Total social value	£939,946	£1,678,734	£2,411,295
Costs			
Maintenance	£250,000	£250,000	£250,000
Net social value	£689,946	£1,428,734	£2,161,295
Cost-benefit ratio	3.76	6.71	9.65

CONCLUSIONS

The Social Value estimated for the Walled Garden is significant and important for both council who own and manage it, and ratepayers, visitors, volunteers and other users of the Garden.

It was clear from early on in the data collection that the Walled Garden held a special place in the hearts of many people in Bangor and the surrounding area. Our task was to give the voices, experiences and accounts of those who used it and were responsible for it an estimate of the social value of the space.

The Walled Garden is described in different ways by many people: some see it as a working garden, an ornamental garden, an oasis of peace, a 'hidden gem', the 'crown jewel of Bangor Council', a 'horticultural museum and library', a safe place for all generations to enjoy and share. It is also a space that is beyond politics and economic demands of modern life; consumerism does not enter this timeless sanctuary.



CONCLUSIONS

The Walled Garden represents a small pocket of groomed and managed nature where people can let go of their daily stresses and take a break from the high speed of modern living. It is a free public space where everyone is welcome to take a few minutes or hours to adopt the pace of nature and set their worries aside.

When the research began the first step was to connect with the walled garden and get a sense of the space which the research project centred. There appears to be a sense of timelessness, pleasure, serenity and beauty, that is difficult to comprehensively articulate and explain. The senses are livened and the atmosphere is inspiring and simultaneously soothing. After getting a sense of place and the space, both the size and aesthetic the ground was set to establish who the stakeholders where and how the walled garden was used by the community and what exactly was happening when they were in the space and what their experiences did for the quality of life and the impact of spending time in the garden to health, education and social interactions and relationships.



Visiting the Walled Garden, the first thing that strikes one is the amount of people using the space and the sense of peace felt within the walls. The garden is relatively small in comparison with other green public spaces, however the vast array of plants, the arrangements, the sculptures along with how the space was manicured created a nature experience that diverges from many other public green spaces in the area. The visual aesthetic of nature as well as the sensory experiences in terms of the aroma and smell from flowers and plants are vital parts of the experience.

CONCLUSIONS

Reflecting on all the conversations that were had when starting to collect the data what stood out most was the affection and reverence that was given to the space by every person that we came into contact with. That was felt more in-person and in how they spoke about the space, but the questionnaires affirmed that also with the words written and the words that appeared with the most frequency were peace, relaxation and beauty.

This was the challenge, many of the experiences signalled that the garden was touching a space in people's lives that is almost impossible to quantify and that is one of the reasons that it was considered to symbolise and represent 'the soul of the community'. A sacred space, that was a welcome break from the monotony and stresses of modern living and endless news reports of all that is wrong with the world. When talking of the walled garden, it provided a space away from the chaos, noise and strife and the space transcended divisions and brought a sense of community, safety and respite.



CONCLUSIONS



The stories that were shared and the personalities included were testimony to how the space brings people together but also allows for people to find solitude and solace in difficult times. There is Derek who is arguably a guardian of the garden who seems to be fixture and part of the fabric of the walled garden as the sculptures and the botany. Then there are the new Mums who are brought to slow down and connect with their senses and be mindful while in the throes of new motherhood, accompanied by Sure Start. There are those who have lost mothers and part of their grieving process is to spend time in the garden daily for their wellbeing.

The sounds of water from the fountain, birds overhead, children playing as well as the constant seasonal changes mean that every visit offers a unique and ever evolving sensory and pleasurable experience. No two visits are the same and part of the pleasure of the place is that the garden is alive and the relationships between the people and space are complex, multi-layered and one of the greatest tasks that we as researchers faced was trying to capture the multiple benefits the Walled Garden offers to different sections of the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of recommendations are shown below for consideration:

- Design and co-ordinate a wider programme of organised visits, targeting young people and those who may be at higher risk of being socially isolated.
- Establish links with SERC, QUB and UU - for horticultural and social science studies.
- Expanding the range of volunteering opportunities.
- Using this research as a platform for further collaboration between Ards and North Down Council and QUB.
- Expand and integrate Social Value and Social Return on Investment into its investment decision-making and evaluation processes.
- Contribute to the development of the Council's Social Value Procurement Framework (22) and a 'stepping stone' to integration of 'Community Wealth Building' into the council's aims and objectives (23,24).
- Take measures to ensure the space remains free to the public. This was acknowledged by research participants, staff and volunteers, that this was very important to maintain as it was unanimously agreed that introducing a charge for entry would negatively impact many people.
- Consider additional research to evaluate how the Walled Garden can be marketed better to increase its profile and build awareness around its value for the local community.
- Consider producing an app or website so that visitors and local people can leave reviews and share experiences of the walled garden.
- Look into how the space helps people manage specific neurological and mental health conditions such as ASD, ADHD, depression and anxiety.

LIMITATIONS

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1. As the interviews, focus group and survey data only included adults aged 18 or over, the social value of the Walled Garden to those under 18 is not calculated or estimated in this report.
 2. The report estimated the social value based on 5 domains. It does not have data to enable the calculation of social value for other experiences of the Garden such as pride of place, its climate and ecological value, and we are confident we have under-estimated the educational value of the Garden due to lack of data on school trips.
 3. Where different proxy monetary values were appropriate, the lower value was preferred to avoid the danger of over-estimation. As such, the social value calculated for the Walled Garden can be reasonably judged to be an under estimation of its total social and eco-social value.

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Unclassified

ITEM 11

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Environment Committee
Date of Meeting	07 October 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Environmental Services
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Waste and Cleansing Services
Report title	Town Centre Wardens Update
Attachments	N/A
File Reference (if applicable)	43002
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 Litter (Northern Ireland) Order 1994 Public Health and Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 1955
Resource Implications	None Narrative:
Screening Requirements	<i>The Council will commit to consider the implication of all reports under the categories of Section 75, Rural Needs, Data Protection, Climate and Sustainability:</i> Screening of decision not required
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Priority 2: Environmental 4. A vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors If multiple:

Background

The Waste and Cleansing Services team has direct responsibility for waste collections, the cleanliness of the borough's urban centres, and its public conveniences. Town Centre Warden was introduced in December 2019 to provide a visible, responsive, and locally based presence in the borough's city, towns, and villages across these service areas. Wardens operate in Bangor, Newtownards, Comber, Donaghadee and Holywood. Wardens in Bangor, Newtownards, Comber and Donaghadee provide street cleansing coverage seven days per week, including weekends, while Holywood benefits from Town Centre Warden coverage five days per week from Tuesday to Saturday.

Role and responsibilities

The primary purpose of the Town Centre Warden role is to maintain town centre environments in a clean, safe, and tidy condition, identify and report issues requiring attention, and provide a local point of contact for residents and visitors. A significant element of the role involves maintenance of the Council's public conveniences, with at least one third of each Warden's time dedicated to ensuring these facilities are cleaned and maintained to a consistently high standard. Wardens work proactively throughout the day to address wider environmental issues and support the delivery of Council cleansing services, including:

- Litter picking
- Removal of dog fouling
- Chewing gum removal
- Responding to areas requiring additional cleansing attention; and
- Addressing environmental issues as they arise.

Town Centre Wardens complement the Council's litter bin servicing arrangements. Public litter bins within town centres are emptied according to established schedules. Wardens help ensure these facilities remain clean, serviceable and fit for purpose, thereby supporting effective waste management and reduced litter. Additional responsibilities include:

- Cleaning and maintaining street furniture, including benches, litter bins and signage
- Undertaking minor weed removal
- Monitoring town centre infrastructure and reporting defects, vandalism or damage
- Providing assistance and information to members of the public
- Responding to enquiries and acting as a visible representative of the Council
- Carrying out key-holder duties where applicable, including opening and closing facilities; and
- Cleaning and maintaining public convenience facilities.

More recently, with the introduction of defibrillator units at Council's public conveniences at Ballyholme, Millisle, Mill Street (Newtownards), and Seapark, Wardens can perform checks to ensure the units remain emergency ready. A key strength of the Town Centre Warden role is their ability to respond flexibly to changing local priorities.

Impact and outcomes

Town Centre Wardens make a significant contribution to maintaining the appearance and cleanliness of city and town centres across the borough. The most recent Ards and North Down Borough Council Residents' Survey identified, dog fouling and litter as important issues for local residents. Through their daily presence and broad range of responsibilities, Wardens enable Waste and Cleansing Services to respond proactively to these concerns and identify areas requiring additional intervention, such as targeted cleansing or power washing.

The service continues to attract positive feedback from residents, businesses and visitors. Wardens provide a valued local presence and act as an accessible point of contact for a wide range of service-related enquiries.

The quality of their work is reflected in national recognition received for Council facilities. In 2025, four of the Council's five Loo of the Year awards were achieved by facilities in Bangor, Donaghadee, Holywood and Newtownards, all of which are supported by Town Centre Wardens.

In addition, Donaghadee was one of only four finalists shortlisted in the Ireland's Best Kept Small Town category of the 2026 Ireland's Best Kept Town Competition, reflecting the positive contribution made by Town Centre Wardens and wider Council services to the presentation and upkeep of the borough's town centres.

Summary

The Town Centre Warden service provides a highly visible, flexible and cost-effective frontline presence within the borough's principal settlements. Through a combination of street cleansing, public convenience management, infrastructure monitoring and community engagement, Wardens play a vital role in maintaining attractive, welcoming and well-presented town centres while supporting wider Council objectives relating to cleanliness, civic pride and public wellbeing.

RECOMMENDATION

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

Unclassified

ITEM 12

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Environment Committee
Date of Meeting	07 October 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Environmental Services
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Waste and Cleansing Services
Report title	Borough Cleanliness Survey 2026/27 Quarter 1 (April to June 2026)
Attachments	Appendix 1 AND Q1 Borough Cleansing Survey 2026-27
File Reference (if applicable)	74001
Legislation	Other The Litter (Northern Ireland) Order 1994
Resource Implications	None Narrative:
Screening Requirements	<i>The Council will commit to consider the implication of all reports under the categories of Section 75, Rural Needs, Data Protection, Climate and Sustainability:</i> Screening of decision not required
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Priority 2: Environmental 4. A vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors If multiple:

Background

Live Here Love Here (formerly Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful) is a leading environmental charity which delivers the independent Borough Cleanliness Survey programme using trained assessors and a recognised Local Environment Audit and Management System (LEAMS) methodology. Ards and North Down Borough Council has commissioned four quarterly surveys in 2026-27 to provide an objective assessment of environmental cleanliness across the Borough, helping to identify areas for improvement, measure performance over time and provide assurance to Members that results are independently verified.

Survey methodology

The survey comprised 100 standard cleanliness transects and a further 25 dedicated dog fouling transects, providing coverage across a range of land use types including town centres, streets, roads, and recreational spaces. Together, these 125 survey locations were used by Live Here Love Here to provide a representative assessment of environmental quality and cleanliness standards across the Borough.

The survey measures litter, detritus, graffiti, flyposting and staining.

Under the LEAMS methodology, each transect is assessed and a grade and a value is assigned to each. The maximum LEAMS score is 300, i.e. where all 100 transects are graded 'A' and are assigned a value of 3.

Table 1 LEAMS grades and values

Grade	Value
A	3
B+	2.5
B	2
B/C	1.5
C	1
C-	0.5
D	0

A score of 198, or 66%, represents an acceptable standard, equivalent to an average grade B.

Survey results

The Quarter 1 litter survey recorded an overall value of 213 which is a LEAMS score of 71%, exceeding the acceptable performance threshold of 66%. The overall Litter Pollution Index (LPI) was 19%, indicating that 19% of surveyed transects failed to achieve the required cleanliness standard.

Of the 100 assessment scores recorded:

- 81% of transects achieved grades A, B+ or B and therefore passed.
- 19% of transects received grades below the required standard.

While overall performance remains above the acceptable threshold, the results indicate opportunities to improve litter standards in specific locations and land-use categories.

Summary

The Quarter 1 Borough Cleanliness Survey demonstrates that Ards and North Down Borough has achieved an overall standard above the accepted LEAMS benchmark, recording a score of 71%. Performance was particularly strong in relation to detritus, flyposting and graffiti.

The principal area requiring continued attention is litter. Cigarette-related litter, confectionery packaging and pedestrian-generated litter remain the most significant contributors to environmental quality issues. Targeted cleansing operations, behavioural change initiatives and enforcement activity will continue to be important in maintaining and improving cleanliness standards across the Borough.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council **Notes** the findings of the Quarter 1 Borough Cleanliness Survey 2026/27 and the ongoing work being undertaken to maintain and improve environmental cleanliness standards across the Borough.

2026 BOROUGH CLEANLINESS SURVEY

ARDS AND NORTH
DOWN COUNCIL

APRIL TO JUNE 26

Funded via the Carrier Bag Levy by:



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Summary

This report details the findings of the 2026 Borough Cleanliness Survey which was undertaken by Live Here Love Here between April and June 2026.

Live Here Love Here’s trained assessors surveyed the local environmental quality of 125 individual transects (streets, roads and recreational spaces) across the council area.

How are the results calculated?

Litter Pollution Index (LPI)

Litter Pollution Index (LPI) is the performance indicator for Northern Ireland and denotes the percentage of transects that pass or fail to meet acceptable standards.

Totals may not equal 100 due to the rounding up or down of figures to make whole numbers.

LEAMS

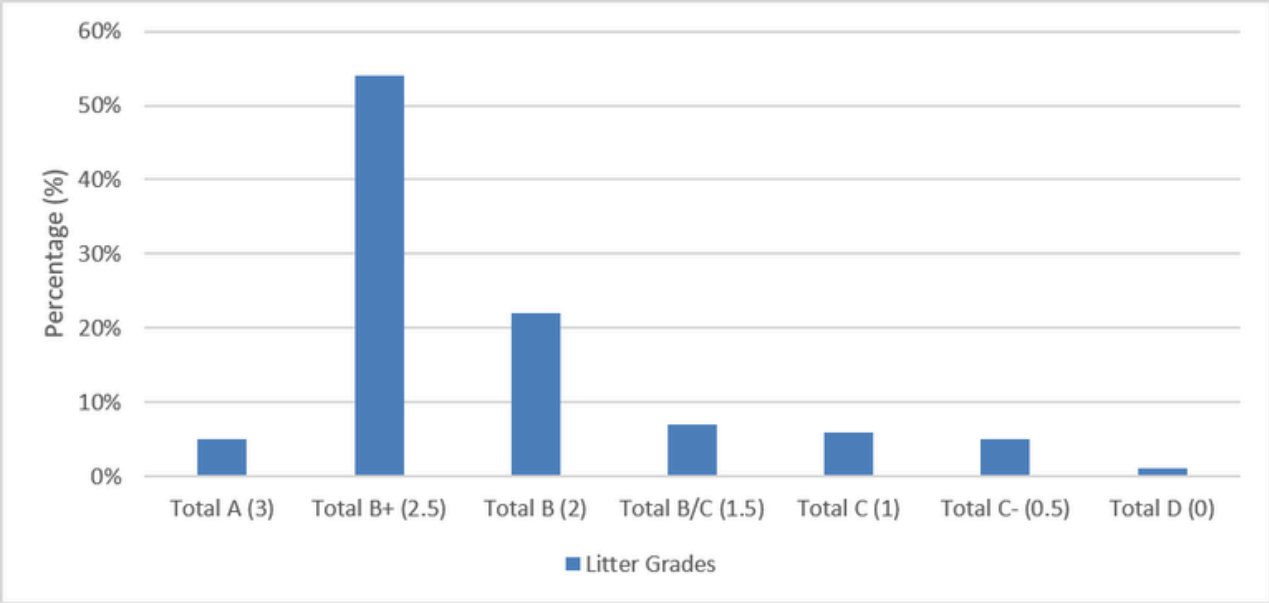
LEAMS is an alternative to LPI, a method of measuring litter and other indicators which is used in both Scotland and Wales. LEAMS scores are generated by assigning a value to each grade and then calculating the average value of all the grades assigned.

This average is presented as a percentage of the total available points for the transects surveyed. LEAMS scores therefore take account of how clean or littered a transect is, rather than just whether it is a pass or fail.

Scores closer to 100 indicate better performance. It is easier to set a target under the LEAMS system; 66 is the point at which performance is considered acceptable, as it equates with an average grade B.

Grade	Equivalent Value
A (pass)	3
B+ (pass)	2.5
B (pass)	2
B- (fail)	1.5
C (fail)	1
C- (fail)	0.5
D (fail)	0

Litter

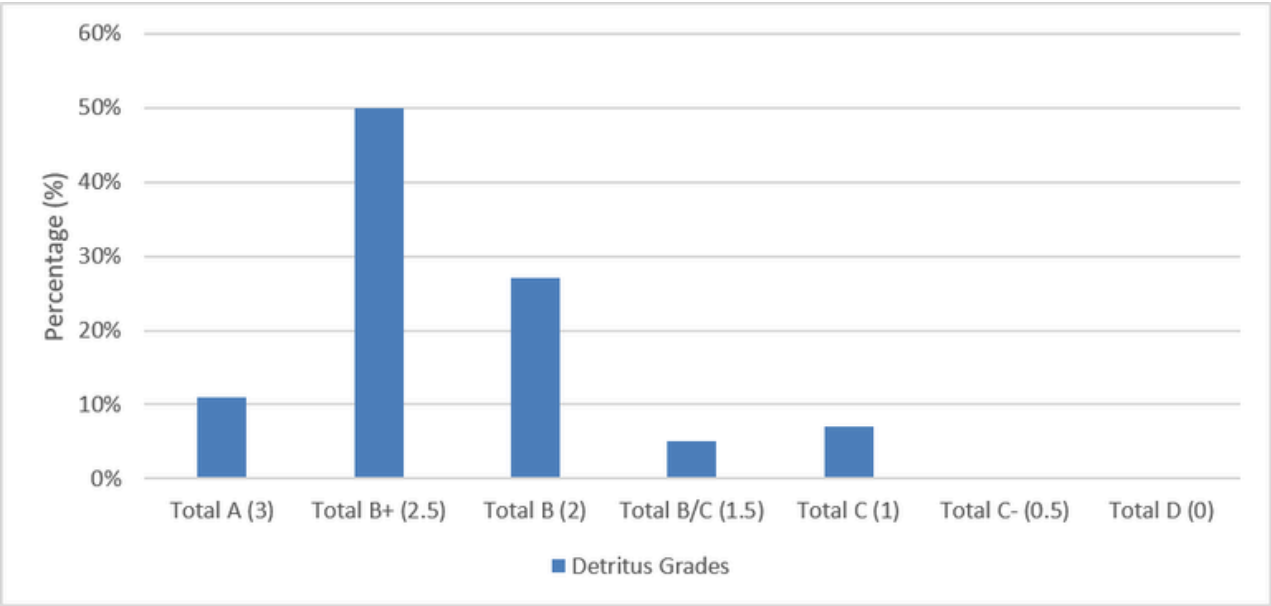


	No. of Transects awarded grade	% of Transects awarded grade
Total A (3)	5	5%
Total B+ (2.5)	54	54%
Total B (2)	22	22%
Total B/C (1.5)	7	7%
Total C (1)	6	6%
Total C- (0.5)	5	5%
Total D (0)	1	1%
TOTAL	100	
Pollution Index		19%
LEAMS Score		71%

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Detritus

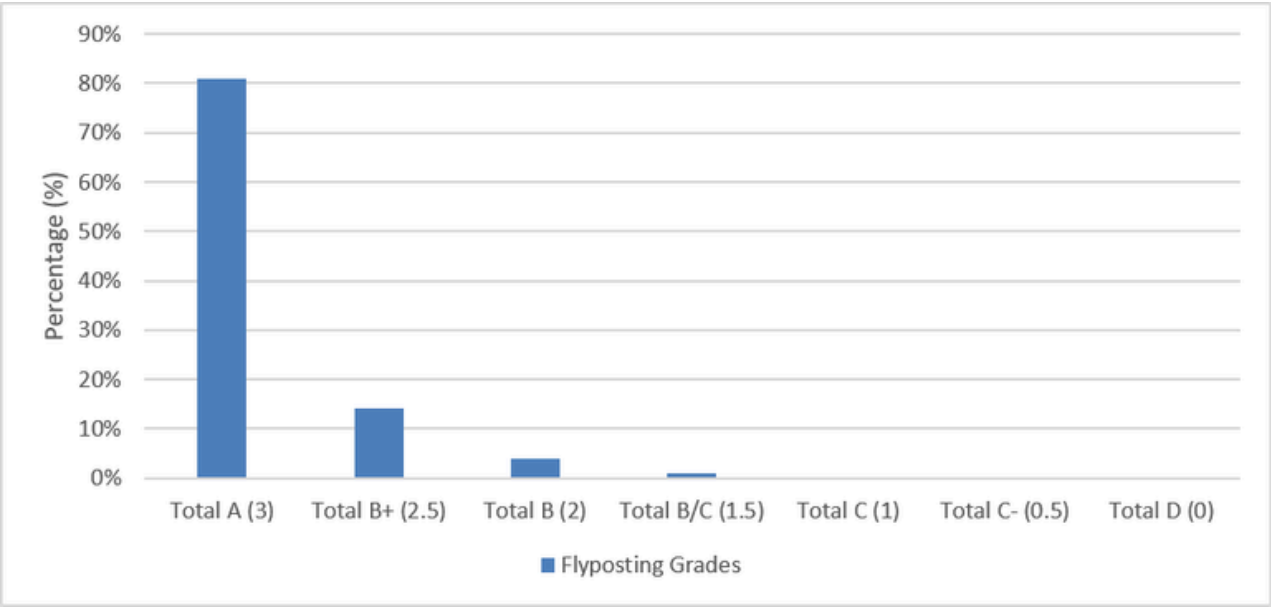


	No. of Transects awarded grade	% of Transects awarded grade
Total A (3)	11	11%
Total B+ (2.5)	50	50%
Total B (2)	27	27%
Total B/C (1.5)	5	5%
Total C (1)	7	7%
Total C- (0.5)	0	0%
Total D (0)	0	0%
TOTAL	100	
Pollution Index		12%
LEAMS Score		76%

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Flyposting



	No. of Transects awarded grade	% of Transects awarded grade
Total A (3)	81	81%
Total B+ (2.5)	14	14%
Total B (2)	4	4%
Total B/C (1.5)	1	1%
Total C (1)	0	0%
Total C- (0.5)	0	0%
Total D (0)	0	0%
TOTAL	100	
Pollution Index		1%
LEAMS Score		96%

Funded via the Carrier Bag Levy by:



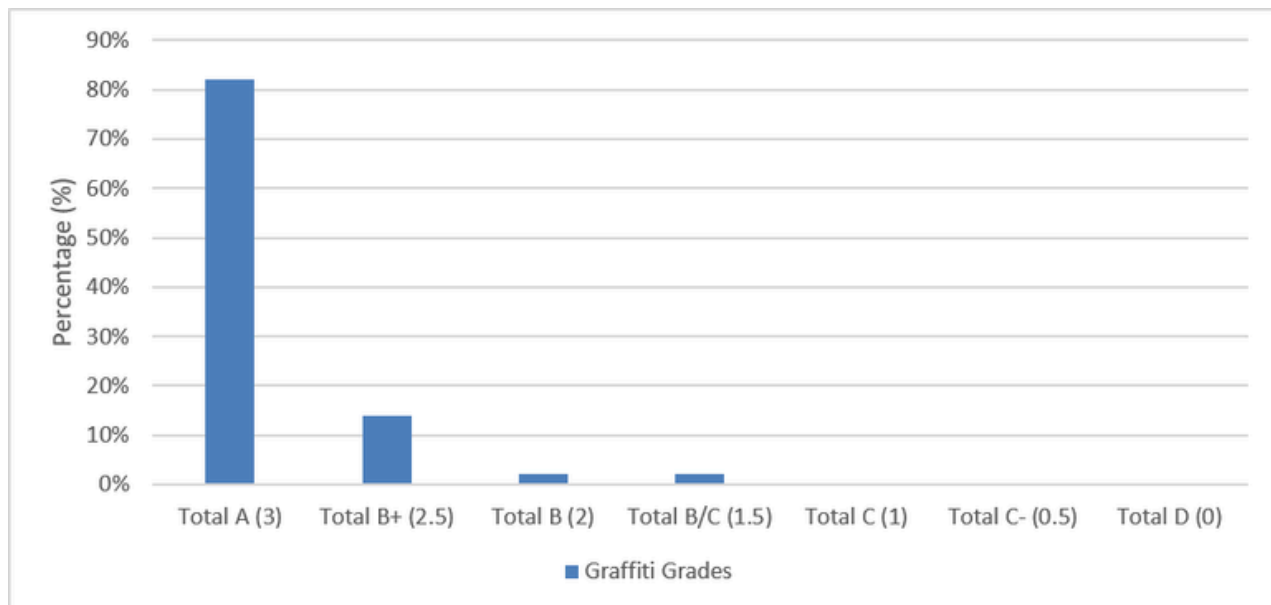
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Graffiti

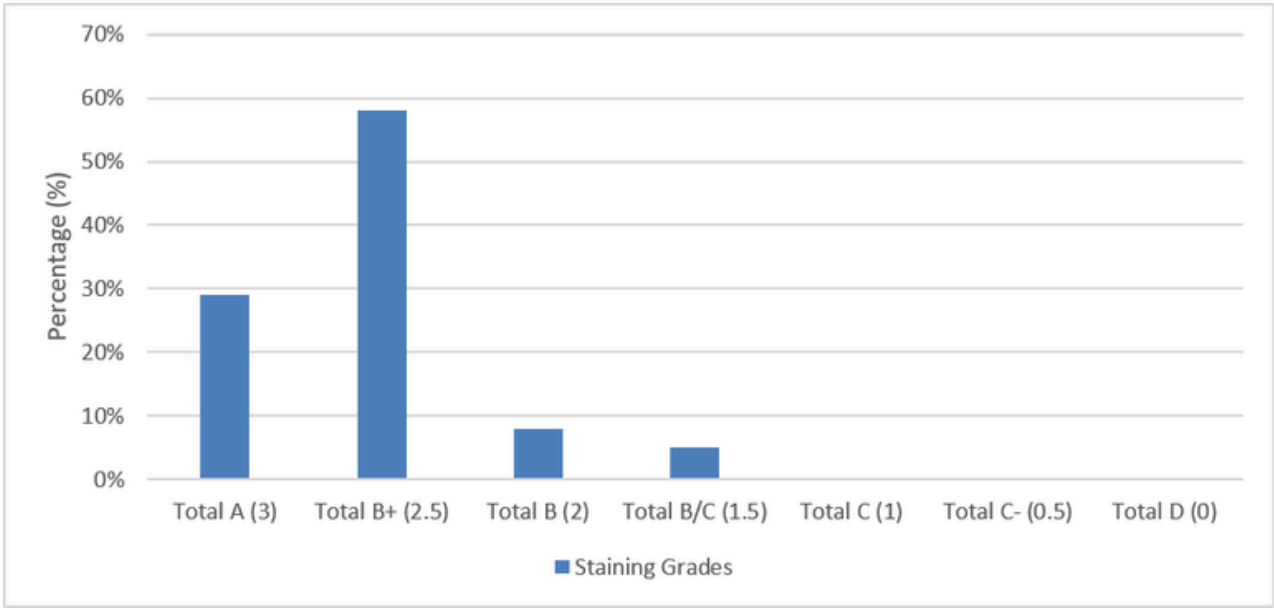
174



	No. of Transects awarded grade	% of Transects awarded grade
Total A (3)	82	82%
Total B+ (2.5)	14	14%
Total B (2)	2	2%
Total B/C (1.5)	2	2%
Total C (1)	0	0%
Total C- (0.5)	0	0%
Total D (0)	0	0%
TOTAL	100	
Pollution Index		2%
LEAMS Score		96%

Funded via the Carrier Bag Levy by:

Staining



	No. of Transects awarded grade	% of Transects awarded grade
Total A (3)	29	29%
Total B+ (2.5)	58	58%
Total B (2)	8	8%
Total B/C (1.5)	5	5%
Total C (1)	0	0%
Total C- (0.5)	0	0%
Total D (0)	0	0%
TOTAL	100	
Pollution Index		5%
LEAMS Score		85%

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Bins (Litter and Dog Fouling)

Bins (Litter & Dog Fouling)	No. of Bins Present	% transects with bins	No. of overflowing bins
Litter bins	84	35%	0
Recycling Bins	2	1%	0
Dog Fouling Bins	1	1%	0

Sources of Litter Pollution Report

Probable source of Litter	% transects affected
Fast Food Outlet	1%
Motorist	29%
Other	2%
Overflowing Bin	0%
Pedestrian	88%
Postal Worker	1%
Weather Conditions	1%

Funded via the Carrier Bag Levy by:

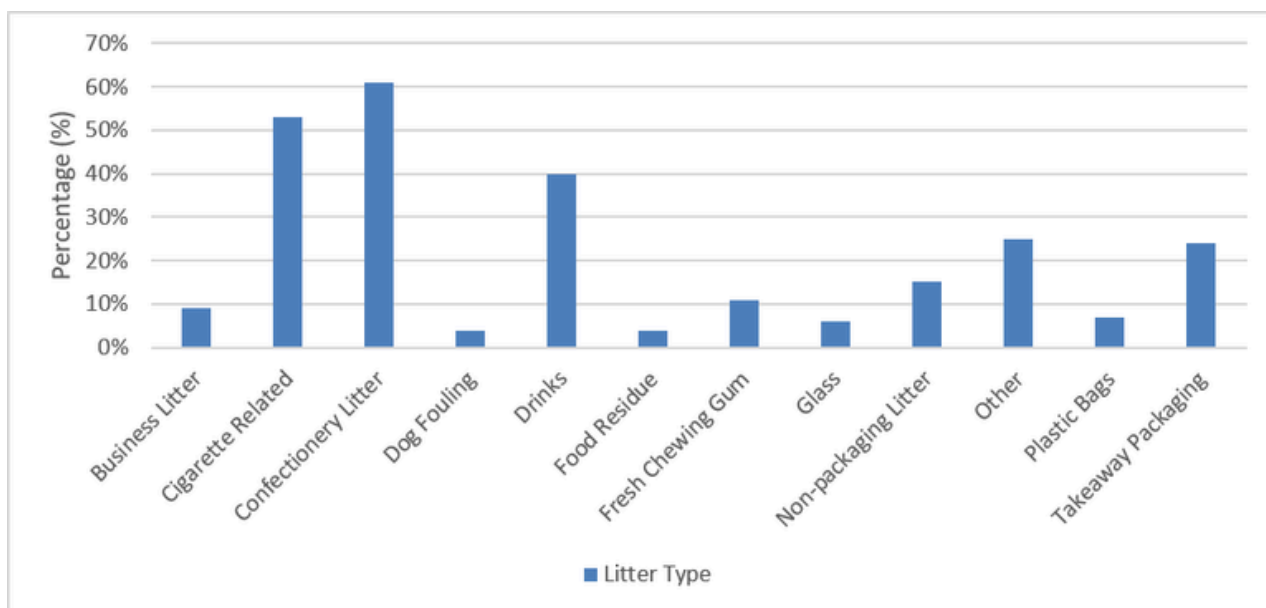


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Litter Types



Types of Litter	% transects affected by this litter type
Business Litter	9%
Cigarette Related	53%
Confectionery Litter	61%
Dog Fouling	4%
Drinks	40%
Food Residue	4%
Fresh Chewing Gum	11%
Glass	6%
Non-packaging Litter	15%
Other	25%
Plastic Bags	7%
Takeaway Packaging	24%

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Cigarette Litter

Since summer 2026, Live Here Love Here have enhanced our litter survey methodology by recording the number of cigarette butts per transect, alongside the standard practice of noting their presence or absence.

The figures below show the number of cigarettes recorded across all 100 transects during this April - June 2026 survey period.

No. of cigarette butts counted	634
No. of transects with cigarettes present	53
% of transects with cigarettes present	53%

Dog Fouling

The figures below show the number of dog fouls and dog fouls in bags recorded across the 25 Dog Fouling transects during this April - June 2026 survey period.

No. of Dog Fouls	13
No. of Dog Fouls in Bags	2
No. of transects with Dog Fouls	6
No. of transects with Dog Fouls in Bags	2

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Transects that failed to meet the required standards*

Litter (continued on overleaf)

Town	Street Name	Litter Pollution Index	Landuse Type	Date and Time
Carrowdore	Carrowdore community centre	1	recreational area	05/07/2026 07:28
Lisbane	Lisbarnet Road	1.5	rural road	05/07/2026 10:04
Comber	Bridge street	1	main retail	05/07/2026 11:33
Comber	Railway street	1.5	high obstruction housing	05/07/2026 12:54
Ballywalter	Park Avenue	1	high obstruction housing	05/08/2026 08:00
Bangor	Clandeboyne retail park	1.5	industrial retail shed	05/08/2026 08:15
Portavogie	Pincess Annes road	0.5	industrial retail shed	05/08/2026 08:51
Bangor	Balloo drive	1.5	industrial retail shed	05/08/2026 08:54
Newtownards	Castlebawn	1.5	industrial retail shed	05/08/2026 09:05
Cloughey	Ballygalget road	0.5	rural road	05/08/2026 10:06
Portaferry	Shore road	1	high obstruction housing	05/08/2026 10:44

*A score of 1.5 or less is deemed a fail.

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Transects that failed to meet the required standards*

Litter (continued)

Town	Street Name	Litter Pollution Index	Landuse Type	Date and Time
Newtownards	Cranmore ave	1	high obstruction housing	05/08/2026 11:07
Newtownards	Victoria ave	0.5	high obstruction housing	05/08/2026 11:44
Portaferry	Lough conway road	1	rural road	05/08/2026 11:47
Newtownards	High street	1.5	main retail	05/08/2026 12:10
Newtownards	East street	0.5	high obstruction housing	05/08/2026 12:20
Newtownards	Jubilee road	0	industrial retail shed	05/08/2026 13:17
Greyabbey	Main street	1.5	main road	05/08/2026 13:23
Ballygowan	Ballygowan play park	0.5	recreational area	05/07/2026 10:37

Flyposting

Town	Street Name	Score	Landuse Type	Date and Time
Bangor	Main street	1.5	main retail	05/07/2026 14:52

*A score of 1.5 or less is deemed a fail.

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Transects that failed to meet the required standards*

Graffiti

Town	Street Name	Score	Landuse Type	Date and Time
Bangor	Marine Gardens	1.5	recreational area	05/07/2026 14:22
Bangor	Main street	1.5	main retail	05/07/2026 14:52

Staining

Town	Street Name	Score	Landuse Type	Date and Time
Hollywood	Strand Avenue	1.5	high obstruction housing	05/07/2026 10:34
Bangor	Market street	1.5	other retail	05/07/2026 15:29
Bangor	Clandeboyne retail park	1.5	industrial retail shed	05/08/2026 08:15
Newtownards	Castlebawn	1.5	industrial retail shed	05/08/2026 09:05
Conlig	Greenway	1.5	industrial retail shed	05/08/2026 10:08

*A score of 1.5 or less is deemed a fail.

Funded via the Carrier Bag Levy by:



Transects that failed to meet the required standards*

Detritus

Town	Street Name	Score	Landuse Type	Date and Time
Holywood	Redburn Park	1	recreational area	05/07/2026 08:57
Balloo	Killyleagh Road	1.5	other retail	05/07/2026 09:46
Holywood	Strand Avenue	1	high obstruction housing	05/07/2026 10:34
Comber	Ballygowan road	1	main road	05/07/2026 12:45
Comber	Railway street	1	high obstruction housing	05/07/2026 12:54
Bangor	Clandeboyne retail park	1.5	industrial retail shed	05/08/2026 08:15
Newtownards	Castlebawn	1.5	industrial retail shed	05/08/2026 09:05
Portaferry	Shore road	1.5	high obstruction housing	05/08/2026 10:44
Newtownards	Cranmore ave	1	high obstruction housing	05/08/2026 11:07
Kircubbin	Main street	1.5	main retail	05/08/2026 12:06
Newtownards	East street	1	high obstruction housing	05/08/2026 12:20
Newtownards	Jubilee road	1	industrial retail shed	05/08/2026 13:17

*A score of 1.5 or less is deemed a fail.

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