

February 3rd, 2025

Notice Of Meeting

You are requested to attend the meeting to be held on **Thursday, 6th February 2025 at 7:00 pm** in **Hybrid Meeting - Church Street, Newtownards & Zoom.**

Agenda

Agenda

📄 *PP 06.02.25 Agenda.pdf*

Page 1

1. Apologies

2. Declarations of Interest

Reports for Approval

3. Ards Peninsula Business Awards

Report attached

📄 *3.0 Ards Peninsula Business Awards 2025.pdf*

Page 4

4. Local Economic Partnership Sub-Regional Economic Plan

Report attached

📄 *4.0 Local Economic Partnership Sub Regional Economic Plan.pdf*

Page 6

📄 *4.1 Appendix 1 Structure Diagram.pdf*

Page 11

📄 *4.2 Appendix 2 - Guidance.pdf*

Page 12

Reports for Noting

5. AND Experiences and Walks and Tours Programme end of Season Report 2024/25

Report attached

📄 *5. AND Experiences and Walks and Tours Programme End of Season Report 2024 25.pdf*

Page 21

📄 *5.1 Appendix 1 AND Experiences and Walks and Tours Programme 202425.pdf*

Page 24

📄 *5.2 Appendix 2 AND Experiences and Walks and Tours Programme 202526.pdf*

Page 26

6. Marketing – Destination Campaign Overview Report 2024,

Spring and Autumn

Report attached

[!\[\]\(c507f772dba2b921f86777f01218e570_img.jpg\) **6. Marketing - Destination Campaign Overview Report 2024.pdf**](#) *Page 28*

[!\[\]\(4729e517bc6a7cd81c8025b9646574fb_img.jpg\) **6.1 Appendix 1 Campaign Visual Assets Examples 2024.pdf**](#) *Page 32*

7. Bangor Visitor Information Outreach Pilot - 2025

Report attached

[!\[\]\(cbe2492b119e39e02a1dab2af4a4b296_img.jpg\) **7. Bangor Visitor Information Outreach Pilot 2025.pdf**](#) *Page 36*

8. Prosperity Budgetary Control Report - December 2024

Report attached

[!\[\]\(5361750c22c4e047a52f4eac1ec2d4cc_img.jpg\) **8.0 Prosperity BCR - December 2024.pdf**](#) *Page 39*

9. Place Budgetary Control Report - December 2024

Report attached

[!\[\]\(0d5ec72f61334709c3fc9450209b754f_img.jpg\) **9. Place Directorate Budgetary Control Report - December 2024.pdf**](#) *Page 42*

10. Update on the Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2024-25

Report attached

[!\[\]\(2bae76de5ebbd5c4d7d47162f1673734_img.jpg\) **10. Update on the Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2024 - 2025.pdf**](#) *Page 45*

11. Update on NoM 568 Response re: Vacancy & Dereliction Study

Report attached

[!\[\]\(28f72b996fc97883dfd9d4e8b1b16b4e_img.jpg\) **11. Update on Notice of Motion 568 re Vacancy and Dereliction Study.pdf**](#) *Page 47*

12. Notices of Motion referred to Committee by Council 29 January 2025

12.1. Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Ashe and Councillor McCollum

That this Council notes the transformative benefits that street art, such as painted utility boxes, can have on communities including the potential to become tourist attractions or foster a sense of civic pride and notes the recent success of the painted utility boxes in Ward Park.

That this Council also acknowledges the frustration and concern that graffiti, such as tagging, can cause and the subsequent costs of removal. Council notes it is important to facilitate the creation of local art in a safe, legal, and positive way enabling artistic creation and local regeneration while also reducing the proliferation of antisocial graffiti

12.2. Notice of Motion received from Councillor Chambers and Councillor Hollywood

Postponed to March 2025 Place and Prosperity Committee

12.3. Notice of Motion received from Councillor Morgan, Alderman Cummings, Councillor Douglas, Alderman Smith and Councillor Ashe

(previously agreed at Place and Prosperity 9.1.25 – minute extract enclosed -referred back to Committee by Council 29 1.25)

“The Comber representatives are delighted that Comber has won the Best Kept Medium Town Award this year and want to thank all the volunteers who have worked tirelessly to make this happen.

There is, however, a long-standing dilapidated hoarding in Castle Street which badly detracts from this important area of Town.

The Comber representatives recognise that Council officers and the Comber Regeneration Community Partnership have tried to address this issue, but this has not been successful. Considering this, Officers should do a report exploring all further options available to resolve this issue with some urgency.”

13. Any Other Notified Business

ITEMS 14&15 *IN COMMITTEE*****

Reports for Noting (In Confidence)

14. Kinnegar Logistics Base

Report attached

 *14. Kinnegar Logistics Base.pdf*

Not included

 *14.1 Appendix 1 - Kinnegar Logistics Base.pdf*

Not included

15. LMP Quarterly Update

Report attached

 *15. LMP Quarterly Update.pdf*

Not included

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

31 January 2025

Dear Sir/Madam

You are hereby invited to attend a hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of the Place and Prosperity Committee of the Ards and North Down Borough Council which will be held in the Council Chamber, 2 Church Street, Newtownards, on **Thursday 06 February 2025** 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. Ards Peninsula Business Awards (report attached)
4. Local Economic Partnership Sub-Regional Economic Plan (report attached)

Reports for Noting

5. AND Experiences and Walks and Tours Programme end of Season Report 2024/25 (report attached)
6. Marketing – Destination Campaign Overview Report 2024, Spring and Autumn (report attached)
7. Bangor Visitor Information Outreach Pilot - 2025 (report attached)
8. Prosperity Budgetary Control Report – December 2024 (report attached)
9. Place Budgetary Control Report – December 2024 (report attached)

10. Update on the Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2024-25 (report attached)

11. Update on Notice of Motion 568 on Vacancy and Dereliction Study (report attached)

12. Notices of Motion referred to Committee by Council 29 January 2025

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13. Any Other Notified Business

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

Reports for Noting (In Confidence)

14. Kinnegar Logistics Base (report attached)

15. LMP Quarterly Update (report attached)

MEMBERSHIP OF PLACE AND PROSPERITY COMMITTEE (16 MEMBERS)

| | |
|------------------------------|----------------------|
| Alderman Adair | Councillor Hollywood |
| Alderman Armstrong-Cotter | Councillor Kennedy |
| Alderman McDowell | Councillor McCollum |
| Councillor Ashe (Vice Chair) | Councillor McCracken |
| Councillor Blaney | Councillor McKimm |
| Councillor Edmund | Councillor McLaren |
| Councillor Gilmour (Chair) | Councillor Smart |
| Councillor Hennessy | Councillor Thompson |

Unclassified

4

ITEM 3

Ards and North Down Borough Council

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|-----------------------------|---|
| Report Classification | Unclassified |
| Exemption Reason | Not Applicable |
| Council/Committee | Place and Prosperity Committee |
| Date of Meeting | 06 February 2025 |
| Responsible Director | Director of Prosperity |
| Responsible Head of Service | Head of Economic Development (Interim) |
| Date of Report | 20 January 2025 |
| File Reference | 160094 |
| Legislation | |
| Section 75 Compliant | Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below: |
| Subject | Ards Peninsula Business Awards 2025 |
| Attachments | |

Background

Following a report to Council in September 2024 it was recommended that Council approves budgetary support for Ards Business Awards. In December 2024 Officers liaised with Ards Chamber on its business awards ceremony arrangements which have now been confirmed by Ards Chamber.

Detail

The Ards Peninsula Business Awards ceremony will take place on Friday 11 April 2025 at Clandeboye Lodge Hotel, Bangor. The Council will be sponsoring the “Business Growth Award” with two subcategories, Business Growth Awards under 10 employees and Business Growth Awards over 10 employees.

As part of the package, four complimentary tickets are being made available to Council. If additional tickets are required these can be purchased from Ards Chamber at a cost of £89+VAT per ticket.

Not Applicable

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A budget of £3,000 is available under the Economic Development revenue budget for this event.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council nominates four Members to attend the Ards Peninsula Business Awards on 11 April 2025.

Unclassified

6

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

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|-----------------------------|--|
| Report Classification | Unclassified |
| Exemption Reason | Not Applicable |
| Council/Committee | Place and Prosperity Committee |
| Date of Meeting | 06 February 2025 |
| Responsible Director | Director of Prosperity |
| Responsible Head of Service | Head of Economic Development (Interim) |
| Date of Report | 21 January 2025 |
| File Reference | ED136 |
| Legislation | |
| Section 75 Compliant | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below: |
| Subject | Local Economic Partnership - Sub-Regional Economic Plan |
| Attachments | Appendix 1 - Structure Diagram Appendix 2 - DfE Guidance |

1. Purpose and background

Following on from the report presented to Council in November 2024, this report is to provide an update on Invest NI's Sub Regional Economic Plan and the establishment of Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs) at a local level.

Members are advised that Minister Murphy communicated with local councils at the end of last year in respect of the launch of the Department for the Economy (DfE)'s Sub-Regional Economic Plan. In his correspondence this sets out the strands of delivery for his economic vision:

- a. Creation of new Local Economic Partnerships with dedicated funding.
- b. Enhancing the role of Invest NI at a regional level; and

Not Applicable

7

c. Realignment of Departmental policies and programmes to help drive local growth.

Subsequently, Invest NI and the Department for the Economy held a number of workshops with relevant stakeholders. During these sessions officials laid out the vision for sub-regional delivery in line with Minister Murphy's key objectives.

2. Local Economic Partnerships

One of the key proposals is the establishment of Local Economic Partnerships within each Council area.

Local Economic Partnerships are designed to:

- Bring together local economic stakeholders to reflect local needs and strengths, promoting collaborative working, and drive greater integration between local and central government economic initiatives.
- Identify actions and develop projects that align with the Sub-Regional Economic Plan, Council Economic Development Strategies and Invest NI Business Strategy. These will be developed with advice from DfE and Invest NI, and they should be appraised and scored/ ranked (where relevant) using a consistent and transparent methodology.
- Put in place effective monitoring and evaluation – this will be agreed dependent on the nature of the projects.

In order to support the delivery of the plans the Minister has proposed an annual NI budget of £15 million for the next three financial years (£45 million in total).

3. Guidance and Membership

DfE has now provided outline guidance on the make-up of the LEPs. At this point it is indicated that DfE will approve the final list of suggested partners. It is also suggested that no group/organisation should have a majority on the LEP, and councils should consider equality of opportunity. The guidance issued by the Department (attached as appendix 2) outlines that membership should reflect local economic needs with no one sector dominating at the expense of others and with each organisation having an equal vote. The guidance also sets out that the LEP must include representation from Further Education, Local Enterprise Agencies and local business representatives.

As specified in the DfE guidance the membership of the LEP is noted below:

- South Eastern Regional College
- Ards Business Hub
- North Down Development Organisation
- Local business representatives to be confirmed

Not Applicable

8

- Queen's University Belfast
- Ulster University
- Invest NI
- DfE
- DfC
- ANDBC Officers – Administration and Support provision

Following the initial meeting (details to be agreed) of the LEP, additional members may be proposed who may contribute to achieving the LEP objectives and subsequent actions.

4. LEP Action Plan

The LEP will be tasked with co-designing an action plan which will identify interventions and develop projects that align with the Sub-Regional Economic Plan, Invest NI Business Strategy and council-specific Economic Development Strategies. These will be developed with advice and guidance from DfE and Invest NI and will be appraised and scored/ ranked (where relevant) using a consistent and transparent methodology, which is yet to be confirmed.

5. Status and next steps

Current status

- The Council's Economic Development Service has communicated with DfE and obtained guidance on the set-up and membership of the LEP; however, it contains no specific details.
- DfE has appointed a Strategic Advisor to work alongside the relevant Council officers and Invest NI to support the development of the LEP. To date, some support has been provided and the officers have progressed and developed the proposals in this report.

February to March 2025 and beyond

- The Membership of the LEP needs to be confirmed and established to enable the action planning to commence through the Q1 2025-2026.

Subsequently the LEP will:

- Draft Terms of Reference for the ANDBC LEP working group to be agreed by Council and DfE/ INI based on chosen model. This will set out initial membership, initial decision-making process, and confirmation of DfE/INI role.
- Start the action planning development with associated budget.
- Agree core focus until programme end in 2027-28. This will be agreed with DfE/ Invest NI.
- Decision on procurement element and progression of actions – e.g. open call, private submissions, ranking, appraise options etc. – DfE and Invest NI will provide advice and assist the LEP working group to identify projects that meet the core focus.
- Assess the actions and projects based on LEP methodology agreed with DfE/INI.

Not Applicable

9

- Start the project delivery phase once agreement with all parties has been reached.

Proposed LEP model for consideration:

It is proposed to adopt the following model for the ANDBC LEP (see structure diagram attached in appendix 1)

- Appoint a secretariat hosted by the Economic Development Service funded by DfE.
- The LEP Working Group will be formed as a working group, linked to, but separate, from the Labour Market Partnership, reporting to the Place and Prosperity Committee.
- Each member of the LEP Working Group has one vote per organisation as specified in the DfE guidance (see membership highlighted in this report).
- Strategic decisions such as the Action Plan and associated budget will be presented at Place and Prosperity Committee and agreed by Council.
- Operational decisions (implementation) will sit with the Working Group to progress actions agreed by Council.
- The Working Group will report to Council on a quarterly basis for information once the action plan has been agreed and seek approval for any emerging strategic issues.

There is no standard approach to the setup of the LEP among the 11 councils in Northern Ireland. Some councils are proposing that the Chair and Vice Chair of the reporting Committee represent the Council on the LEP.

6. Funding and Recruitment

In the announcement on 1 October 2024, the Minister outlined a £15m fund spread across Northern Ireland for a period of three years totalling £45m. Each council area in Northern Ireland would be granted an allocation to support their individual action plan.

Whilst the allocation for Ards and North Down has not been confirmed officially, DfE has indicated that ANDBC allocated funding would be in the region of £1.384m per year, meaning a total of £4.152m across three years. The final amount will depend on the formula agreed by the Minister and has not yet been confirmed.

The majority of the funding will be for operational expenditure on programmes and projects identified in the action plan; however, the Department has indicated that circa £135,000 per year should be allocated to the administration of the programme and this would include the recruitment of additional staff. It is anticipated that all of the administration will be covered from this source and there is no anticipated additional cost to Council.

This report is seeking approval from Members to proceed on this basis and prepare documents for the recruitment of additional temporary staff resources to support the operation and delivery of the LEP to avoid any delays.

Not Applicable

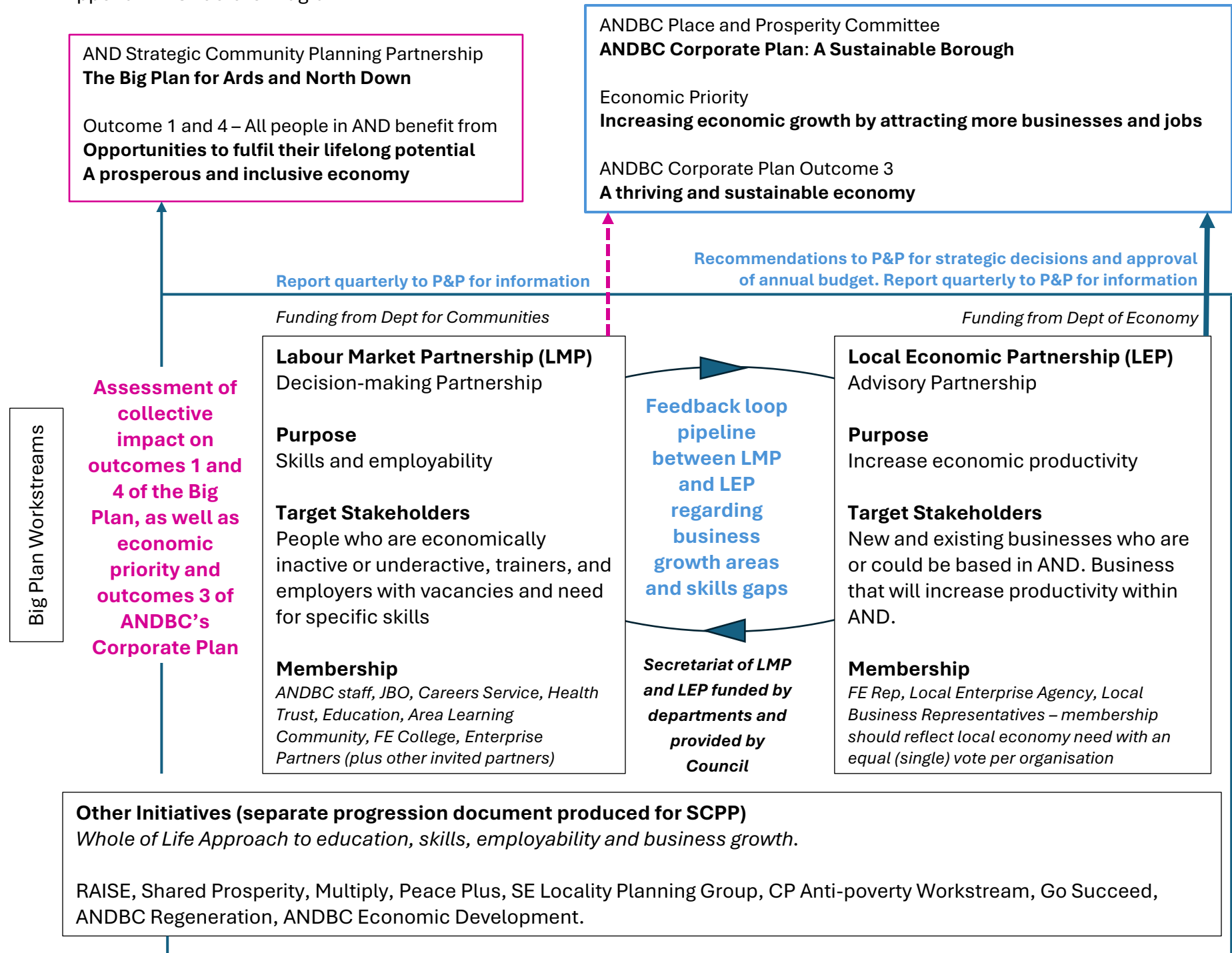
10

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council approves:

- that officers proceed to make arrangements to the establish the LEP Working Group and with the subsequent development of an action plan, in accordance with the attached guidance and report, by engaging with the relevant partners at a local level;
- that the LEP Working Group reports directly to the Place and Prosperity Committee for decision-making purposes on strategic issues such as the action plan and budget allocation; and
- that officers proceed, on the basis of this report, to prepare documents for the recruitment of additional temporary staff resources to support the operation and delivery of the LEP Working Group following confirmation of budget by DfE.

Appendix 1: Structure Diagram





Department for the Economy

Local Economic Partnerships

Guidance Document

November 2024

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this document is to support councils in setting up Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs).
- 1.2 The Sub-Regional Economic Plan was launched 1st October 2024. The Plan outlined how the department will work with Invest NI, Councils and other key stakeholder to establish Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs) between Oct-Dec 2024.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

- 2.1 Councils will establish, chair, and operate the LEP within their area. They will:
 - Determine LEP Terms of Reference (TOR), assisted by DfE and Invest NI. This will set out the focus of the LEP, membership, decision-making process, and extent of DfE/ Invest NI role. A template is attached at Annex A.
 - Appoint staff to support the LEP. They will manage operational issues relating to their LEP, act as liaison with DfE and Invest NI, and ensure all governance, and assurance matters are adhered to in line with appropriate procedures. They will also act as the interface between councils/ LEPs and DfE/ Invest NI.
 - Take control of identifying actions, designing suitable projects, and overseeing implementation.
- 2.2 DfE and Invest NI will:
 - Support the set up and operation of LEPs.
 - Advocate and champion the local economic needs of each LEP.
 - Appoint a DfE Strategic Advisor to work alongside the relevant Invest NI Regional Office to provide direct support to the LEP.
 - Meet council and agree proposed structure and membership, assist in drafting TOR, and secure funding.

- Ensure actions are aligned with Programme for Government outcomes and Economic Vision objectives.
- Provide specialist support, data, and ongoing guidance as required.

2.3 Local Economic Partnerships will:

- Bring together local economic stakeholders to reflect local needs and strengths, promoting collaborative working, and drive greater integration between local and central government economic initiatives.
- Identify actions and develop projects that align with the Sub-Regional Economic Plan, Council Economic Development Strategies and Invest NI Business Strategy. These will be developed with advice from DfE and Invest NI, and they should be appraised and scored/ ranked (where relevant) using a consistent and transparent methodology.
- Put in place effective monitoring and evaluation – this will be agreed dependent on the nature of the projects.

3. LEP Structure & Membership

3.1 Councils will determine what format the LEP will undertake to ensure flexibility and to meet local needs.

3.2 This can be a new standalone body or integrated with an existing structure such as a Labour Market Partnership (LMP) or a Community Planning Partnership (CPP). Councils may merge LEPs to work across a neighbouring council area within an Invest NI region.

3.3 The LEP TOR will set out this structure and should have:

- Clear and efficient decision-making procedures.
- Membership criteria and transparent selection procedures.
- Appointment terms and conflicts of interest management.
- Agreed frequency of meetings and required quorum for decision-making.

3.4 Membership must include:

- FE Representative(s)
- Local Enterprise Agency representative(s)
- Local business representative(s)/Chamber of Commerce representative

3.5 Membership can also include:

- University representative(s)
- Third sector representative(s)
- Financial services representative(s)
- Industry and/or lobby groups
- Public sector organisations(s)
- CPP or LMP representative(s)
- Trade union representative(s)

Membership should reflect local economic needs with no one sector dominating at the expense of others. Each organisation should have an equal vote. Diversity in representation is encouraged; membership should not discriminate against any person on the basis of race, age, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, political opinion, marital status and whether or not a person has dependents.

Annex A – TOR Template



Department for the Economy

Local Economic Partnerships

Terms of Reference

November 2024

Document Control

Summary

This document provides the draft Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Local Economic Partnership (LEP)

Key personnel

| Role | Name | Position | Date |
|----------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| Author | Michelle Craig Catriona McAllister | DfE Regional Balance | 1/11/24 |
| First Approver | Keith Brown | DfE Lead | 1/11/24 |
| Final Approver | Giulia Ni Dhulchaointigh | Group Owner | XX/11/24 |

This ToR and any amendments to it will be subject to consideration and approval by the DfE (Department for the Economy) Regional Balance Team.

Document status history

| Version | Issue Date | Reason for Update | Updated by |
|---------|------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 0.1 | 31/10/24 | 1st Draft | Michelle Craig Catriona McAllister |
| 0.2 | XX/11/24 | 2 nd Draft | Keith Brown |
| Final | | | |

Distribution

| Version | Name | Responsibility / Branch (or Organisation) | Date |
|---------|------|--|------|
| 0.2 | | | |
| 0.3 | | | |
| | | | |

Introduction and Context

1.1 The Sub-Regional Economic Plan was launched 1st October 2024. The Plan outlined how the department will work with Invest NI, Councils and other key stakeholders to establish Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs).

Justification for the formation of Local Economic Partnerships

2.1 Local Economic Partnerships will play a key role in delivering regional balance, by bringing together central and local government, ALBs, and local stakeholders to create improved economic prosperity at a local level.

Structure, Roles and Responsibilities

3.1 The Local Economic Partnership (LEP) will be owned by the Local Government District (LGD) with support from DfE (Regional Balance Team) and Invest NI (Regional Office Network).

3.2 Roles and Responsibilities are outlined in the LEP Guidance document.

Membership & Attendance

4.1 Membership of the Local Economic Partnership is comprised of the following:

- [LGD to insert LEP members here]

4.2 Secretariat to the group will be provided by [LGD to insert name here]

- 4.3 Attendance is important but in exceptional circumstances deputies may attend. Deputies should have the full delegated authority to make decisions and approve documentation on behalf of the appropriate member and be sufficiently briefed to provide accurate and timely information to the Local Economic Partnership.
- 4.4 A quorum will consist of **[LGD to insert details here]**. When a quorum is not present, the meeting should be adjourned to another time.
- 4.5 The partnership should strive to reach decisions by consensus. If a matter cannot be agreed by consensus, the LEP should agree a process for handling i.e. decision by a majority of votes. In the event of a tie, Invest NI Regional Manager will have the deciding vote.

Meetings – Timetable and Protocol

- 5.1 The timescale of this will be **[LGD to insert]** (can be reviewed and amended with agreement from LEP at later time).
- 5.2 The Local Economic Partnership will convene **[LGD to insert]**.
- 5.3 Each member should take personal responsibility to proactively declare any potential conflict of interest arising on the group’s agenda or from changes in the member’s personal circumstances. The Chair should then determine an appropriate course of action with the member.
- 5.4 The secretariat will be responsible for circulating papers in advance of meetings.
- 5.5 Standing items at meetings will include:
 - Conflicts of Interest
 - Action points from previous meeting
 - Local Economic Partnership Updates (including Deliverables, Risks and Issues Management)
 - Invest NI Briefing

Terms of Reference – Authority and Review

- 6.1 The Terms of Reference for the Partnership will be approved by Giulia Ni Dhulchaointigh, DfE.

- 6.2 Overall responsibility for the Local Economic Partnerships lies with **[insert appropriate LGD Director]**.

Unclassified

ITEM 5

Ards and North Down Borough Council

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|-----------------------------|---|
| Report Classification | Unclassified |
| Exemption Reason | Not Applicable |
| Council/Committee | Place and Prosperity Committee |
| Date of Meeting | 06 February 2025 |
| Responsible Director | Director of Prosperity |
| Responsible Head of Service | Head of Tourism |
| Date of Report | 16 January 2025 |
| File Reference | TO/EV92 |
| Legislation | |
| Section 75 Compliant | Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below: |
| Subject | AND Experiences and Walks and Tours Programme 2024/25 |
| Attachments | Appendix 1 - AND Experiences and Walks and Tours 2024/25 Appendix 2 - AND Experiences and Walks and Tours 2025/26 |

Background

Throughout 2024/25, as part of the AND Experiences and Walks and Tours Programme, the Tourism Service has delivered 15 Experiences and 22 Walks and Tours. These mostly take place from April – September each year.

Experience AND Programme 24/25

In collaboration with tourism-focussed, and other local, businesses (those who may be interested into diversifying into the visitor/tourism market) the Tourism team delivered a series of new or enhanced Experiences in 2024/25. This was via an Expression of Interest application-based developmental business process, meaning that those businesses which are successful can develop and operate a pilot at zero or

Not Applicable

limited financial risk to themselves. The total Council budget associated with the Experience Programme is £6,000.

Between May 2024 and January 2025 22no. Experiences were programmed. However, due mostly to adverse weather conditions where re-scheduling was not an option, coupled with unforeseen personal circumstances and unfortunately some Experiences lacking sufficient sales to proceed, a total of 15 Experiences were delivered. These ranged from 'on the water' activity, craft, food and drink ,and even an Experience featuring alpacas. Experiences took place at various locations throughout the Borough (see Appendix 1 for full list).

A total of 239 tickets were available with 202 tickets sold, equating to 85% of tickets sold. Of these, 60% were 'Out of Borough' (OoB) with participants from, GB, ROI as well as rest of NI. Every Experience received positive feedback.

Industry Day

The success of the 24/25 programme and its high level of ticket sales generated sufficient income to enable the Service to deliver a second annual Tourism Industry Day. Hosted at The Clandeboye Lodge Hotel on 22 October 2024, with 40 delegates in attendance, the day offered opportunities for businesses to be guided on Experience development. Five speakers presented on the topic of 'Innovation' and a collaborative 'speed networking' session was held to close the day. Feedback was extremely positive with the day producing several new collaborations for the 2025/26 programme and beyond.

AND Experience Programme 2025/2026

At the end of 2024/25, the Experience Development Programme was reviewed to ensure it was continuing to deliver against its objectives and alignment with new the Corporate Plan Priorities. One of the recommendations was to ensure Experiences could also align with the Tourism NI Embrace a Giant Spirit (EAGS) brand, meaning they could progress to become EAGS TNI brand-aligned, ensuring national promotion. It was anticipated that this would produce a reduction in the overall number of Experiences.

An Expression of Interest was launched after the Industry Day which was promoted through various Council ezines, contact lists and social media, resulting in 16 applications by the closing date.

The Assessment Panel assessed that 12 experiences met the criteria and were duly accepted onto the programme for 2025/26. Experiences are currently under development, but it is anticipated Experiences will run throughout the Borough and include creative, heritage, 'on the water' and food and drink themes (see Appendix 2 for full draft list).

AND Walks and Tours Programme 2024/25

Beginning in May, 22 Walks and Tours took place across the borough, finishing with two 2025 New Year's Day walks.

A total of 518 tickets were available with 470 sold, equating to 91% of tickets sold. Of these 27% were OoB with visitors from USA, GB, ROI and rest of N.I.

Not Applicable

23

The programme included a diverse range of themes and interests including, horticultural, historical, Christian heritage, dog friendly and themed boat trips across the Borough. Once again, the programme included activity aligned to the two main food and drink festivals in summer and autumn.

AND Walks and Tours Programme 2025/26

Like last year, the 2025/26 Walks and Tours programme will begin in May and finish on New Year's Day 2026. The programme will seek to complement monthly food activities and events happening within the Borough (see Appendix 2 for full list).

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes this report and appendices.

Appendix 1 - AND Experiences and Walks and Tours 2024/25

AND Experiences Programme 2024/25

| Experience | Month | Location |
|---|--------------|-----------------|
| SUP, Sauna and Swim | April | Whiterock |
| Knit like a Viking | April | Cloughey |
| Felting with the Bees in the Walled Garden | April | Helen's Bay |
| Wee Birds Workshop at Castle Espie | April | Comber |
| Electric Picnic | May | Whiterock |
| Seacourt Evenings. Monoprinting with Plants | May | Bangor |
| Well Spring at Mount Stewart– A Day of restorative wellbeing and self-care | May | Newtownards |
| Mrs Maker's Mucky Ducks | May | Comber |
| From Gain to Griddle | May | Millisle |
| History, Heritage and Hampers | May | Hollywood |
| Boat and Bake | June | Whiterock |
| Scene to Studio. Painting the Walled Garden | June | Bangor |
| Wellness at the Wetlands | June | Comber |
| Cake with the Cows | June | Orlock |
| Noble at The Walled Garden | September | Helen's Bay |
| Sunrise in the East | September | Ballyhalbert |
| Seacourt Autumn Evenings - Taster sessions in printmaking. Letterpress Postcards | September | Bangor |
| Apples Oh My! | September | Cultra |
| Cast Away in Bronze | September | Millisle |
| Mrs Maker's Spooky Masquerade | October | Comber |
| Seacourt Autumn Evenings -Taster sessions in printmaking. Screen-printed Garlands | November | Bangor |
| Alpaca and tree planting experience | December | Carrowdore |

Appendix 1 - AND Experiences and Walks and Tours 2024/25

AND Walks and Tours Programme 2024/25

| Tour name | Month | Location |
|--|--------------|--|
| Historical Tour Holywood | May | Holywood |
| Ocean Crest boat trip with music (Father's Day) | May | Bangor Bay |
| St Brendan boat trip with music (Father's Day) | May | Portaferry |
| D Day boat trips x 4 | June | Bangor Bay |
| Rosemount House and Garden Tour | June | Greyabbey |
| Comber Historical Walking Tour | June | Comber |
| Historical Tour of Newtownards | June | Newtownards |
| Summer Solstice St Brendan guided tour of Strangford Lough | June | Portaferry |
| Jenny Watts Boat Trip | July | Bangor Bay |
| Gardens & Gin | July | Mount Stewart / Echlinville Distillery |
| Gothic Abbey and Physic Garden Tour | July | Greyabbey |
| Paws for Gin | August | Donaghadee |
| Step back in Time | August | Bangor |
| Strangford Lough Boat Trip | August | Portaferry |
| Gardener's Delight | September | Ballywalter Estate |
| Paws for Gin | September | Bangor |
| Spirits of the East Coast walking tour (Halloween) | October | Donaghadee |
| New Year's Day Walk | January | Bangor |
| New Year's Day Walk | January | Donaghadee |

Appendix 2 – AND Experiences and Walks and Tours Programme 2025/26 Drafts

AND Experiences Programme 2025/26 Draft*

| Experience | Month | Location |
|---|--------------|-----------------------|
| Christmas Experience | TBC | Bangor |
| Deadly Tales of Bangor | TBC | Bangor |
| Creative Spinning Workshop | TBC | Cloughey |
| Legends of the Lough | TBC | Strangford Lough Area |
| Stories and Supper at The Ulster Folk Museum | TBC | Cultra |
| Seacourt Supper Club | TBC | Bangor |
| Survivor's Tale: The Story of the Princess Victoria | TBC | Donaghadee |
| Electric Escape | TBC | Whiterock |
| Spring Dip | TBC | Whiterock |
| St Brigid Experience | TBC | Bangor |
| Easter Floral Experience | TBC | Millisle Area |
| Forage and Feast | TBC | Helen's Bay |

**Draft experiences are currently being finalised; therefore, some detail e.g. name, and dates are still to be agreed.*

Appendix 2 – AND Experiences and Walks and Tours Programme 2025/26 Drafts

AND Walks and Tours Programme 2025/26 Draft

| Tour name | Month | Location |
|--|--------------|--------------------|
| Historical Tour Hollywood | May | Hollywood |
| Sea Bangor boat trips x 2 | May | Bangor Bay |
| Gardeners Delight | June | Ballywalter Estate |
| Ocean Crest boat trip with live music (Father's Day) | June | Bangor Bay |
| St Brendan boat trip with live music (Father's Day) | June | Strangford Lough |
| St Brendan Summer Solstice Voyage of Discovery with live music | June | Strangford Lough |
| Comber Historical Walking Tour (Comber Earlies) | June | Comber |
| Gothic Abbey and Physic Garden tour | July | Greyabbey |
| Rosemount House, garden tour with refreshments | July | Greyabbey |
| Historical walking tour, Newtownards | July | Newtownards |
| Paws for Gin | August | Donaghadee |
| Ocean Crest Boat Tour (August Bank Holiday) | August | Bangor Bay |
| Step back in time | September | Bangor |
| Welcome back the Brent Geese (Shore Life) | October | Newtownards |
| Spirits of the East Coast walking tour (Hallowe'en) | October | Donaghadee |
| New Year's Day Walk | January | Donaghadee |
| New Year's Day Walk | January | Newtownards |

Unclassified

28

ITEM 6**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Report Classification | Unclassified |
| Exemption Reason | Not Applicable |
| Council/Committee | Place and Prosperity Committee |
| Date of Meeting | 06 February 2025 |
| Responsible Director | Director of Prosperity |
| Responsible Head of Service | Head of Tourism |
| Date of Report | 17 January 2025 |
| File Reference | TO/MAR4 |
| Legislation | |
| Section 75 Compliant | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below: n/a evaluation report |
| Subject | Marketing - Destination Campaign Overview Report 2024, Spring and Autumn |
| Attachments | Appendix 1 - Campaign Visual Asset Examples 2024 |

Council agreed to the delivery of a Borough Marketing and Communications Strategy (BMCS) with the aim to create greater awareness of Ards and North Down as a visitor destination. The objective being to convey a clear proposition presenting Ards and North Down as an appealing visitor destination, targeting potential visitors, increasing revenue and supporting jobs.

The roll out of biannual destination campaigns in spring and autumn is a key deliverable of the BMCS. In 2024, those campaigns were delivered in March and Oct/ November (the quieter shoulder seasons before and after peak summer months) and guided by Tourism Northern Ireland's consumer sentiment to target 'most likely to travel' segments in NI domestic, Republic of Ireland and GB markets.

Both multi-channel digital-led marketing campaigns were designed to raise awareness of Ards and North Down as an appealing destination that was easily accessible, offering value-for-money short breaks.

Not Applicable

Campaign Aims

1. Promote AND tourism industry offers aligned to discoverni (Tourism NI) and visitardsandnorthdown (VisitAND) websites.
2. Increase awareness of AND as an appealing place to book short breaks. Driving traffic and engagement to VisitAND website and social channels.

Messaging delivered clear and compelling reasons to visit, with a call-to-action to book offers and enter the campaign competition for a chance to win £300 off a stay in the Borough. A total marketing investment of £58,750 covered creative concepts, asset creation, video and photography as well as all campaign advertising placement.

Overview

The two campaigns were designed to support the industry by directing audiences to book offers and inspire potential visitors about what to see and do on a short break in Ards and North Down. Simultaneously, the campaigns generated strong growth of Visit AND’s online following. A total of 45 local tourism provider offers were promoted.

The campaigns generated strong reach including 59.2k campaign webpage views, an increase of 6% in VisitAND social media followers, and strong engagement including 1,398 competition entries (up 66% on prior year). The positive impact was also extended with 937 new people subscribed to receive ongoing destination promotional email communications from Council. Overall, the two campaigns generated a total of 6.3million impressions/ opportunities-to-see.

1. Spring 2024 – ‘Make it Ards and North Down’ Campaign

This campaign targeted NI domestic market Natural Quality Seekers, and ROI market Indulgent Relaxers and Open-Minded Explorers, as well as the GB market (short breaks) holiday makers. The multi-channel campaign ran across traditional channels including out-of-home and radio as well as digital channels such as Google Search, Google Display, YouTube, Spotify, META (Facebook, Instagram) advertising, organic social, web, email, and Google Search and Display advertising. Reach was further extended via Council’s promotional partners including whatsonni and Visit Belfast with presence in high footfall areas of Belfast, including the Visit Belfast Welcome Centre – a key gateway for visitors to the City.

| Objective | Result |
|--|-------------|
| At least 2% growth in social media audience | 3% |
| At least 10k web pages views | 32.2k |
| Digital impressions (opportunities-to-see) target 500k | 3.1 million |

3. Autumn 2024 – ‘Aaaaand Relax’ Campaign

This campaign targeted NI domestic market (Natural Quality Seekers) and ROI market (Open-Minded Explorers). The fully integrated campaign ran across traditional channels including radio, print advertising, and out-of-home (including Visit Belfast Welcome Centre, Grand Central Station, Connelly Street Station Dublin, and other high footfall sites in NI and ROI). Digital channels included Google Search, Google Display, META Facebook and Instagram advertising, organic social, video,

Not Applicable

web, email, and via Belfast Live, Dublin Live, Irish Times, editorial in the Belfast Telegraph Online and whatsonni. Reach was further extended via the Visit Belfast Regional Partnership with presence in the Visit Belfast Welcome Centre – a key gateway for visitors to the city.

| Objective | Result |
|--|-------------|
| At least 2% growth in social media audience | 3% |
| At least 10k web pages views | 27k |
| Digital impressions (opportunities-to-see) target 500k | 3.2 million |

Digital Benchmarking- Above Industry Average

Digital Marketing allows for accurate measurement of visibility and engagement. Statistics for both campaigns show engagement levels across a range of digital channels which are well above industry benchmark levels.

The spring campaign generated click through rates* (CTR) well above benchmark levels. Google Search CTR was 6.61% vs. benchmark 4.68%, META (Facebook/Instagram) advertising CTR was 1.57% vs. benchmark of 0.52% and Google Display Advertising in ROI was 0.59% CTR vs. benchmark of 0.4%. The autumn campaign’s META advertising achieved an average CTR of 2.41%, far outperforming the industry average ad CTR of 0.9%. Digital content on Belfast Live and Dublin Live generated 348 clicks which is 83% higher than industry average, and Irish Times digital content achieved a CTR of 7.6% compared to an industry average of 2.1%.

[NB* percentage of people seeing the advert and clicked to find out more by visiting the campaign web pages]

These results demonstrate that both campaigns resonated with the target audience and that the content was compelling and well-targeted, encouraging a significant portion of users to act by clicking through for more information.

Together, these two campaigns effectively promoted a total of 45 offers for tourism providers based in the Borough and generated 6.3 million digital / impressions / opportunities-to-see. As a direct result of the campaign an additional 59.2k visitors were driven to the visitardsandnorthdown.com website, 1.3k new people signed up to receive ongoing marketing communications from Council, and the audience following on VisitAND social media channels increased by 6%.

The tourism ‘offers’ providers gave feedback about the positive impact of this campaign work:

‘The destination management campaigns are a great way to give the audience an overview of the destination and for us to piggyback on. Campaigns are great overall and give a fantastic look and feel of Ards and North Down.’

‘Helps target key demographics and audiences with additional funding on our behalf.’

‘The campaigns showcase a wide variation of activities and destinations within the borough and the multiplatform approach is consistent and well considered.’

Not Applicable

31

Summary

The main objective – building awareness through creating a strong profile of the Borough as an appealing visitor destination to potential visitors – was achieved with strong reach across NI, ROI and GB audiences. The fully integrated digital-led approach effectively reached the target audiences. It is anticipated that the output of that greater awareness will be a positive impact on visitor interest and bookings.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes this report and attachment.



Ards and
North Down
Borough Council

Appendix 1


2024 Spring and Autumn Campaign Visual Asset Examples

Ards and North Down Borough Council
www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk



Spring 2024 – Visual Asset Examples

Visit Ards and North Down for...



Wildlife
Natural Beauty
Culture
Heritage
Local Food
Sea Air
Adventure
Relaxation
Luxury
Fun

Northern Ireland Embrace the Giant Spirit Ards and North Down Borough Council

Visit Ards and North Down for...



Wildlife
Natural Beauty
Culture
Heritage
Local Food
Adventure
Relaxation
Luxury
Sea Air
Fun

Northern Ireland Embrace the Giant Spirit Ards and North Down Borough Council

For Relaxation
For Luxury
For Sea Air
For Fun
For Indulgence
For Adventure

Strangford Lough

Northern Ireland Embrace the Giant Spirit Ards and North Down Borough Council

For Adventure
For Family
For Sea Air

Donaghadee

Northern Ireland Embrace the Giant Spirit Ards and North Down Borough Council

Ards and North Down Borough Council
www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk



Autumn 2024 – Visual Asset Examples





Ards and North Down Borough Council

Unclassified

36

ITEM 7**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Report Classification | Unclassified |
| Exemption Reason | Not Applicable |
| Council/Committee | Place and Prosperity Committee |
| Date of Meeting | 06 February 2025 |
| Responsible Director | Director of Prosperity |
| Responsible Head of Service | Head of Tourism |
| Date of Report | 20 January 2025 |
| File Reference | TO/TIC4 |
| Legislation | |
| Section 75 Compliant | Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below: |
| Subject | Bangor Visitor Information Outreach Pilot - 2025 |
| Attachments | |

Background

In October 2020, Council approved a series of Transformation projects, one of these being to review Visitor Information Provision. The Tourism Service has been progressing a series of workstreams in line with relevant and parallel Council projects.

- Move of Newtownards Visitor Information Centre (VIC) permanent services from 31 Regent Street to a more central location – inclusion in the Newtownards Citizen Hub project.
- Move of Bangor Visitor Information services to a higher footfall location – inclusion in the Bangor Waterfront or Civic and Office Accommodation project.
- Portaferry seasonal visitor information provision at Exploris via a Service Level Agreement with all year availability - complete.
- Review of visitor servicing offered at Cockle Row Cottages on a seasonal basis. Two Expressions of Interest to offer the building to private or community use failed in the market. The Tourism team has and continue to develop relationships with a local community group who offer walking tours

Not Applicable

37

and partner with the VIC for local heritage activities. This group deliver excellent services but appear at this juncture not likely to have the capacity to deliver a heritage/visitor service under a formal agreement with Council, however this will be kept under review.

- Move to digital visitor servicing. The new Visit AND website was introduced in 2020 utilising the Tourism NI platform to extend reach and visibility in the market. It has had 729k VAND website users in the last 12 months, up by 50% on the previous year. The VAND social channels were developed and introduced in 2020 and continue to grow annually: Facebook at 10k followers and VAND Instagram at 3.6k followers (January 2025).
- Develop and maximise visitor servicing outreach opportunities. This is maximised via outreach activity at visitor attractions and event days (17 opportunities servicing an additional 1800 enquiries year to date at various sites). A further opportunity to pilot test additional outreach is set out below.

Status of Visitor Servicing in Bangor

The Tourism Service operates a visitor information centre at Tower House, Quay Street, Bangor six days per week. The building has been utilised for this purpose, along with accommodating most of the tourism office-based team for circa 30 years. It is open Monday – Friday 9.15am – 5.00pm and Saturday 10am – 4pm (Jun- Aug 5.00pm) and staffed by two Visitor Information Advisors daily. Since the pandemic, both VICs have experienced a reduction in footfall and enquiries. It is acknowledged that customers seek visitor information in numerous ways with digital being a high preference pre- travel. Tourism NI (TNI) in line with the new draft Tourism Strategy indicates that every touchpoint, whilst in destination for the visitor, should be imbued with a ‘human touch’ (TNI, VIC research, November 2023). The footfall year to date in Bangor VIC has been changeable with the early and later months slightly up on footfall and enquiries, but the peak season having a decline in figures. This may be somewhat attributable to the inclement weather in 2024.

Customer enquiries

| | 2021/2022 | 2022/2023 | 2023/2024 | April – end Dec 2024 |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------------------|
| April – end March | *5,844 | 8,257 | 7,267 | 6,412 |
| May - September | *3,207 | 4,487 | 4,188 | 3,998 |

Figures include visitors to the centre along with phone and email enquiries.

*NB Bangor VIC reopened after the Covid Pandemic in June 2021 under restricted entry

Outreach Pilot to maximise customer engagement

It is acknowledged by TNI that to maximise positive customer engagements and increase visitor dwell time, face to face visitor servicing should be available at locations where visitors will be present. The Tourism service believe this opportunity could be explored further in Bangor by relocating its Visitor Information Advisors (VIAs) from Tower House to other City locations during the peak summer months. An options exercise has been completed with the following three sites determined as feasible for testing during 2025

Not Applicable

38

1. The Market House, Main Street, Bangor – in partnership with ‘Gifted Trust’ ‘Front of house’ reception/desk and information provision space alongside an exhibition space. May – August with existing Bangor VIC opening schedule.
2. Pickie Fun Park, Bangor – in partnership with Pickie Fun Park. Space for ‘pop-up’ information stand and ‘roving’ advisor.
3. The Walled Garden – in partnership with Parks Service. Space for ‘pop-up’ information stand and ‘roving’ advisor.

(Sites 2 and 3 weather dependent during May – September)

In all cases, the above would be staffed with the existing Bangor VIAs with staff rotated as appropriate. Site one will be the ‘base or hub’ with sites two and three staffed as appropriate to optimum visitor engagement. The Tower House office would be utilised on key City event days and as required, but would not operate as a VIC.

Budget

The annual overheads budget for the VIC relates to the entire building of Tower House (also housing most the Tourism Events and Tourism Development team), so will remain static. Income and expenditure relating to stock purchase will not likely be achievable due to the new outreach venue – with site one only allowing a smaller selection possible. This will be managed to remain cost neutral. An element of the budget will pay for the rental at £500 per month for the Market House and a limited budget will be diverted to support additional stock range at Newtownards VIC.

Monitoring and review

The three new outreach sites will be monitored to record footfall, enquiry type and visitor origin. The three sites will be compared from a busy period and frequency of use perspective and will give insight into accessing visitors at different sites. Surveys will be undertaken with visitors to understand the engagement experience. Should there be any need to change or revert to the normal operating model at Tower House this will be implemented with immediate effect to ensure no loss of service. An appropriate communication plan to include signage and social posts as relevant will be agreed. A review report will be completed at the end of the season with recommendations for longer term planning.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes the Bangor Visitor Information Outreach Pilot for the period May – end September 2025.

Unclassified

39

ITEM 8

Ards and North Down Borough Council

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Report Classification | Unclassified |
| Exemption Reason | Choose an item. |
| Council/Committee | Place and Prosperity Committee |
| Date of Meeting | 06 February 2025 |
| Responsible Director | Director of Prosperity |
| Responsible Head of Service | Head of Finance |
| Date of Report | 27 January 2025 |
| File Reference | FIN45 |
| Legislation | Section 5 Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011 |
| Section 75 Compliant | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below: |
| Subject | Prosperity Directorate Budgetary Control Report - December 2024 |
| Attachments | |

The Prosperity Directorate's Budgetary Control Report covers the 9-month period 1 April to 31 December 2024. The net cost of the Directorate is showing an underspend of £111k (4.5%) – box A on page 3.

Explanation of Variance

The Prosperity Directorate's budgetary performance is further analysed on page 3 into 3 key areas:

| Report | Type | Variance | Page |
|----------|------------------------------|------------------|------|
| Report 2 | Payroll Expenditure | £53k favourable | 3 |
| Report 3 | Goods & Services Expenditure | £125k adverse | 3 |
| Report 4 | Income | £183k favourable | 3 |

Choose an item.

40

Explanation of Variance

The Prosperity Directorate's overall variance can be summarised by the following table: -

| Type | Variance £'000 | Comment |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|--|
| Payroll | (53) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic Development – (£65k) vacant posts filled in Sept/Oct Tourism – £15k. mainly due to extra staff costs for Tourism Events. |
| Goods & Services | | |
| Economic Development | 152 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go Succeed Programme grants - £218k. Offset by additional grant income. Development Projects (£66k) – (50k) re Seal Sanctuary Q2 claim which offsets the adverse income variance below. |
| Tourism | (28) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Various expenses across Tourism running costs |
| Income | | |
| Economic Development | (218) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional grant income for the Go Succeed Programme. |
| Development Projects | 50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploris – Q2 grant not yet received but has been processed by DAERA |
| Tourism | (16) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tourism Experiences – (£6k). Tourism Events – (£10k). |

Choose an item.

| REPORT 1 BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT | | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|--|
| Period 9 - December 2024 | | | | | | |
| | Year to Date Actual | Year to Date Budget | Variance | Annual Budget | Variance | |
| | £ | £ | £ | £ | % | |
| Prosperity | | | | | | |
| 700 Prosperity HQ | 112,801 | 115,600 | (2,799) | 153,500 | (2.4) | |
| 720 Economic Development | 895,497 | 975,500 | (80,003) | 1,396,000 | (8.2) | |
| 740 Tourism | 1,314,977 | 1,342,900 | (27,923) | 1,868,200 | (2.1) | |
| Total | 2,323,275 | 2,434,000 | A (110,725) | 3,417,700 | (4.5) | |
| REPORT 2 PAYROLL REPORT | | | | | | |
| | £ | £ | £ | £ | % | |
| Prosperity - Payroll | | | | | | |
| 700 Prosperity HQ | 104,860 | 107,600 | (2,740) | 143,300 | (2.5) | |
| 720 Economic Development | 612,155 | 677,600 | (65,445) | 912,800 | (9.7) | |
| 740 Tourism | 764,873 | 749,400 | 15,473 | 987,600 | 2.1 | |
| Total | 1,481,889 | 1,534,600 | B (52,711) | 2,043,700 | (3.4) | |
| REPORT 3 GOODS & SERVICES REPORT | | | | | | |
| | £ | £ | £ | £ | % | |
| Prosperity - Goods & Services | | | | | | |
| 700 Prosperity HQ | 7,941 | 8,000 | (59) | 10,200 | (0.7) | |
| 720 Economic Development | 865,174 | 712,200 | 152,974 | 974,200 | 21.5 | |
| 740 Tourism | 597,018 | 624,800 | (27,782) | 916,100 | (4.4) | |
| Total | 1,470,133 | 1,345,000 | C 125,133 | 1,900,500 | 9.3 | |
| REPORT 4 INCOME REPORT | | | | | | |
| | £ | £ | £ | £ | % | |
| Prosperity - Income | | | | | | |
| 700 Prosperity HQ | - | - | - | - | | |
| 720 Economic Development | (581,832) | (414,300) | (167,532) | (491,000) | (40.4) | |
| 740 Tourism | (46,914) | (31,300) | (15,614) | (35,500) | (49.9) | |
| Totals | (628,746) | (445,600) | D (183,146) | (526,500) | (41.1) | |

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council notes this report.

Unclassified

42

ITEM 9**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Report Classification | Unclassified |
| Exemption Reason | Not Applicable |
| Council/Committee | Place and Prosperity Committee |
| Date of Meeting | 06 February 2025 |
| Responsible Director | Director of Place |
| Responsible Head of Service | Head of Finance |
| Date of Report | 27 January 2025 |
| File Reference | FIN45/RDP152 |
| Legislation | Section 5 Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011 |
| Section 75 Compliant | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below: |
| Subject | Place Directorate Budgetary Control Report - Dec 2024 |
| Attachments | |

The Place Directorate's Budgetary Control Report covers the 9-month period 1 April to 31 December 2024. The net cost of the Directorate is showing an underspend of £123k (11%) – box A on page 3.

Explanation of Variance

The Place Directorate's budget performance is further analysed on page 3 into 3 key areas:

| Report | Type | Variance | Page |
|-----------------|------------------------------|------------------|----------|
| Report 2 | Payroll Expenditure | £158k favourable | 3 |
| Report 3 | Goods & Services Expenditure | £14k favourable | 3 |
| Report 4 | Income | £49k adverse | 3 |

Not Applicable

43

Explanation of Variance

The Place Directorate's overall variance can be summarised by the following table (variances over £20k): -

| Type | Variance £'000 | Comment |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|--|
| Payroll | (158) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainly vacant posts within Regeneration |
| Goods & Services | | |
| Regeneration | 24 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paddington, Conway Square £15k |
| Strategic Development | (38) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Underspend in revenue costs for Capital Projects mainly due to timing. |
| Income | | |
| Strategic Capital Development | 49 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Levelling up Grant is expected to be less than budget - £62.3k Shop Local Campaign Grant (£11k) |

Not Applicable

44

| REPORT 1 BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Period 9 - December 2024 | | | | | |
| | Year to Date Actual | Year to Date Budget | Variance | Annual Budget | Variance |
| | £ | £ | £ | £ | % |
| Place | | | | | |
| 800 Place HQ | 209,471 | 217,400 | (7,929) | 266,900 | (3.6) |
| 810 Regeneration | 535,219 | 630,000 | (94,781) | 1,128,800 | (15.0) |
| 820 Strategic Capital Development | 251,676 | 272,400 | (20,724) | 453,600 | (7.6) |
| Total | 996,366 | 1,119,800 | A (123,434) | 1,849,300 | (11.0) |
| REPORT 2 PAYROLL REPORT | | | | | |
| | £ | £ | £ | £ | % |
| Place - Payroll | | | | | |
| 800 Place HQ | 121,474 | 129,900 | (8,426) | 173,100 | (6.5) |
| 810 Regeneration | 389,432 | 495,200 | (105,768) | 657,000 | (21.4) |
| 820 Strategic Capital Development | 235,038 | 279,200 | (44,162) | 371,900 | (15.8) |
| Total | 745,944 | 904,300 | (158,356) | 1,202,000 | (17.5) |
| REPORT 3 GOODS & SERVICES REPORT | | | | | |
| | £ | £ | £ | £ | % |
| Place - Goods & Services | | | | | |
| 800 Place HQ | 87,997 | 87,500 | 497 | 93,800 | 0.6 |
| 810 Regeneration | 159,112 | 134,800 | 24,312 | 471,800 | 18.0 |
| 820 Strategic Capital Development | 16,638 | 55,500 | (38,862) | 206,200 | (70.0) |
| Total | 263,747 | 277,800 | (14,053) | 771,800 | (5.1) |
| REPORT 4 INCOME REPORT | | | | | |
| | £ | £ | £ | £ | % |
| Place - Income | | | | | |
| 800 Place HQ | - | - | - | - | - |
| 810 Regeneration | (13,324) | - | (13,324) | - | - |
| 820 Strategic Capital Development | - | (62,300) | 62,300 | (124,500) | - |
| Totals | (13,324) | (62,300) | 48,976 | (124,500) | |

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council notes this report.

Unclassified

45

ITEM 10**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Report Classification | Unclassified |
| Exemption Reason | Not Applicable |
| Council/Committee | Place and Prosperity Committee |
| Date of Meeting | 06 February 2025 |
| Responsible Director | Director of Place |
| Responsible Head of Service | Head of Regeneration |
| Date of Report | 13 January 2025 |
| File Reference | RDP19 |
| Legislation | |
| Section 75 Compliant | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below: |
| Subject | Update on the Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2024 - 2025 |
| Attachments | |

Background

As members will be aware the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) launched the Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2024/25 in October 2024. This was welcome news and a timely development coming after a lengthy gap since the previous scheme in 2022/23.

Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2024/25

The purpose of the Rural Business Development Grant Scheme is to support the sustainability and growth of rural micro-businesses (less than 10 full-time equivalent employees) through the provision of a small capital grant of up to 50% of costs for capital items up to a maximum amount of £4,999.

DAERA anticipated that the Northern Ireland total capital funding allocated to the Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2024/2025 would be £1.5million. The funding allocation per Council would be, as in previous scheme years, a straight percentage share based on the number of micro businesses in the Council area as a

Not Applicable

46

percentage of the overall number of micro businesses in Northern Ireland. Each Council would also have an administration budget of 10% of the Letter of Offer award.

The scheme opened 16 October 2024 and closed on 8 November 2024. Mandatory pre-application workshops were facilitated by officers and took place on the 23, 28, 31 October and 5 November 2024. This process proved beneficial for officers and applicants which is evidenced by the high number of approved applications.

A total of 36 applications were received, three were deemed ineligible, and one applicant withdrew for personal reasons.

An assessment panel convened on 18 December 2025 to assess the 32 applications. Thirty-one applications achieved the minimum threshold score of 65 and were approved. One application was unsuccessful in meeting the minimum threshold and was therefore unfortunately deemed not eligible for approval.

The total grant amount awarded for the 31 successful applications totals £101,736. This amount was above the indicative budget for the Ards and North Down Borough Council area, however, DAERA confirmed on 10 January 2025 that it would provide the additional budget required to award grant funding to all businesses who achieved the minimum threshold score of 65.

Letters of Offer were issued to successful applicants on 10 January 2025 with projects having to be completed no later than 31 March 2025.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes this report.

Unclassified

47

ITEM 11**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

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|-----------------------------|---|
| Report Classification | Unclassified |
| Exemption Reason | Not Applicable |
| Council/Committee | Place and Prosperity Committee |
| Date of Meeting | 06 February 2025 |
| Responsible Director | Director of Place |
| Responsible Head of Service | Head of Regeneration |
| Date of Report | 18 February 2025 |
| File Reference | RDP246/RDP14 |
| Legislation | |
| Section 75 Compliant | Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below: |
| Subject | Update on Notice of Motion 568 re Vacancy and Dereliction Study |
| Attachments | N/A |

Context

Members may recall the following Notice of Motion (568) agreed and ratified at the 5 July 2024 Council meeting:

‘Officers are tasked with reviewing current powers and how council could best effect positive change. As part of this review officers would investigate using part or all of Newtownards town centre as a pilot scheme to tackle dereliction, which could then be broadened across the Borough if successful. The review may form a working group which would consider what incentives could be provided through, DFC whom hold regeneration powers, the Planning system, Building Control, or by other means, to encourage the re-use or redevelopment of local derelict buildings to provide new business opportunities or homes. Consideration would also be given to what limitations can be placed on public and private property owners who are not willing to work in partnership for regeneration and the public good.’

Not Applicable

48

An update report in response to this Notice of Motion was agreed at the Place and Prosperity Committee meeting on 13 June 2024.

Update

Three considerations were detailed in the previous report as being fundamental to empowering the Council to effectively respond to this Notice of Motion and the detrimental vacancy and dereliction issue impacting the Borough:

1. Staffing – a restructure within the Regeneration Service has recently been completed resulting in the implementation of newly formed small team of officers, specifically tasked with undertaking strategic regeneration projects focused on growing the non-domestic rate base and therefore positively contributing towards the Economic priority detailed in the Corporate Plan 2024 – 2028. Work has begun on various projects deemed to be of strategic regeneration value.
2. Corporate Governance – from experience in developing and delivering various grant schemes, officers are mindful that any grant scheme should not be overly arduous to applicants, however, it must be aligned to the Grants Policy Version 2.0 implemented in October 2024. Officers have engaged with other Council districts regarding their grant schemes used for vacancy and dereliction focused projects to establish any key successes and lessons learnt.
3. Pilot and Budget – Officers are in the process of developing a pilot grant scheme aimed at tackling vacancy and dereliction within urban areas of the Borough to increase the value of the non-domestic rate base to the Council.

The 'Empty to Energised' (working title) grant scheme will provide potential financial assistance to property owners who participate in the scheme to renovate vacant properties and reintroduce commercial use to the premises under stipulated terms and conditions. A secondary benefit of the pilot scheme may be an opportunity to increase living accommodation on the high street, aligned to the Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) Living High Streets Framework.

To ensure an evidence-based approach to the pilot schemes officers deemed it necessary to obtain the most recent vacancy and dereliction figures in urban areas of the Borough. The latest DfC vacancy survey (31 October 2024) shows that:

- Bangor City Centre has a total number of non-domestic premises of 666 of which 140 (21.0%) were vacant
- Newtownards has 536 premises with 113 (21.1%) vacant. This is the highest number since April 2016
- Comber has 129 premises with 20 (12.6%) vacant
- Donaghadee has 121 premises with 21 (17.4%) vacant
- Holywood has 305 with 28 (9.2%) vacant

Not Applicable

49

Based on these percentages and other considered factors, an appointed consultant is undertaking a Vacancy and Dereliction Study in Bangor and Newtownards. Each study has the following objectives:

1. Identification and mapping of derelict and vacant commercial properties
2. Analysis of patterns of vacancy using historic data
3. Exploration into cases of decline and recommendations of strategies for redevelopment (short, medium, and long-term)
4. Interventions to tackle vacancy and dereliction and ways to increase property values and attract new businesses
5. Each study will be supported with an Action Plan that details how the implementation of the various interventions can be managed, potential paths for funding, and a clear identification of responsibility suggested.

The anticipated completion date for each study is 31 March 2025, the data will then be interpreted and will assist with the development of the grant scheme. The required budget for the grant scheme has been approval as part of the 2025/2026 rate setting process.

The conclusions of the studies and the workings of the proposed grant scheme for Bangor and Newtownards will be detailed in a future report to the Committee for approval.

Upon implementation and assessment of the effectiveness of the grant scheme, consideration will be given to broadening its implementation across the Borough.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes this update report.

9. NOTICES OF MOTION

9.1. Notice of Motion (639) received from Councillor Morgan, Alderman Cummings, Councillor Douglas, Alderman Smith and Councillor Ashe

The Chairman invited Councillor Morgan to the meeting along with Councillor Douglas who had requested speaking rights on this matter.

Councillor Morgan proposed, seconded by Alderman Cummings, that the Comber representatives are delighted that Comber has won the Best Kept Medium Town Award this year and wanted to thank all the volunteers who have worked tirelessly to make this happen.

There is, however, a long-standing dilapidated hoarding in Castle Street which badly detracts from this important area of the town. The Comber representatives recognise that Council officers and the Comber Regeneration Community Partnership have tried to address this issue, but this has not been successful. Considering this, Officers should do a report exploring all further options available to resolve this issue with some urgency.

The proposer, Councillor Morgan, indicated that she had circulated photographs of the hoarding in question to members, which was situated in Castle Street, Comber, just to provide some context. She advised Members that the hoarding was situated in Comber's main shopping street where people walked and drove past every day, and she believed that was unacceptable. Continuing, she stated that the people of Comber were very proud of their town, particularly in respect of cleanliness, seating areas, flowerbeds and The Square itself. As such, it had won the Best Kept Medium Town Award which was fantastic not only for the town but for the entire Borough. Councillor Morgan acknowledged the hard work and dedication of the many volunteers who had helped to achieve that award.

Continuing, she informed Members that two planters were situated in front of the hoarding which volunteers looked after, and she asked Members to consider how they must feel having to look at the hoarding as a backdrop to those planters. As such, she stated that she felt angry for the people of Comber and suggested that elected Members should also feel angry for them. She advised that she was aware of other similar eyesores throughout the Borough which were also proving difficult to resolve. In respect of the issues around the hoarding in Comber, Councillor Morgan acknowledged that efforts had been made by Council officers and the Comber Regeneration and Community Group to resolve the issue, with no success to date. She believed that it was the Council's duty to try to do something about this to ensure that it was resolved and to think outside the box to make that happen. She asked Members for their support.

Commenting as seconder, Alderman Cummings indicated that he wished to place on record his thanks to Council staff in the Regeneration Team who, along with Comber Town Action Group partners, had been working tirelessly to attempt to resolve this issue. This motion was a final, more formal endeavour, with an emphasis on a united elected Member voice to secure a solution.

P&P 9.1.25 (9.1)

51

The proposal recognised the achievement of a dedicated army of volunteers who had committed themselves to improving the appearance of Comber and secured Best Kept Town award. This particular section of land and hoarding was located in the heart of the town and looked out of place and unsafe. Alderman Cummings advised that Comber Regeneration volunteers, who were at the heart of the Award, had offered to help seek funding and assist with repairs, but access could only come with approval from the landowner. Therefore, he believed the Council must exhaust every avenue in order to address this problem which overshadowed the good work that had been achieved in Comber. The solution he believed was simple; if the landowner permitted access, the hoarding could be replaced and the appearance enhanced, which would surely work to the advantage of all. Alderman Cummings noted that the landowner currently did not live in the area and was heavily dependent upon his agent and he was convinced if a united message could be sent, a positive outcome could be secured. He urged Members to support the motion.

At this stage Councillor Douglas asked Members for their support for this Notice of Motion brought forward by all the elected Members from the Comber DEA. As it had already been said everyone was delighted that Comber had won the Best Kept Medium Town Award, and a big thank you needed to go to all the volunteers who continued to work tirelessly to make this happen. She stated that when one drove into Comber from the Newtownards side, one would see a beautiful area that was looked after by the Comber Army Cadets. If one came into Comber from the Dundonald side, that area was looked after by the Comber Regeneration Community Partnership, and if one came into Comber from the Killinchy side, there was an area close to the roundabout which was looked after by the Comber Rotary Club. These were just a few of the organisations and groups that volunteered on a regular basis, as well as a number of individuals, who on a regular basis come rain or shine, were out trying to make Comber an attractive place to live in, work in and visit.

At this stage Councillor Douglas circulated some pictures of the hoarding in question, advising that for those of who did not know the area, it was just off The Square on Castle Street in Comber. This was one of the main streets in Comber and it was an eye sore. She referred to comment made by a Comber volunteer "I would hate to see the good work going to waste with this ugly looking hoarding which is falling apart". As already had been mentioned over the past number of years, Council officers, Comber's Chamber of Trade, Comber Regeneration Community Partnership, Town Advisory Group and other representatives had tried to address this issue without success. Councillor Douglas stated that she understood that it was not straight forward as this was on private land and the owner lived abroad. In summing up, she sought support for the Notice of Motion so that officers could explore all further options available to try and resolve this issue as soon as possible.

Councillor Smart expressed his support for the motion and acknowledged the hard work of all of the volunteers who put so much effort into their town. He agreed that it was a shame to have this blight in the town centre and believed the report and deep dive on this issue could not only provide great dividends for Comber, but also for the wider area.

P&P 9.1.25 (9.1)

52

Concurring with the comments made to date, Councillor Ashe commented that the issues around this hoarding were the first email she had received on becoming elected. She believed that it was a very important issue for the people of Comber, especially given its location at the entrance to the car park in the SuperValu area where the Council's Comber Earlies event was held. The hoarding was one of the first and last things visitors to that event would see and, as such, it did not provide a good lasting impression. She acknowledged the efforts which had been made to date to rectify the matter but was keen to see the matter finally resolved once and for all through a Plan B or C.

At this stage the Chairman commented that Comber was one area of the Borough which she had not been so familiar with until last year when, during her term as Mayor, she had received many requests to attend events in the town. As such, she had witnessed firsthand the great community spirit there was within the town and the work carried out by Roy Murray and his many volunteers. However, while she was supportive of the motion, she could foresee an issue with it as the area in question was not owned by the Council and there was only so much that it could do. She indicated that she did not have a problem with a report coming back but was aware there could be difficulties as the site was in private ownership.

Councillor Blaney took the opportunity to echo the comments made by other Members, agreeing that Comber was a fantastic town, and the passion of the volunteers and local elected representatives was to be applauded. The point was well made around the town winning the Best Kept Medium Town award and all the effort which had gone into that, but it was disappointing that this issue remained. He hoped the matter could be successfully resolved and acknowledged the work of the elected representatives, including his colleague Alderman Smith, in their endeavours to assist with this.

Councillor McCollum indicated that she wished to commend the Comber elected Members on coming together to try to resolve this matter, adding that it was lovely to see what could be achieved when elected Members did come together in instances such as this. She acknowledged the respect they had for their constituents and while the challenges were clear, the Council should do its utmost to try to resolve this.

Councillor Edmund expressed his full support and that of his colleagues for the Comber elected representatives in respect of this matter. He agreed that the hoarding was, without doubt, an eyesore which was disappointing given the hard work of the many volunteers in Comber. Councillor Edmund noted the efforts which had been made to date, adding that he hoped a solution could be finally found to resolve the matter once and for all.

At this stage the Interim Director of Place indicated that he agreed with all of sentiments raised but indicated that he wished to make clear the amount of work which had already been undertaken to date. Officers had gone out of their way to try to have the issue resolved and had spoken to the agent on at least three occasions and secured funding of £12,000 to have the work done and offered to carry out the work. All the owner had been asked to do was to accept liability after the work had been completed. As such, he indicated that he was unsure where officers were going to go with this as it was privately owned land, and the agent had recommended to

P&P 9.1.25 (9.1)

53

his client not to accept what was being proposed. As such, he was unsure of how the Council could proceed this proposal, particularly as it was in private ownership. He continued that it was important to inform the Committee of the work which had already taken place to date on this project.

By way of summing up, Councillor Morgan indicated that all of the Comber elected representatives recognised the work and effort which had been undertaken to date in respect of this matter. She also acknowledged the difficulties with it but asked if the Council was prepared for such an eyesore to remain in situ in the town. She believed that the Council needed to make a very serious statement about this because it was such a blight, and she encouraged officers to take on board what had been said and make a statement that it could not remain in situ indefinitely. Councillor Morgan asked Members for their support.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Morgan, seconded by Alderman Cummings, that the Comber representatives are delighted that Comber has won the Best Kept Medium Town Award this year and want to thank all the volunteers who have worked tirelessly to make this happen.

There is, however, a long-standing dilapidated hoarding in Castle Street which badly detracts from this important area of Town. The Comber representatives recognise that Council officers and the Comber Regeneration Community Partnership have tried to address this issue, but this has not been successful. Considering this, Officers should do a report exploring all further options available to resolve this issue with some urgency.