

An aerial photograph of a vast, green landscape. In the foreground, a dense forest of trees in various shades of green and brown covers a hillside. A prominent stone tower, known as the Round Church, stands on a small clearing. Beyond the forest, the terrain opens up into rolling green fields, some of which are divided into smaller plots by stone walls. In the far distance, more hills and a few buildings are visible under a clear sky.

# Whitespots Country Park Development

A unique development opportunity | Bringing rich heritage to life

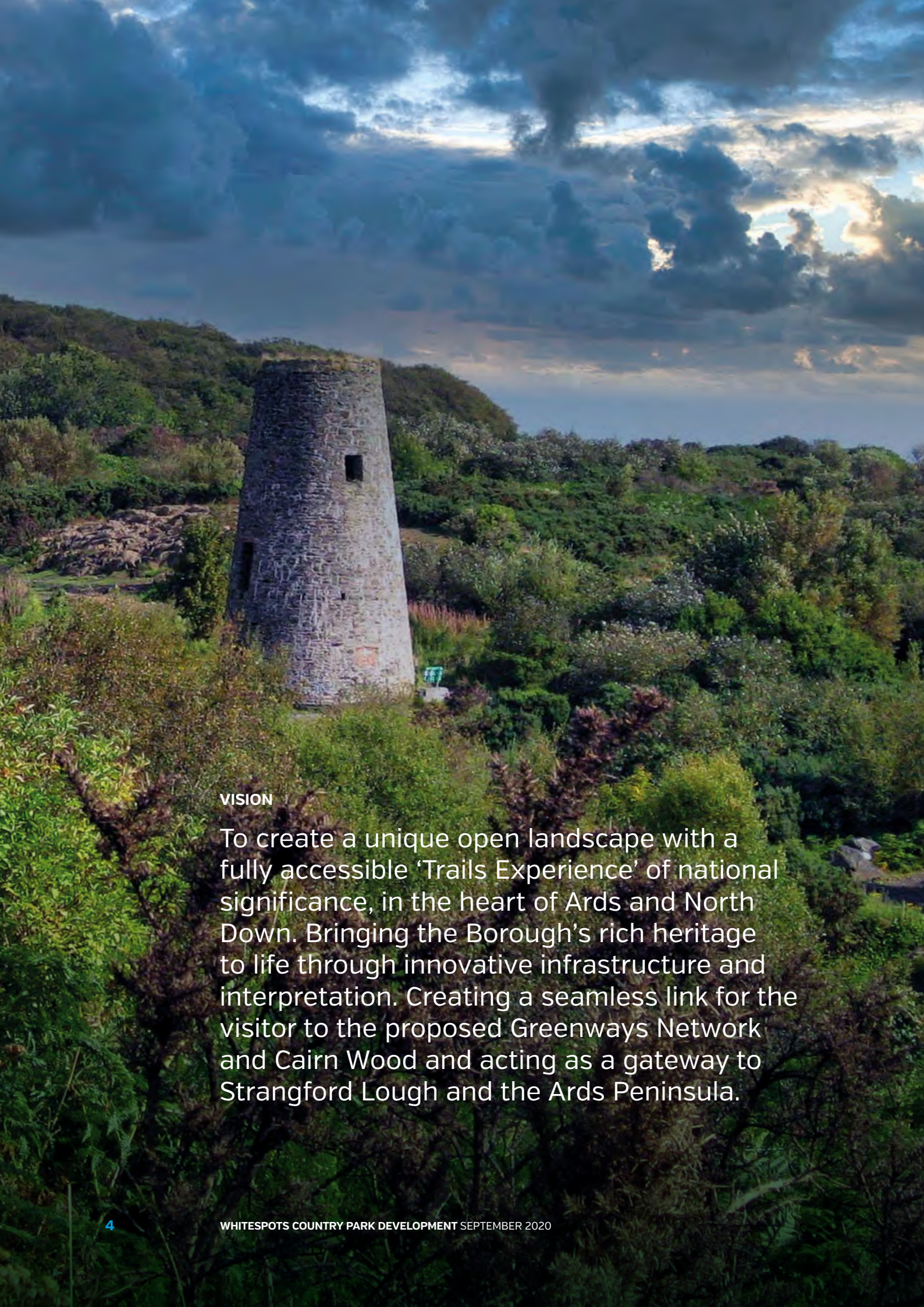
September 2020  
[ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk](http://ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk)



Ards and  
North Down  
Borough Council







#### VISION

To create a unique open landscape with a fully accessible 'Trails Experience' of national significance, in the heart of Ards and North Down. Bringing the Borough's rich heritage to life through innovative infrastructure and interpretation. Creating a seamless link for the visitor to the proposed Greenways Network and Cairn Wood and acting as a gateway to Strangford Lough and the Ards Peninsula.



## **CONTENTS**

Why Whitespots?	Pg 6
Whitespots site key facts	Pg 8
Whitespots Country Park history	Pg 9
Masterplan for the site	Pg 10
Invest in Whitespots	Pg 12
Benefits realisation – objectives and outputs	Pg 15



## Why Whitespots?

Whitespots Country Park: development of a multi-use recreational and leisure destination.

Ards and North Down Borough Council is developing a long-term vision for a Regional Park; Whitespots Country Park is at the heart of the vision.

The unique history, natural environment and cultural heritage of Whitespots and its immediate area is an exciting development opportunity. Delivered in a phased approach the proposed development includes an interactive outdoor activity zone and aims to bring heritage to life through a series of looped trails, interpretative signage and thought-provoking visitors experiences, making local stories accessible to a global audience.

Whitespots Country Park will be linked by a series of greenways to Belfast and the wider region. Inspirational panoramic views of Strangford Lough, the Ards Peninsula and across the Irish Sea to the Isle of Man and Scotland reveal themselves among the trees and trails.

## READY FOR INVESTMENT

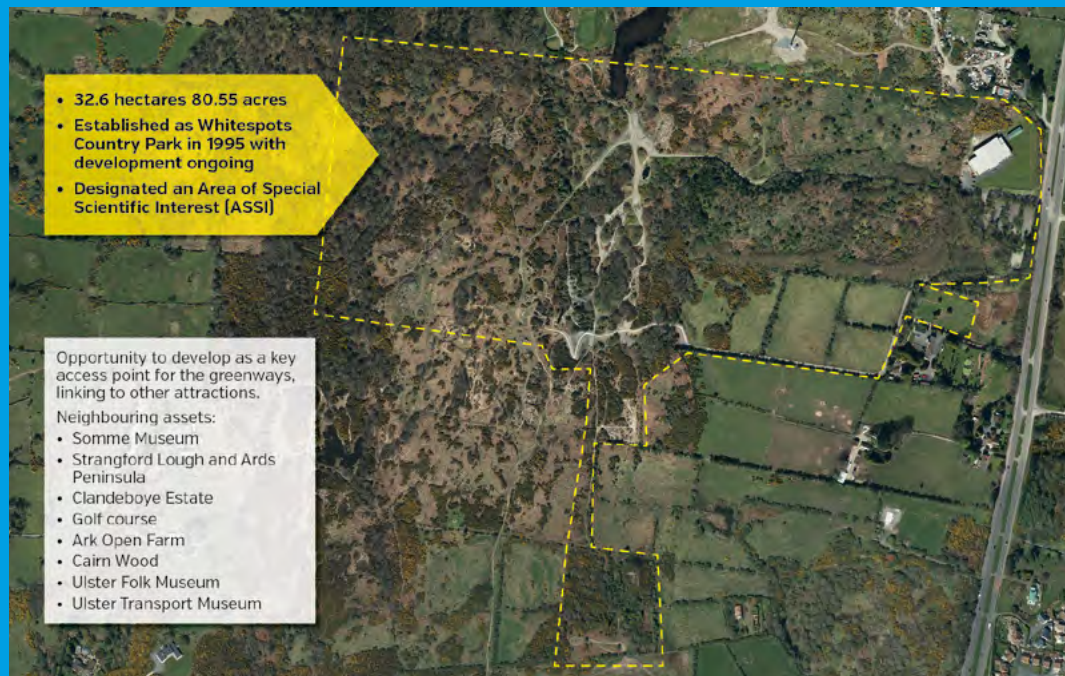
Whitespots Country Park, boosting tourism and regenerating our region.

THE PRODUCT		
Unique history and heritage	Evidence of demand	Targets
As a designated Area of Special Scientific Interest due to lead mining in the early 19th century, and with the Clondeboy Estate 1st World War training camp, the Somme Museum is the gateway to the site. Whitespots provides a rich history and heritage creating distinctive experiences.	Mining heritage attractions have demonstrable visitor appeal and there is increasing global interest in World War history.  Country Parks, walking, outdoors and environment has significant and growing appeal.	Targets for the project by its third phase are:  <b>Visitor numbers</b> (annually) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 250,000 local visitors using the facilities for active leisure.</li> <li>• 11,700 domestic visitors</li> <li>• 8,330 out of state visitors (Oos)</li> </ul> <b>Job creation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 25 FTE direct jobs</li> </ul>

GATEWAY TO STRANGFORD LOUGH AND THE ARDS PENINSULA		
Greenways and open spaces	Connectivity	Access
Whitespots is at the centre of a network of greenways running from Belfast to Comber, Newtownards to Bangor and on to Donaghadee and back to Belfast. There is an opportunity to develop it as a key access point linking to other established attractions within the footprint of this network.  Set in a country park (80.55 acres/32.6 hectares) with breathtaking countryside and loughshore views, meandering forest trails that will guide the visitor through a landscape of digitally enhanced sculptures and the chimney stacks of old mines.	Located between Bangor and Newtownards, the site is only 13miles/ 21kms from Belfast city centre and 13.4 miles/21.5kms from the M2 Motorway.	Close to major points of entry including Belfast Port and Belfast City Airport, within a 15mile/24km radius

OVERALL REGIONAL PARK BENEFITS	
<b>Social</b> Economic, health, educational, community cohesion and other social benefits to the Borough (population 157,000), the Greater Belfast area (population 340,000) and to Northern Ireland as a whole.	<b>Preservation</b> Preserve and create access to a rich natural industrial and cultural heritage for the local community and visitors.
<b>Position of scale</b> Linking existing assets and successful attractions within the Borough with new ones to be developed.	<b>Environmental sustainability</b> Protecting the biodiversity of the site and enhancing sustainable behaviours.

# Whitespots site key facts





# Whitespots Country Park history

## SITE HISTORY

The site has a distinctive mining history and First World War heritage. Extensive working of lead ore took place here during the 19th century, and up until 1910. Designated an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI), reminders of this industrial history can still be seen today.

Clandeboyne Estate was used as a training camp during the First World War. The nearby Somme Museum examines Ireland's role in the First World War from the special perspective of the cross-community involvement in the three local volunteer divisions.

## MINING HERITAGE

- The lead mines were responsible for 40% of the lead ore produced in Ireland in the 19th century.
- A total of 13 mines produced more than 13.9 thousand tonnes of lead.

## WORLD WAR HERITAGE

- Clandeboyne Estate has a history linking it directly with the Ulster Tower at Thiepval in France and the Battle of the Somme.
- The 36th (Ulster) Division trained on the Estate prior to leaving for the Somme.
- The Somme Museum, situated at the entrance to Whitespots, has complementary plans for development and upgrading.

## OTHER ATTRACTIONS

- Game of Thrones® association – the country park was used as the location for a key scene in two episodes in series three of the globally successful HBO Series Game of Thrones®. The remains of the windmill stump at the site played an important role in these scenes.
- Internationally renowned site for Trial Bike competitions.
- Natural environment – Clandeboyne's ancient forest.



# Masterplan for the site

Enhancing the natural assets available at the site through stories unlocking our heritage, glimpsing into the past and bringing our history to life in a new, immersive and distinctive country park experience that visitors will want to return to again and again.

Only a short distance from Belfast city centre, major road networks and points of entry and perfectly positioned for access from towns and villages by car or bike, on road or greenway.

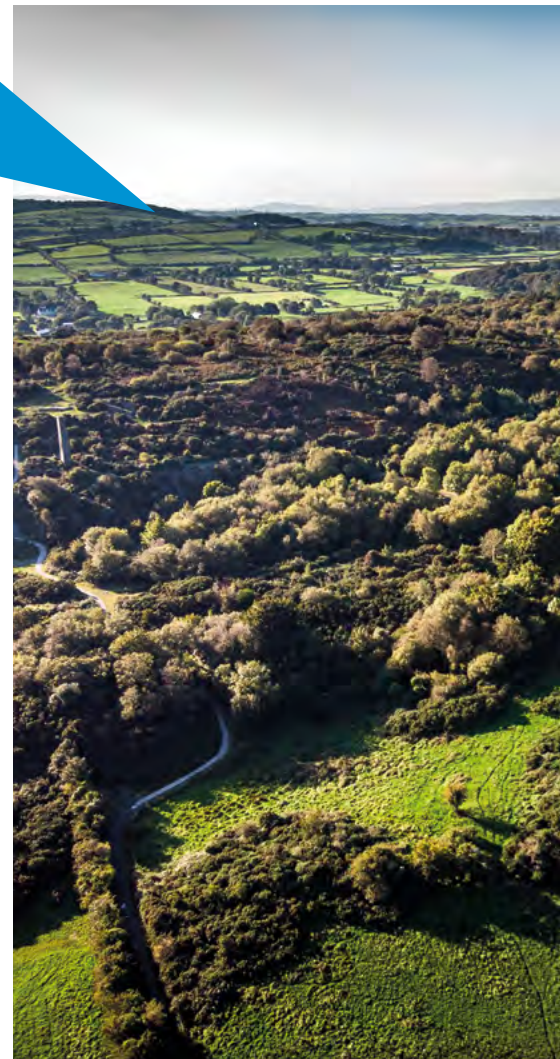
While Whitespots is the central focus, the masterplan integrates Conlig and Clandeboye Estate. The greenway linkages to neighbouring established attractions extends the offering from a day trip to a longer stay in the area, increasing potential visitor spend. This integration aims to boost overall tourism and regeneration for the surrounding areas.

## BRINGING THE VISION TO LIFE

The masterplan illustrates how the vision will be realised to create the multi-use recreational visitor and leisure destination.

### Rich Site Heritage

- A unique series of trails interpreting the Mining, World War and environmental assets of the site
- Restoration and interpretation of the Mining Heritage

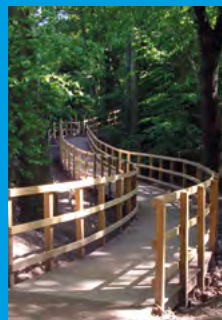


## Unique Open Landscape

- Enhancement and protection of the woodland and natural environment
- Education and Forest Schools
- Elevated boardwalk exploiting iconic views



*Images used here are for illustration purposes only, they are not confirmed proposals*



## Innovative Infrastructure and Interpretation

- Commercial Zone with outdoor recreation (Visitor Hub with coffee shop and visitor facilities)
- Trial Bike event area
- Adventure zone with zip wires, high ropes, elevated boardwalk and adventure playground

# Invest in Whitespots

## EVIDENCE OF DEMAND

### Strong visitor demand for sites relating to mining heritage and increasing global interest in World War history



#### Mining Attractions

44 separate mining attractions across UK and Ireland identified

*Annual Visitors*

Honister Slate Mine, Lake District	125,566
Levant Mine, Cornwall	100,000
Llechwedd Slate Caverns, Snowdonia	215,000



#### World War Attractions

*Annual Visitors*

Eden Camp, Yorkshire	100,000+
The D-Day Story, Portsmouth	75,000
The Black Watch Museum, Scotland	100,000+

### Popularity of forest trails for walking in NI

Country parks/parks/forests attracted the largest proportion of the **21.1 million visits** to participating attractions in 2018

**42%**  
of visitors

Source: Northern Ireland Visitor Attraction Survey published by NISRA in June 2019



### Natural environment – Clondeboye's ancient forest

An estimated **4.7m visits** to NI forests and country parks in 2015, with the majority of visitors incurring expenditure in the vicinity outside the forest during the visit

**60%**  
of visitors

Source: DAERA Forest Service Research 2015

### Tourism NI have identified the global popularity of

**GAME OF THRONES®**

as a key asset in promoting Northern Ireland to a global audience

The windmill stump at the site was the location for key scenes in the series

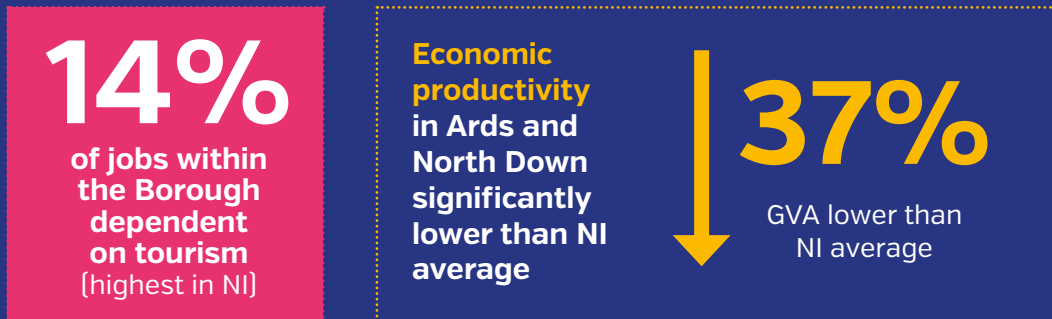
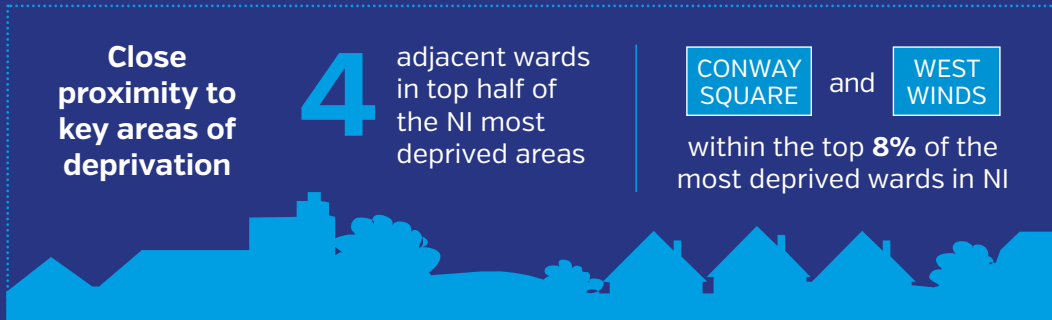
### Internationally renowned site for Trial Bike competitions each event brings

**100-160**

Out of state riders and spectators to the area




## THE CASE FOR DEVELOPMENT



**Significant potential for wider linkages including via greenways to Somme Museum, Ark Farm, Strangford Lough, Ulster Folk Museum and Ulster Transport Museum.**

Opportunity to ensure environmental sustainability, protecting the biodiversity of the site and enhancing sustainable behaviours.



Source: NISRA

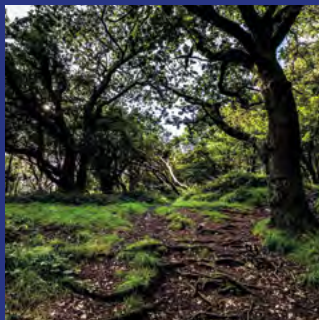
The text is presented in a clean, modern font. A green leaf icon is positioned to the right of the text, symbolizing environmental sustainability. The source is cited at the bottom left.

# Invest in Whitespots

## DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

The masterplan proposes to undertake development in three phases; Phase 1 and 2 could be brought together – these are the catalyst to secure private sector investment outlined in the table below.

<p><b>Phase 1</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Upgrade paths and trails</li> <li>• Separate area for Trial Bikes</li> <li>• A new Visitor Hub</li> <li>• Restoration of mine shafts and windmill stump</li> <li>• Enhancement of the woodland</li> </ul>	<p><b>£6m</b></p>	<p>Public sector funding used to create environmental, educational and heritage focused development</p>
<p><b>Phase 2</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Viewing tower</li> <li>• Restoration of historic chimney stacks</li> <li>• Creation of new woodland areas</li> </ul>	<p><b>Additional £4.3m (Total £10.3m)</b></p>	<p>Public sector, with some small private sector investment, to attract visitors from further afield and link to other local attractions in area</p>
<p><b>Phase 3</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two zip wires</li> <li>• Adventure playground and pump track</li> <li>• High-ropes course</li> <li>• Elevated timber boardwalk</li> </ul>	<p><b>Additional £9.5m (Total £19.8m)</b></p>	<p>Build on growth from Phases 1 and 2 to promote commercial opportunities for private investment in the site for further tourism growth</p>



# Benefits realisation – objectives and outputs

Key PfG Principle	Objective	Phase 1 Target Metrics	Phase 2 Targets	Phase 3 Targets
<b>Health and Wellbeing</b>	Improve the Health and Wellbeing of residents within the Belfast Region	144,000 local visitors using the facilities for active leisure per year	240,000 local walking visitors	250,000 local walking visitors
<b>Employability and Skills</b>	Develop skills through education in the environmental sustainability and leisure sectors and provide job opportunities	7 FTE Direct jobs created 5 Volunteering opportunities Training provision to volunteers Number of school visits	11 FTE Direct jobs created	25 FTE Direct jobs created
<b>Tourism and Economic Development</b>	Increase the GVA derived from tourism in Belfast Region	4,020 Domestic Visitors p.a. 1,980 OoS Visitors per year	6,700 domestic 3,330 OoS	11,700 domestic 8,330 OoS
<b>Environmental Sustainability</b>	Protect the biodiversity of the site, enhance sustainable behaviours (e.g. transport through greenway use)	Annual biodiversity audit Retention of natural species Numbers using greenways	As per Phase 1 Plus creation of new woodland areas	As per Phase 1 and 2 Plus creation of new boardwalk



Printed on FSC® certified material.  
© Ards and North Down Borough Council, September 2020. Details correct at time of print.

