

June 19th, 2023

Notice Of Meeting

You are requested to attend the meeting to be held on **Wednesday, 21st June 2023 at 7:00 pm** in **Hybrid - Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards and via Zoom.**

Agenda

Zoom Guidance

(Attached)

[Zoom Guidance.pdf](#)

Not included

Agenda

(Attached)

[21.06.2023 CWB Agenda.pdf](#)

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1. Apologies

2. Declarations of Interest

3. Environmental Health Protection and Development Q4 Performance

(Report attached)

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4. Caravans Act (NI) 1963 Response to Department of Infrastructure

(Report attached)

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5. Affordable Warmth Update

(Report attached)

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6. Food Service Plan Review

(Attached)

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7. Public Analyst Services

(Report attached)

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8. Sea Swimming Update on Bathing Waters in ANDBC - Response to Notice of Motion

(Report attached)

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(Report attached)

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(Report attached)

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14. Tree and Woodland Strategy (up to 2032) Year 2 Update

(Report attached)

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(Report attached)

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(Report attached)

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(Report attached)

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23. Update on Projects Associated with Whitespots Country Park

(Report attached)

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24. Notices of Motion

24.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillors Gilmour and Cathcart

That this Council explores the possibility of supporting the Bookstart Early Years Pilot across Ards and North Down. A report is brought back detailing information about the programme, how it could be supported across the Borough, including cost and potential delivery partners.

25. Any Other Notified Business

*****Items 26 and 27 - IN CONFIDENCE*****

26. Northern Community Leisure Trust Quarter 4 2022/23

(Report attached)

[26. Northern Community Leisure Trust Q4 2022 2023.pdf](#)

Not included

[26.1 Appendix Q4 2022-23 Trust Report.pdf](#)

Not included

27. Home Safety Equipment Contract

(Report attached)

[27. Home Safety Equipment Contract.pdf](#)

Not included

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

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14 June 2023

Dear Sir/Madam

You are hereby invited to attend a hybrid meeting (in person and via zoom) of the Community and Wellbeing Committee of Ards and North Down Borough Council in the Council Chamber, 2 Church Street, Newtownards on **Wednesday, 21 June 2023** commencing at **7.00pm**.

Yours faithfully

Stephen Reid
Chief Executive
Ards and North Down Borough Council

A G E N D A

1. Apologies
2. Declarations of Interest
3. Environmental Health Protection and Development Q4 Performance (Report Attached)
4. Caravans Act (NI) 1963 Response to Department of Infrastructure (Report Attached)
5. Affordable Warmth Update (Report Attached)
6. Food Service Plan Review (Report Attached)
7. Public Analyst Services (Report Attached)
8. Sea Swimming Update on Bathing Waters in ANDBC – Response to Notice of Motion (Report Attached)
9. Community & Culture Q4 Performance (Report Attached)
10. Reconstitution of PCSP 2023/2024 (Report Attached)
11. Movilla Coffin Lids – Response to Notice of Motion (Report Attached)
12. Community Transport – Response to Notice of Motion (Report Attached)
13. Leisure Services Q4 Performance (Report Attached)
14. Tree & Woodland Strategy (up to 2032) Year 2 Update (Report Attached)

15. Wildfire report (Report Attached)
16. Victoria Primary School Play Area Letters - Response to Notice of Motion (Report Attached)
17. Commemorative Tree Planting (Report Attached)
18. Display Bed Applications (Report Attached)
19. Branch Out Community Group Support (Report Attached)
20. Cemetery Post Boxes 'Letters to Heaven' (Report Attached)
21. 'Cycling Friendly Borough' - Response to Notice of Motion (Report Attached)
22. Parks & Cemeteries Q4 Performance (Report Attached)
23. Update on projects associated with Whitespots Country Park (Report Attached)
24. Notice of Motions
 - 24.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillors Gilmour and Cathcart

That this Council explores the possibility of supporting the Bookstart Early Years Pilot across Ards and North Down. A report is brought back detailing information about the programme, how it could be supported across the Borough, including cost and potential delivery partners
25. Any Other Notified Business

*****ITEMS 26 and 27 **** IN CONFIDENCE*****
26. Northern Community Leisure Trust Quarter 4 2022/23 (Report Attached)
27. Home Safety Equipment Contract (Report Attached)

MEMBERSHIP OF COMMUNITY AND WELLBEING COMMITTEE (16 MEMBERS)

Alderman Adair	Councillor Creighton
Alderman Brooks	Councillor Douglas
Alderman Cummings	Councillor Holywood
Alderman Douglas	Councillor S Irvine
Councillor Ashe	Councillor W Irvine
Councillor Boyle	Councillor Martin (Chair)
Councillor Chambers	Councillor Moore
Councillor Cochrane	Councillor Woods (Vice Chair)

Unclassified

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ITEM 3

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Community and Wellbeing
Date of Meeting	21 st June 2023
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Environmental Health Protection and Development
Date of Report	2 nd June 2023
File Reference	CW22
Legislation	Local Government Act (NI) 2014
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other X If other, please add comment below: N/A
Subject	Environmental Health Protection and Development Q4 Performance Report
Attachments	None

Context

Members will be aware that Council is required, under the Local Government Act 2014, to have in place arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions. To fulfil this requirement Council approved the Performance Management Policy and Handbook in October 2015. The Performance Management Handbook outlines the approach to Performance Planning and Management process as:

- Community Plan – published every 10-15 years
- Corporate Plan – published every 4 years (Corporate Plan Towards 2024 in operation)
- Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) – published annually (for publication 30 September 2022)
- Service Plan – developed annually (approved April/May 2022)

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The Council's 18 Service Plans outline how each respective Service will contribute to the achievement of the Corporate objectives including, but not limited to, any relevant actions identified in the PIP.

Reporting approach

The Service Plans will be reported to relevant Committees on a quarterly basis as undernoted:

Reference	Period	Reporting Month
Quarter 1 (Q1)	April – June	September
Q2	July – September	December
Q3	October – December	March
Q4	January - March	June

The report for Quarter 1 2022-23 is attached.

Key points to note:

- Staff absence rates are now on target with a number of staff on long term sick returning to work.
- The Q4 target for PTO inspections was not met as during this period officers worked to complete property inspections that were delayed as a result of Covid lockdowns. This backlog has now been cleared and should not impact future achievement of targets. We are confident that the property inspection service has now recovered to pre-Covid levels of performance and this will be indicated positively on future reports.

Key achievements:

- The Service has generally performed well against the KPI's for Q4

Emerging issues:

- None

Action to be taken:

- None

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes the report.
















Unclassified

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Quarterly Performance Report - Environmental Health, Protection and Development

Generated on: 02 June 2023

Last Update Q4 2022/23

Performance Data Traffic Light Icon	PI Short Name	Performance Data Current Value	Performance Data Current Target
	% of premises in priority sectors inspected and permits issued	71%	50%
	% spend against budget	96.38%	100%
	% service requests responded to within 2 working days	94%	94%
	% of Planning comments made within 15 working days	91%	90%
	% of quarterly targets achieved as determined by Service Level Agreements	100%	100%
	% of customers satisfied with service upon completion of service request	97%	90%
	Produce business case and recruit additional support in Health and Wellbeing	1	0
	% staff attendance	95.81%	95%
	% of employees in whom time invested in Team Briefings	100%	100%
	Complete three CP Market Surveillance exercises	3	3
	Complete three H&S targeted inspection initiatives	3	3
	% of PTO applications completed within 180 days	45%	90%
	% of Caravan Sites inspected annually	100%	90%
	% of Petroleum Sites inspected and annual licenses issued	100%	100%
	% of High Risk Food premises inspected	100%	90%

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Unclassified

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ITEM 4

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Community and Wellbeing Committee
Date of Meeting	21 June 2023
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Environmental Health, Protection and Development
Date of Report	21 March 2023
File Reference	EHPD13
Legislation	The Caravans Act (NI) 1963
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Caravans Act (NI) 1963 Response to Department of Infrastructure
Attachments	Appendix Letter from Dfl to Council Chief Executives Caravans Act

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to seek Council agreement to a response to the Department of Infrastructure in relation to a proposed change to the Caravans Act (NI) 1963, to provide an exemption to licences being required for Traveller sites on land owned by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

Background

The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) has written to Chief Executive's requesting a response to a proposal to adopt one of the recommendations from the summary report issued following the 2021 Review of the Caravans Act (NI) 1963 by the Department for Communities (DfC).

The recommendation is in respect of Irish Travellers and states:

"DfC on behalf of the Housing Executive, will pass to DfI for its consideration proposals for an amendment to the 1963 Act seeking exemption to licences being required for sites on land owned by the Housing Executive".

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Dfl currently holds responsibility for the Caravans Act (NI) 1963. Under the 1963 Act, the development of caravan sites including residential sites and their physical standards are controlled through planning permission granted for the use of a caravan site and the 1963 Act's site licensing scheme.

The licensing scheme under the 1963 Act is administered by District Councils who are responsible for the issuing and enforcement of Site Licences.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) have been responsible for the provision of serviced sites for the Irish Travelling Community since 2003 and are not exempt from the requirement to hold a site licence. Prior to 2003 such sites did not require a licence as District Councils were responsible for their provision, and a site licence is not required for the use as a caravan site of land occupied by a District Council. This has resulted in a difference in the licensing arrangements between NI and the other UK jurisdictions. Elsewhere Traveller sites do not require a site licence.

Having agreed to consider this request, the Dfl is now seeking the views of Council on the proposal to exempt the NIHE from the requirement to hold a site licence for its Traveller's sites.

The Dfl have stated that even if a decision is made to exempt the NIHE they will still be required to have regard to the Department's Model Licence Conditions and the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service Fire Safety Guide for Caravan Site Operators when providing appropriate sites. They have also declared that any subsequent proposals to amend the 1963 Act to exempt the NIHE will be subject to public consultation, the agreement of an incoming minister and Executive, as well as the availability of a suitable legislative vehicle.

It should be noted that if NIHE were to be exempt from the requirement to hold a site licence for its traveller sites, District Councils would have no remit on these sites in relation to the 1963 Act. The Health and Safety Executive NI is the enforcing Authority for the Health and Safety at Work (N) Order 1978 on residential sites.

Please note that the closing date to reply to this letter is 30th June 2023, therefore the Council's response will be submitted before that date with Committee endorsement, with a note that it is subject to Council ratification.

RECOMENDATION

It is recommended that Council agree that, whilst at this time there are no sites provided by the NIHE for the Irish Travelling Community within this Borough, The Environmental Health Protection and Development Service would recommend that a letter of response be sent from the Council making the following comments:

- It is understood that while the current licensing regime does go some way to provide a safeguard to ensuring traveller sites in NI are adequately habitable and serviced it has presented challenges to regulation and enforcement of

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sites provided by NIHE for members of the travelling community in other areas.

- The standards and protections on sites for travelling community should be of no less than that what is expected on a holiday/residential caravan site. In its response to the 'Consultation on New Model Licence Conditions for Caravan Sites' (June 2019) Ards and North Down Borough Council welcomed the amalgamation of the current Model Licence Conditions for holiday caravan sites, residential sites and Traveller sites into one document, creating clarity and ease of reference.
- Revised and updated Model Licence Conditions should be in place prior to the implementation of an exemption; and
- Ards and North Down Borough Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to public consultation on this proposal in due course.

Regional Planning Governance & LegislationDepartment for
Infrastructure

An Roinn

Bonneagair

Deapairment fur

Infrastructurewww.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk

Council Chief Executives

Clarence Court
10-18 Adelaide Street
BELFAST
BT2 8GB
Tel: 0300 200 7830**Email:** kathryn.mcferran@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk
julie.maroadi@infrastructure-ni.gov.ukYour reference:
Our reference: DFIPG 113/23

27 April 2023

Dear Chief Executives

Outworkings of 2021 Review of the Caravans Act (NI) 2011

The Department for Communities has now published the summary report relating to the 2021 Review of the Caravans Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 ([2021 Review of Caravans Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2011 | Department for Communities \(communities-ni.gov.uk\)](#).)

Section 7 of this report contains a summary of the recommendations. One of the recommendations in the report is in respect of Irish Travellers (Section 7.3 recommendation 17) and states:

"DfC, on behalf of the Housing Executive, will pass to DfI for its consideration proposals for an amendment of the 1963 Act seeking exemption to licences being required for sites on land owned by the Housing Executive"

As you are aware the Department for Infrastructure currently holds responsibility for the Caravans Act (Northern Ireland) 1963 ("1963 Act"). Under the 1963 Act the development of caravan sites, including residential sites and their physical standards are controlled through planning permission granted for the use of land as a caravan site and the 1963 Act's site licensing system.

The licensing system under the 1963 Act is currently administered by District Councils who are responsible for the issuing and enforcement of site licenses.

In 2003 the responsibility for the provision of serviced sites for the Irish Travelling community transferred from District Councils to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE). Under the current legislative framework the NIHE is **not exempt** from the requirement to hold a site licence for its Traveller sites.

This is in contrast to the position prior to 2003 where these sites did not require a licence because District Councils were the licensing authority and a site licence is not required for the use as a caravan site of land occupied by a District Council (paragraph 11 of the Schedule to the 1963 Act). This has resulted in a difference in the licensing arrangements between Northern Ireland and the other UK jurisdictions. Elsewhere Traveller sites do not require a site licence.

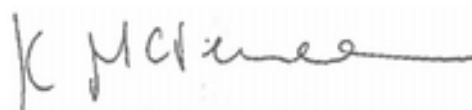
The Department has agreed to consider this request and is therefore seeking your views on the proposal to exempt the NIHE from the requirement to hold a site licence for its Travellers' sites.

It should be noted that even if a decision is made to exempt the NIHE they will still be required to have regard to the Department's Model Licence Conditions and the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) Fire Safety Guide for Caravan Site Operators when providing appropriate sites.

Any subsequent proposals to amend the 1963 Act to exempt the NIHE will be subject to public consultation, the agreement of an incoming Minister and Executive, as well as the availability of a suitable legislative vehicle.

I would appreciate if you could send your response to David Doherty david.doherty@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk by **CoP 30 June 2023**.

Yours sincerely



DR KATHRYN McFERRAN
(Acting) Director

Cc: Heads of Planning

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ITEM 5

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Community and Wellbeing Committee
Date of Meeting	21 June 2023
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Environmental Health, Protection and Development
Date of Report	02 June 2023
File Reference	CW8
Legislation	N/A
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below: N/A
Subject	Affordable Warmth Update
Attachments	Appendix 1 INTERIM Service Level Agreement between DfC and ANDBC Appendix 2 Letter from DfC 1 st June 2023 Appendix 3 Letter from DfC 16 th June 2023

Service Level Agreement

Each year the Department for Communities (DfC) issues a Service Level Agreement (SLA) to Councils for the Affordable Warmth function. The document attached as Appendix 1 'Interim Service Level Agreement between DfC and ANDBC' which was shared with Councils in February 2023, was provided by Emma Sisk, Head of Affordable Warmth & Energy Branch of DfC requesting that it is signed and returned as soon as possible. Failure to sign the agreement could have audit implications for DfC and potentially financial implications for the Council if payment was refused by Department of Finance/DfC due to a signed SLA not being in place.

In addition, as an audit requirement, Councils are to provide an assurance statement regarding financial accountability and operational delivery to assure the Department

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that funds provided for the Affordable Warmth Scheme are being spent on the Scheme. This is to be delivered alongside the signed SLA.

ANDBC and DfC Meeting Update

At the request of Members, on 16th March 2023 a cross party delegation (Councillor Karen Douglas, Councillor Robert Adair, Councillor Joe Boyle, Councillor David Chambers, Councillor Eddie Thompson and Councillor Rachel Woods) met with Officers from the Environmental Health Protection and Development (EHPD) Service and Senior Officials from DfC including David Polley, Director of Housing Supply Policy; Emma Sisk, Head of Affordable Warmth and Energy; and Oliver McHugh.

A full and frank discussion took place with DfC officials highlighting the known difficulties with the scheme and the steps that had been introduced to mitigate against some of the concerns to date, including an improved approach to targeting. They stated that it was not possible to address all issues raised as the scheme had to operate within the original constraints of the business case to the Department of Finance. They further advised that there was still no budget confirmed for 2023/24.

When pressed on proposals from the Department for the Economy to introduce a "One Stop Energy Advice Shop" in Northern Ireland, DfC officials confirmed that this was indeed the plan but how the grants schemes would operate within this had not yet been determined. They did however advise that the Affordable Warmth Scheme in its current format was due to be wound down in the next 18 months. They appreciated that Councils had made a valuable contribution to the Affordable Warmth Scheme in terms of budget, in kind costs and "added value" but admitted that much of this had not been captured. They agreed to work with officers to try and capture some of this information including case studies, so that it could be considered when trying to shape the next scheme.

Council future role in the current Scheme

Members will be aware that the Department for Communities (alongside other Government departments) has published its budget for the 2023-24 financial year demonstrating the significant reduction in funding available to Council.

As reported to the Council meeting on 12 June, DfC has published a consultation on an EQIA to garner any further comments on the impact that the reduction in budget will have, above what it has recognised itself. Whilst the consultation runs for 12 weeks, DfC asked Councils to respond by 07 June to be able to review comments quickly with a view to potential realignment of some of the budget available. Affordable Warmth was identified as one of the schemes at risk and potentially closing.

During this consultation process, DfC called a Senior Officials meeting with Councils on 30 May 2023 and announced that they had already decided to remove the Councils eligibility assessment and inspection role in the scheme from 1 September 2023 (See Appendix 2). There was no advance warning of this, and Council Officials were presented with a fait accompli.

DfC advised that Councils are to continue to submit 20 applications per month in June, July and August but from the 1 September 2023, applicants will need to

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contact the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) directly who will process the scheme in its totality until at least the end of the financial year. DfC officials made it clear that the decision would not be reversed even if more money was forthcoming should the Executive reconvene, particularly as they had been looking to “wind down” the scheme. The Boiler Replacement scheme which is delivered directly by NIHE has also been closed, with replacement boilers restricted to those eligible for the Affordable Warmth Scheme.

When pressed on the delivery model with NIHE, DfC indicated that they would propose still allocating 20 properties per month per council area, but this may reduce to 15 once the full budget impact was considered. There will be handover meetings between Councils and their local NIHE to ensure waiting lists are transferred but much of the detail has still to be worked out.

DfC did thank Councils for their contribution and enthusiasm for the Scheme, making particular reference to the Members of Ards and North Down who had shown such support.

Concerns with the change in delivery model

Officers believe that the administration process for the scheme by NIHE needs further clarification. The Council also needs confirmation that its residents will not be disadvantaged by the fact that some Councils will be handing over long waiting lists whereas in ANDBC, greater effort is required to promote the scheme.

The concern is that if NIHE are relying on applicants contacting them directly rather than actively promoting the scheme then they will receive insufficient interest from our Borough and may reallocate that budget to other council areas that have waiting lists in place. From experience, NIHE will not provide the same degree of direct support and “hand holding” to vulnerable households that our Affordable Warmth team do and therefore many will struggle to complete the application process should they become aware of and keen to avail of the scheme.

It is proposed that Council writes to DfC to outline these concerns and obtain clarification over the proposed new system, in order to ensure that ANDBC residents are not unfairly disadvantaged.

With this in mind, the EHPD service will explore the possibility of using its budgetary contribution to the project to continue to identify, signpost, refer and support the most vulnerable in our Borough to the NIHE, thus increasing the chances of securing energy efficiency improvements to the housing stock in our Borough and to provide energy efficiency advice and guidance to all.

Some other Councils have energy efficiency officers in post who provide this service and in the light of the cost-of-living crisis impacting most severely on the most vulnerable, officers would be keen to explore how this role could be further developed to provide greater support and guidance to those who are currently in fuel poverty.

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RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council:

1. Approves the signing of the Affordable Warmth Service Level Agreement 2023-2024 for governance and audit purposes.
2. Notes the changes in delivery model for the scheme being implemented by DfC as part of their budgetary controls, which will exclude Councils.
3. Agrees to write to DfC asking how the decision to exclude Councils was reached in the absence of a response to the current budget consultation exercise, and expressing concern over how such a decision will impact the most vulnerable in the Borough, seeking assurances that every effort will be made by NIHE to identify and support eligible residents in our area to avail of the scheme for the remainder of its lifetime.
4. Explores ways to continue to support the most vulnerable in the Borough, in the absence of the Affordable Warmth scheme, including consideration of an interim energy efficiency advice role, with a further report being brought to Council in due course.

AFFORDABLE WARMTH SCHEME

INTERIM

SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT

between

DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES

and

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN COUNCIL

For the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2024

Date: 27 February 2023

1. Overview

- 1.1. The Department for Communities (DfC/the Department) is responsible for developing policy and implementing programmes to mitigate the effects of fuel poverty and improve the thermal comfort of low income households across Northern Ireland. The Affordable Warmth Scheme is DfC's primary scheme for tackling fuel poverty. DfC works in partnership with all local councils and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE/the Housing Executive) to deliver the Affordable Warmth Scheme.
- 1.2. The Affordable Warmth Scheme aims to mitigate the effects of fuel poverty in households living in severe or extreme fuel poverty. It targets low income households in eligible private housing and delivers home energy efficiency improvement measures to qualifying households.
- 1.3. All parties will use opportunities during the life of this agreement to display a commitment to work together in support of Government aims to improve household energy efficiency.

2. Aims and Objectives of the Affordable Warmth Scheme

- 2.1. The Affordable Warmth Scheme is delivered under the statutory framework contained within the Domestic Energy Efficiency Grants Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009 as amended by the Domestic Energy Efficiency (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (2016 SR NO 333 Para 7) and Amendment Regulations 2021 (2021 SR NO 147).
- 2.2. The aims of the Affordable Warmth Scheme include to:
 - mitigate the effects of fuel poverty in low income households.
 - deliver a whole house approach providing energy efficiency improvement measures.
 - target and assist those most likely to be living in the most severe fuel poverty first using a triage system which utilises an agreed scoring matrix to prioritise cases and maintain consistency across all Council areas. The weighting for the triage system takes account of the vulnerability of the householder in terms of age and disability and the condition of the household.
 - deliver a range of measures within a short period of time with minimal disruption to residents.

- raise the SAP rating of homes to a level which would protect the occupants from the impacts of fuel poverty.
- deliver tailored solutions in a synchronised way.

2.3. The Affordable Warmth Business Case (2019 – 2024) contains the following objectives and performance indicators:

- between 1 June 2019 and 31 March 2024 to deliver energy efficiency improvement measures to a minimum of 14,000 homes considered to be likely to be at risk of severe fuel poverty
- between 1 June 2019 and 31 March 2024 to deliver 21,000 energy efficiency measures.

2.4. For the period of this SLA and based on an annual budget of £16m this translates overall as:

- 3,137 homes assisted
- 4,705 energy efficiency measures provided

2.5. The measures available under this scheme are listed at **Annex A**

3. Scope and Duration of the Interim Agreement

3.1. The Department has agreed to work with Councils to review a number of issues raised by Councils. To inform the process going forward DfC commissioned Business Consultancy Services (BCS) to undertake an evaluation of the current targeted approach of the Affordable Warmth Scheme and to examine and consider the appropriateness of the current funding model. Councils participated in that study and made recommendations for a refreshed approach to targeting. This approach was piloted in 3 Council areas and the Department made recommendations to DoF to make changes to the targeted approach based on the results of the pilot. DoF agreed to the changes and Councils will be asked to introduce the refreshed approach from 1 April 2023.

3.2. The purpose of this Service Level Agreement (SLA) is to set out the interim arrangement between the Department and Councils pending further consideration of the way forward in the development of a future SLA. It sets out the relationship between Councils and DfC, the duties and responsibilities on each and the outworkings of delivering the Affordable Warmth Scheme.

3.3. This interim agreement takes effect from 1 April 2022 and remains in force unless terminated by:

- The end date of the agreement: 31 March 2024
- Either party, on the expiry of 3 months' notice in writing.
- The agreement of both parties.

3.4. Any party may also terminate the Agreement without notice, for any of the following reasons:

- any breach by the other of its obligations under this Agreement; and
- in the case of a breach capable of rectification, where such breach has not been rectified by the other party within 14 days of it being given notice of same.

3.5. The agreement may be amended at any time with the consent of both parties. Agreed amendments will be incorporated into the agreement and recorded at **Annex B**

3.6. This interim agreement will be reviewed as part of a wider review of the SLA as required under DfC Internal Audit Recommendation 4.2(c):

Review the SLA to ensure clarity is provided on self-referrals, the Scheme's objectives and key performance indicators are included and ownership is clearly attributed between the parties.

4. Role and Responsibilities

4.1. Department for Communities

4.1.1. The Department for Communities has a responsibility to ensure that the Affordable Warmth Scheme meets its aims and objectives and is delivered in partnership with local Councils and NIHE.

4.1.2. The Department undertakes to:

- bid for funding to enable Councils and NIHE to administer the Scheme. Funding to Councils will be provided through NIHE which will transfer agreed funds to each local council on a quarterly basis **(the funding model is under review and any revised model will be approved by DoF)**;

- set a target for referrals which Local Councils will deliver to the NIHE annually and monthly;
- where targets are required to be changed due to budgetary or scheme performance reasons give 2 months' notice of an increase or decrease of targets;
- provide each Local Council with data detailing the households to be targeted where appropriate;
- provide reporting templates for Local Councils monthly progress reports.
- continually monitor and evaluate the scheme through reporting arrangements with the NIHE and Local Councils;
- provide advice to the NIHE regarding the policy of the scheme as required;
- consider changes that will improve process or impact as the scheme develops;
- carry out a final evaluation of the Scheme post 31 March 2024.

4.2. Local Councils

4.2.1. Local Councils are responsible for targeting households who are most in need, determining eligibility for the Scheme and submitting regular referrals to the NIHE. Each local council has been provided with details of households considered to potentially meet the conditions of the scheme.

4.2.2. Each Local Council undertakes to:

- with the consent of the targeted householder, conduct an eligibility assessment with the householder to collate and verify eligibility for the Scheme in relation to occupancy, tenure and financial income;
- contribute to the objectives and performance indicators (paras 2.3 and 2.4 refer) by maintaining a steady rate of 20 +/- 5 completed first time surveys to the Housing Executive monthly (equates to approximately 240 per Council annually). Additional referrals will not be accepted without prior agreement with the Department and NIHE. The monthly tolerance difference should be made up by the end of the quarter.

- apply appropriate discretion regarding accepting self-referrals (*currently referrals which are not from the 'targeted list'*). Local councils must bear in mind that Affordable Warmth is primarily a targeted scheme. Targeting those households in most need of intervention and requiring scheme measures in priority one to four order (**Annex A**). **This clause will be amended to reflect the refreshed targeting approach from 1 April 2023.**
- advise the Department within one month if referral targets cannot be met along with a plan for resolution.
- where the number of referrals may need to be adjusted in year due to budget change or scheme performance, endeavour to meet the new targets in order to maximise the number of households being supported. Where this is not possible the Council must inform the Department;
- highlight urgent cases to the NIHE central team at the time the referral is being electronically transferred. An urgent case is defined as a household with no heating system, or where a 15 year old central heating boiler is broken down beyond repair
- ensure that when an application is received by Building Control that officials arrange for measures to be inspected. NIHE will provide Councils with details where certificates are outstanding, and both parties will actively progress these cases and report position at the quarterly partnership meetings.
- Building Control officials will confirm to the NIHE whether the installation is in compliance with the building regulations;
- provide householders participating in the scheme with information regarding energy advice;
- manage and respond to complaints concerning local council staff regarding the Affordable Warmth Scheme;
- where local council officials have completed the survey and referred that survey to the NIHE, direct any query regarding the application to the NIHE to resolve.
- meet with the NIHE and DfC at least quarterly to discuss the progress of the scheme and discuss any areas of concern;
- participate in both the established Senior Officer group (3 meetings per year) and other ad hoc meetings as and when required;

- where the householder agrees, refer their details (name, address, contact number) to the Social Welfare Group (***Make the Call***¹) for the purposes of conducting a Benefit Entitlement Check with them.
- carry out additional duties such as handholding of householders and qualitative case studies of homes which have received assistance through the Scheme.

4.3. Northern Ireland Housing Executive

4.3.1. The NIHE is a non-departmental public body. Therefore it will not be a signatory to this SLA as the DfC and the NIHE has an established accountability process. This accountability process sets out the controls to be exercised over the different areas of the NIHE's activities by the DfC directly or by the NIHE itself. The prime purpose is to assist the Permanent Secretary of DfC in discharging his responsibilities in relation to NIHE systems and as such represents a formal statement by DfC of the standards it requires the NIHE to achieve in relation to the probity of activities.

4.3.2. The NIHE undertakes to:

- act as Scheme Manager to deliver the schemes strategic objectives;
- manage and control all financial procedures and in line with approved budgetary capacity and scheme business case;
- develop, implement and monitor scheme policies, procedures and guidance underpinned by the objectives outlined in the scheme business case;
- provide performance and financial information and complete all monthly and quarterly reports to NIHE Executive Team and DfC;
- complete evaluations of the scheme interventions in relation to customer satisfaction levels, energy efficiency and fuel poverty;
- work closely with DfC, Councils and Grants Offices to ensure effective delivery of the scheme business case;
- manage, investigate and respond to all complaints in line with Housing Executive policies;

¹ Link for contact information and general information to Make the Call [Make the Call Service | nidirect](#)

- administer scheme information requests where available such as Freedom of Information Requests, Subject Access Requests and Assembly Questions;
- positively engage with other scheme stakeholders and actively address matters pertaining to the scheme;
- carry out the daily tasks as defined in the Scheme Information & Policy Guide;
- attend quarterly partnership meetings and provide scheme performance update and address matters relating to the scheme with senior officials;
- maintain local monthly meeting between Grants Office representative and Council representative to address local queries;
- complete sample verification checks (minimum 10% - maximum 100%) of applications referred and liaise with Councils on the findings so corrective action can be taken;
- encourage scheme participation, give technical and energy guidance to householders and help reduce cancellations.

5. Financial Arrangements

5.1. Local councils will be responsible and accountable for the management of the Affordable Warmth budget allocated to them and paid to them quarterly by NIHE. Each local council must ensure that they have appropriate financial management policies in place and that the Affordable Warmth Scheme budget is ring fenced for Affordable Warmth activities.

6. Monitoring & Reporting

6.1. Each local council will provide the Department, with monthly progress reports (template attached at **Annex C**) regarding the number of:

- referrals completed;
- the number of self-referral referrals completed; and
- numbers and details of referrals to other schemes or services.

6.2. Local councils will advise the Department of any Internal Audit of the Affordable Warmth Scheme in their Council area, share any Audit recommendations concerning Affordable Warmth and consider those which relate to improving the management of the scheme. This will be done in consultation with DfC.

7. Accountability

7.1. Overall accountability for the delivery of the scheme rests with the Accounting Officer of DfC as the funding department. However, each receiving organisation is accountable for its own finances and ensuring that appropriate controls are in place in order to provide them with the necessary assurances regarding expenditure.

8. Limited Liability

8.1. The local council shall have no liability to the Department for any loss or damage sustained by the Department as a result of the Department relying on any information supplied to it by the local council under this agreement.

9. Confidentiality and Data

9.1. All Parties are to take cognisance of the Data Protection, GDPR and Freedom of Information legislation. **Annex D** sets out an agreement for the processing of personal data for the DfC and the NIHE.

Department for Communities
22 February 2023

FORMAL COMMITMENT

Signed
On behalf of the Department for Communities

Dated

Signed
On behalf of Ards and North Down Council

Dated

AFFORDABLE WARMTH MEASURES

Prioritised list of measures available under the Affordable Warmth Scheme:

Priority rating	Conditions in existing property	Improvement measures available
Priority 1 – Insulation	No cavity wall insulation	Install cavity wall insulation
	Ineffective cavity wall insulation	Remove and replace cavity wall insulation
	No loft insulation or below minimum	Installation or top up of roof space insulation to 270mm
	No hot water jacket	Install hot water jacket
	Ineffective or no draught proofing	Draught proof windows/doors
Priority 2 – Heating	No heating system exists	Installation of natural gas or oil heating
	Conversion of existing LPG or solid fuel system	Installation of natural gas or oil heating
	Conversion of Economy 7	Conversion to natural gas (or oil where natural gas isn't available) or conversion to high efficiency storage system
	Householder 65 or over, or with child under 16, or receiving a disability benefit and with a boiler over 15 years old	Boiler replacement and new radiators where required
	Heating system exists without controls	Add heating controls
	Heating system exists but radiators defective	Replace radiators as needed
Priority 3 – Windows	Windows in disrepair	Repair/replace windows with double glazing if draught proofing is not possible
Priority 4 - Solid wall	Solid wall with no insulation	Internal/external insulation

RECORD OF AGREED CHANGES TO THE INTERIM SLA

Summary of Change made	Reference Paragraph	Date change agreed	Version updated by

COPY OF MONTHLY RETURNS TEMPLATE



Council Reporting
Template.xlsx



DATA PROCESSING AGREEMENT – ARDS AND NORTH DOWN COUNCIL

for the processing of personal data for the Department of Communities and Northern Ireland Housing Executive

1) Purpose

1. This agreement sets out the terms and conditions by which personal data will be processed by the Council's on behalf of the Department for Communities (DfC) and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE).
2. This agreement is signed and agreed to ensure full compliance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) and is consistent with the original purpose for which the data is / was gathered and further processed.
3. The purpose of the disclosure is to facilitate the processing of personal data on behalf of the DfC and NIHE who are the Data Controllers and to fulfil the obligations with regard to: Improving domestic energy efficiency in the private sector across Northern Ireland via the Affordable Warmth Scheme. This scheme aims to target identified low income households and deliver energy efficiency improvement measures to qualifying households. The Affordable Warmth Scheme is DfC's primary scheme for tackling fuel poverty. DfC and NIHE work in partnership with all local councils and the NIHE to deliver the Affordable Warmth Scheme.
4. The terms Data, Data Controller, Data Processor, Personal Data, Sensitive Personal Data, Processing and Information Commissioner have the same meaning as defined within the Data Protection Act 2018.
5. "Agreement" – means this Data Processor agreement along with any associated documents attached or referred to as forming part of the agreement.

6. "Services" – means the services that will be provided by the Data Processor during the period of the agreement.
7. "Council Liaison officer" – means the person nominated by each Data Processor who will assume day to day management responsibility and liaison with the Data Controllers.

2) Use and Disclosure of Personal Data

1. Councils will receive specific targeted lists of referral addresses within their Council area of responsibility and also receive independent enquiries from individuals who are not on the target list.
2. Council officers will visit targeted and non-targeted addresses, where appropriate to assess eligibility for the scheme and collect the necessary documentation. When visiting an address, the Council officers will complete an electronic NIHE application form named '**Affordable Warmth Scheme**' application.
3. As part of the process, the applicant is required to provide documentation to verify eligibility including proof of ownership, occupancy and income. These eligibility documents will be photographed by Council staff on a Council issued electronic tablet at the time of the visit and in the home of the applicant. Eligibility documents will be shared with NIHE electronically and the eligibility document data is then deleted beyond recovery from the tablets. Where documents cannot be submitted electronically, hardcopies can be accepted if necessary.
4. The tablets have a security feature that secures all data being stored on and transmitted to a device and provides functionality to lock down and wipe data from a device if it is lost or stolen.

5. In certain cases the original hard copy eligibility documents are removed by the Council officers instead of photographing onto the electronic tablet in the home of the applicant. These documents will be photographed or scanned and checked that the copy is legible before sharing with NIHE. The originals will be returned to the applicant in such a way to protect the data in accordance with Council policy.
6. If the property is privately rented, the Council officers will send a consent form to the landlord.
7. Data gathered for this purpose will not be disclosed to any other person or organisation. The data is used to confirm the eligibility of the applicant to receive a grant.

3) Proportionality / Subject Access

1. The processing will be proportional for its purpose and a high level of security and confidentiality will be applied. The Council will additionally agree to notify the ICO if any changes are required to their Data Protection notification.
2. If a subject access request is made directly to the Council and it involves personal data controlled by DfC and NIHE, it is the responsibility of the relevant Council to immediately liaise with DfC and NIHE to process the request.
3. DfC and NIHE will give appropriate assistance as is necessary to the Council to enable it to:
 - Comply with a subject access request
 - Respond to any information notice served upon the Council by the ICO
 - Respond to any complaint from a data subject
 - Investigate any breach or alleged breach of the Data Protection Act

4) Security

1. The Council will apply appropriate security measures equal with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018.
2. The Council must ensure that appropriate technical and organisational measures shall be taken against unauthorised or unlawful processing of personal data and against accidental loss or destruction of, or damage to, personal data. In particular, the Council shall ensure that measures are in place to:
 - Prevent accidental compromise or damage during storage, handling, use, processing, transmission or transport;
 - Deter deliberate compromise or opportunist attack;
 - Promote discretion in order to avoid unauthorised access; and
 - Provide suitable training to their staff on how to handle DfC and NIHE data.
3. To ensure Information Security Standards Councils will work to the principles of ISO27001.
4. The personal data, including application forms and supporting documents, is transferred to NIHE (on behalf of DfC) via -
Electronic forms are transferred to NIHE using XML files and FTPS site or using password protected xml files via e-mail.
5. When necessary paper application forms and supporting documentation are hand delivered to NIHE grants office and signed in by case officers.
6. The services of any sub-contractor will not be used by the Council in connection with the processing of DfC and NIHE data without prior approval.

5) Confidentiality

1. The Council will not disclose or communicate to any other individual or organisation the personal data gathered for DfC and NIHE. They shall treat any personal data provided strictly private and confidential.
2. The Council shall ensure that any of their staff listed within the agreement are aware of their responsibilities in connection with the use of that data.
3. The obligations of confidentiality in relation to this agreement by the Council will remain in force after the expiry of this agreement.
4. This obligation of confidentiality shall not apply where disclosure of DfC and NIHE data is ordered by a Court of law. There may also be occasions when disclosure is required by the Police or other law enforcement agencies for the investigation of a crime or is required for legal proceedings.
5. If this happens, and a request is received by the Council, it must inform DfC and NIHE as soon as possible in writing, stating the identity of the requesting body and nature of the data sought. This will allow DfC and NIHE to deliberate and decide on what can be released.

6) Retention and Review

1. The data should be retained for five years in line with DfC retention policies.

7) Data Processor Breach of Security

1. In the event of a data breach by the Council, which involves DfC and NIHE data, the Council Liaison Officer must immediately inform DfC and NIHE of the circumstances.
2. A data breach can take the form of the following:-

- The loss or theft of data;
 - Equipment failure;
 - Professional hacking attempt;
 - Professional “blagging” whereby data is obtained by deceit; and
 - Human error by accidental disclosure. (An organisation mistakenly providing personal information to the wrong person, for example by sending details out to the wrong address).
3. Once it has been confirmed that DfC and NIHE personal data has been involved, the main DfC Data Breach procedure must be invoked. It must also be assumed that the Council will have a data breach procedure in place; however, DfC will lead on this matter.

8) Time Period of agreement and Termination

1. This agreement will remain in force until the SLA is reviewed. However if potential issues do emerge, this may require further consideration.
2. DfC may at any time by notice in writing, terminate this agreement if the Council is in breach of any obligation under this agreement.
3. DfC retains the final decision in any variation to the agreement. No variation will occur unless written directions are signed by both parties and included within this document.

This constitutes an agreement between the Council (acting as Data Processors) and DfC / NIHE who will abide by the content of this document.

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From: David Polley
Director of Housing Supply Policy

Level 3
Causeway Exchange
1-7 Bedford Street
Belfast
BT2 7EG

Telephone: (028) 90 515286
e-mail: David.Polley@communities-ni.gov.uk

Date: 01 June 2023

To: All Northern Ireland Council Chief Executives, via email

Dear Chief Executives

AFFORDABLE WARMTH SCHEME, ENDING TARGETING

I am writing to issue formal notification that the Department has decided to remove targeting from the Affordable Warmth Scheme (AWS). I am therefore providing 3 months' notice, as set out in the Service Level Agreement, that the Scheme will change from 1 September 2023, when full delivery will be taken over by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) as a single scheme operator and targeting through local councils will end.

This has been a very difficult decision for the Department to take. Both the capital and resource budget for the AWS 23/24 are under severe pressure – with capital being reduced by 12.5% and resource by 5%. The budget Equality Impact Assessment, launched on the 10 May, highlighted that a reduction in budget could lead to the closure of the Affordable Warmth Scheme, which would significantly impact those people living in fuel poverty at this time of high energy prices. Therefore, this decision has been made to reduce the cost of delivering the Scheme in order to remove the risk of Scheme closure.

The NIHE is developing processes to receive applications from September and the Department will liaise closely with council officials as this work progresses. In the meantime, the Department is maintaining its ask of 20 referrals per month over the notice period. Councils will be reimbursed for this in the normal manner.

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I met with your senior officer to give them advance notice of this decision on 30 May. We will, of course, continue this intense collaboration and consultation with council and NIHE officials on transitional arrangements, including a robust communication plan to facilitate the move to the NIHE. We are committed to maintaining a 'worst first' approach and we will ensure that this change to scheme delivery is communicated in a way that is easily understood.

I would like to thank councils for your substantial contribution to the Affordable Warmth Scheme. With your assistance the Scheme has helped just over 26,000 households with over 47,000 energy efficiency measures installed to date. We look forward to engaging with you in the near future as we develop proposals for an energy efficiency scheme to replace the AWS.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Polley".

DAVID POLLEY

Director of Housing Supply Policy

From: Adrian Boyce
Head of Affordable Warmth and Energy

Level 3
Causeway Exchange
1-7 Bedford Street
Belfast
BT2 7EG

Telephone: (028) 9082 9046
e-mail: Adrian.Boyce@communities-ni.gov.uk
Date: 16 June 2023

Dear Senior Officials

Affordable Warmth Scheme

At our meeting of 30 May 2023, the Department advised it would provide you with further details to share with your committees and staff in relation to the changes to the Affordable Warmth Scheme (AWS). I will also provide information on further queries made following the meeting to ensure consistent communications.

Context

The decision to remove targeting and therefore council involvement from the AWS has been approved by the Permanent Secretary under the Executive Formation and Exercise of Functions Act.

This has been a very difficult decision for the Department to take, following the impact of the 2023-24 budget allocations. The impact on public services included a severe pressure on both the AWS 2023/24 capital and resource budgets with capital reduced by 12.5% and resource reduced by 5%.

The Departments budget 2023-24 Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA), launched on the 10 May 2023 and the consultation period is currently underway. Interested parties are encouraged to make responses up to 2nd August at [EQIA on DfC Budget for 2023-24 - NI Direct - Citizen Space](#). The EQIA detailed the potential savings measures, which would allow the Department to live within its Budget allocation including the closure of the AWS.

Any proposal to close the scheme would significantly impact those people living in fuel poverty, in particular vulnerable, low-income households. Therefore, the decision to remove targeting has been made to mitigate against the risk of closure and make the Scheme more resilient.

Additionally, the requirement within the SLA of two months' notice of a change to the referral rate, and the potential difficulties for councils as a result these changes (in terms of funding and staffing levels) also acts as a constraint on the Department's ability to scale (up or down) capital expenditure.

The Department is also aware that in recent years councils are increasingly having to subsidise AWS activity from their own resources. One council withdrew from the Scheme in 2019, with a second announcing its intention to withdraw from the Scheme in July this year. Uncertainties over the budget for this year and beyond poses the possibility of other councils taking similar action, leaving the Scheme at risk of collapse.

Recognition

The Department would like to thank councils for their substantial contribution to the AWS, with your partnership directly helping over 26,000 households with the installation of over 47,000 energy efficiency measures in these properties to date.

The Department would also like to acknowledge the work of council staff since the scheme was introduced in September 2014 and their work to promote energy efficiency and reduce the effects of fuel poverty in their council areas.

Next Steps and queries

From 1 September 2023 the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) will act as the single delivery provider for the AWS. As part of their proposal NIHE will also confirm the contact details for the Scheme going forward. My team are currently liaising with NIHE on the details and further communication will be made as soon as possible.

With regards to Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) [TUPE], the Department's understanding is that no function is transferring from councils to the NIHE as the basis of the Scheme is changing to an application-based Scheme. Therefore, TUPE would not apply in this case. However, as NIHE are developing their proposal to deliver the AWS, they will be confirming the position regarding TUPE.

The Department are committed to maintaining a 'worst first' approach and will ensure that this change to scheme delivery, is communicated in a way that is easily understood by future applicants.

The Department also looks forward to engaging with councils in the near future, as it develops proposals for an energy efficiency scheme to replace the AWS.

I hope that you find this information useful.



Department for
Communities
www.communities-ni.gov.uk

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Yours sincerely,

Adrian Boyce
Head of Affordable Warmth and Energy

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ITEM 6

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Community and Wellbeing Committee
Date of Meeting	21 June 2023
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Environmental Health, Protection and Development
Date of Report	01 June 2023
File Reference	CW22
Legislation	Food Safety (NI) Order 1991
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below: N/A
Subject	Food Service Plan Review
Attachments	None

Delivery of the Food Service Plan 2022/2023**Background**

This report demonstrates the delivery of the Food Service Plan 22/23 which was approved by Council on 28 September 2022. The plan set out the numbers of inspections and activities to be carried out by the Food Control team during the year.

Food Hygiene and food standards interventions are carried out as defined in the Food Law Code of Practice and priority has been given to higher risk premises and manufacturers. Intervention activities have been prioritised in accordance with the advice provided by the.

Throughout the year the Food Standards Agency has carried out quarterly temperature checks to assess resources on the delivery of food controls.

Service Delivery

During the year the food service has had some movement of experienced officers, long-term illness, and an increased number of newly registered premises. In general, there has been a decline in standards of premises, in particular structural repairs,

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and an increase in pest activity. This has also been experienced in other Council areas and may be due to a combination of Covid-19 recovery and the increase in utility, commodity, and food prices.

An inspection programme was implemented to include the outstanding inspections from 21/22 which amalgamated due to Covid-19 restrictions.

The tables below show the total number of food hygiene and food standards inspections completed in the year 22/23 including the backlog from 2021 and newly registered food businesses. The figures show that the food team have met or exceeded the targets in almost all the risk categories.

Food Hygiene Inspections

Food Hygiene risk rating of premises.	Inspections due in 2022-2023	Backlog inspections 2021	Total number of inspections due in 2021-2023 (Including backlog)	Inspections completed 2022-2023 (includes new premises)
A	0	0	0	3
B	21	43	64	64
C	54	34	88	158
D	36	90	126	117
E	122	38	160	160
Total	233	205	395	502

Food Standards Inspections

Food Standards risk rating of premises.	Inspections due in 2022-2023	Backlog inspections 2021	Total number of inspections due in 2021-2023 (Including backlog)	Inspections completed 2022-2023
A	7	0	7	7
B	32	27	59	70
C	240	62	302	321
Total	279	89	368	398

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New Business Registrations

All food businesses are legally required to register with the Local Authority. 181 new businesses were registered during 22/23 which is a 38% increase on the previous year and has created pressure on the team as new businesses are required to be inspected within 28 days of registration.

Investigation of food poisoning and other infectious diseases

Investigation of food poisoning is provided by Council on behalf of the Public Health Agency. The Food Service Plan estimated 16 individual cases per year, however, this year the team have undertaken 82 investigations regarding infectious diseases. 66 cases (80.5%) of these were reported from the Public Health Agency and 16 (19.5%) cases were reported by members of the public alleging illness from food consumed within the Borough.

Further information

The Council provides a comprehensive service to consumers and food businesses such as education, advice and signposting to other resources e.g. Food Standards Agency on line allergen training.

Sampling

The Northern Ireland Food Managers Group policy for food sampling been implemented within the Council's Food Control Service. The target number of bacteriological samples for routine analysis is 12 per week totalling 650-700 for the year. During 22/23 615 ready to eat food samples were collected with the results showing 90.5 % satisfactory and 9.5% unsatisfactory. Unsatisfactory samples are taken again along with advice given to the business until a satisfactory result is received. Unsatisfactory samples may arise from poor handling practices, poor temperature control or incorrect storage conditions.

The service also took part in a national survey regarding hygiene standards in take away sandwich shops/cafes which involved taking nine sample swabs for indicator organisms such as Listeria from ready to eat surfaces. 33% of the swabs were unsatisfactory and were re-sampled and reported as satisfactory. There was a small shortfall of 35 samples which is mainly due to bank holidays.

The Food service plan targeted 318 routine chemical samples to be taken. 104 chemical samples were collected and analysed for composition and labelling, allergens, and food complaints 50.9% were non-complaint for labelling, 49.1% were complaint. The reduction in number was due to budget restraints.

The Food Control Service assists the business to achieve compliance with the labelling regulations and provides guidance in new product development. The service participated in an FSA survey on the nutritional content of children's restaurant meals. 8 meals were collected for analysis as part of a Northern Ireland project. Results of this survey are pending.

Complaints and Service Requests

The food section responded to 491 complaints and service requests mainly from members of the public. Of these 175 related to hygiene standards in premises or issues with food products. All service requests are responded to within two days,

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however depending on the nature of the request they may be acted on immediately such as evidence of an imminent risk to public health e.g., rodents in a commercial kitchen.

Enforcement Actions

The service operates within the Councils generic Regulatory Services Enforcement policy which includes an appendix providing specific information on food safety. A summary of the formal enforcement activity for the year is summarised below.

Hygiene Improvement Notice	10
Remedial Action Notice	1
Voluntary Closure	4

Advice and Education

As outlined in the Food Service Plan officers have provided advice and education to businesses including the following:

- providing free food hygiene training to 3 volunteer catering groups in church settings
- facilitating a food safety talk to event managers at SERC
- engaging with food vendors at Sea Bangor in June 2022
- awarded a Gold Award for Caloriewise to the SERC Bangor campus café

2023/2024

A food Service Plan for 2023/24 is currently under development and will be presented to Council at the September 2023 meeting.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes the successful delivery of the Environmental Health Protection and Developments Food Service Plan on behalf of the Council.

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ITEM 7

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Community and Wellbeing Committee
Date of Meeting	21 June 2023
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Environmental Health, Protection and Development
Date of Report	25 May 2023
File Reference	CW61
Legislation	Food Safety (NI) Order 1991
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Public Analysts Services
Attachments	None

Article 27(1) of the Food Safety (NI) Order 1991 requires that the Council appoint one or more persons (Public Analyst(s)) to act as Analyst(s) within the district of the Council.

Furthermore, the Framework Agreement on Official Feed and Food Controls by Local Authorities, amendment of 5 April 2010, Chapter 2, paragraph 12.8, states that Ards and North Down Borough Council shall ensure that a Food Analyst is appointed to carry out examinations and analyses of food samples. In making these appointments, all relevant legal requirements and Codes of Practice shall be satisfied.

In 2021 Belfast City Council had undertaken the procurement on behalf of the 11 Councils. The Public Analyst had been awarded a two year contract in 2021 which had 2 x 1 year extensions. The Current Public analyst is Public Analyst Scientific Services Ltd.154 Business Park, Valiant Way, Wolverhampton, WV9 5GB. It is therefore proposed that the current Public Analyst contract is extended for a further year.

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The qualifications required by Analysts are set out in the Food Safety (Sampling and Qualifications) Regulations (NI) 2013. The Environmental Health Protection and Development service is satisfied that the following persons, who are employed by Public Analyst Scientific Services, fulfil the requirements of the Regulations for appointment as Public Analysts on behalf of the Council.

Duncan Kenelm Arthur BSc, MChemA, CChem, MRSC

Nigel Kenneth Payne MSc, MChemA, CChem, MRSC

Lilian Emma Jane Downie MChem, MChemA, CChem, MRSC

Michelle Evans BSc, MChemA, CChem, MRSC

Donna Hanks BSc, MChemA, MRSC

Mary Butts MSc MChemA MRSC

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council approves an extension of the above Company and persons as Public Analysts to the Council under Article 27(1) of the Food Safety (NI) Order 1991, effective from January 2023.

Unclassified

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ITEM 8

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Community and Wellbeing Committee
Date of Meeting	21 June 2023
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Environmental Health, Protection and Development
Date of Report	02 June 2023
File Reference	PCA100
Legislation	The Quality of Bathing Water Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Sea Swimming Update on Bathing Waters in ANDBC - Response to Notice of Motion
Attachments	Appendix Letter to Councils seeking confirmation of BWO status April 2023- Ards and North Down Borough Council

Further to a Motion agreed at Council in January 2022, Officers wish to update Members on progress in relation to increasing the number of designated bathing waters in the Borough.

The Environmental Health Protection and Development Service have been in discussion with DAERA since the motion was agreed, primarily to discuss concerns about water quality at beaches nominated through DAERA's public consultation exercise.

A meeting was held with DAERA and Northern Ireland Water (NIW) in August 2022 to discuss Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) at nominated sites. At this meeting NIW provided data in relation to the CSO at Brompton Bay, which was previously believed to present a risk to bathers due to its regular discharging at the beach. However, there has been significant investment to upgrade infrastructure at Brompton Bay, which should ensure that discharges during the bathing season are

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unlikely to occur. NIW also provided reassurance that CSOs did not present a significant risk at Skippingstone Beach or Donaghadee Harbour. Following the meeting DAERA agreed to write to the Council in due course and ask us to confirm our willingness to act as Bathing Water Operator (BWO), at beaches that met beach user criteria.

A formal request was received from DAERA on 21st April 2023, asking for the Council to act as BWO at two candidate beaches: -

**Brompton Bay, Bangor
Donaghadee Harbour**

Water quality is currently being tested at the candidate beaches and DAERA have invited BWOs to display the results of monitoring at their sites. If this is approved by Council, it will be temporary signage as formal signs must be produced if the beaches become fully designated. We would intend to attach QR codes to existing Council signage at the candidate beaches, which link to water quality information on our website.

A process will now be undertaken by DAERA to formally reveal the identity of the locations as Designated Bathing Waters as per The Quality of Bathing Water Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council approve that Officers continue to work with DAERA and accepts the role of Bathing Waters Operator for Brompton Bay, Bangor and Donaghadee Harbour following the formal identification of these sites as designated bathing waters. It is further recommended that Council approves that temporary signage is erected placed at the candidate beaches, to inform the public of water quality at that location.



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

www.daera-ni.gov.uk

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Stephen Reid,
Chief Executive,
Ards and North Down Borough Council
Stephen.Reid@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk

DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division
1st Floor
Klondyke Building
Cromac Avenue
Belfast
BT7 2JA

Telephone: 028 9056 9593

Email: bwr2022@daera-ni.gov.uk

Our reference: BWR2022

Date: 21 April 2023

Dear Stephen

2022/23 REVIEW OF BATHING WATERS – CONFIRMATION OF BATHING WATER OPERATOR AT CANDIDATE SITES

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs has completed a review of Bathing Waters over 2022/23, during which popular candidate bathing water sites nominated through a public consultation were surveyed over the 2022 bathing season.

You may recall that you were contacted in July 2021 as part of a pre-consultation exercise seeking nominations for sites in your area where the Council would be prepared to take on the role of Bathing Water Operator. You were also contacted following the public consultation in April 2022, to notify you of the sites that had received significant number of nominations in the consultation.

At that time, you indicated that you did not wish to pursue the identification of additional Bathing Waters in your Council Area.

This letter is to advise that the Department has completed its evaluation and survey of candidate sites nominated by the public, and preliminary criteria for identification

have been met at the following sites in your council area. Confirmation of a Bathing Water Operator is required for these sites to be identified in regulation. The statutory responsibilities are summarised at Annex 1.

- Brompton Bay Bangor
- Donaghadee Harbour

I would be grateful if you could confirm if you are willing to act as Bathing Water Operator for the publicly nominated sites above by 12/05/2023. If this is not possible, I would be grateful if you could let me know. Please send all correspondence in this regard to bwr2022@daera-ni.gov.uk

It is the Department's intention to publish the report of the review post the Council elections in May/June 2023 including those sites which will be taken forward for formal identification through the Regulations.

The public consultation also sought views on the length of the bathing season, which currently runs from 1 June – 15 September. A significant proportion of respondents requested that the bathing season be extended to accommodate year-round bathing, and the review will recommend that the Department undertakes a process of consultation on the impacts of any change on stakeholders, including Councils as Bathing Water Operators.

I am happy to assist with any queries you may have through the address bwr2022@daera-ni.gov.uk

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Owen Lyttle
Director - DAERA Marine & Fisheries Division

ANNEX 1**Summary of Bathing Water Operator Responsibilities**

Northern Ireland has 26 identified bathing waters which must meet stringent water quality standards under The Quality of Bathing Water Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008. The Regulations aim to protect public health and the environment by monitoring water quality at coastal and inland waters where there is an appropriate body willing to take on the statutory responsibilities of Bathing Water Operator for the site, it is considered safe to bathe, and the site is used by a large number of bathers.

The responsibilities placed on a Bathing Water Operator by the Quality of Bathing Water Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008¹ are summarised below:

- Bathing Water Operators must ensure that signage at a bathing water includes the information set out in the guidance for Bathing Water Operators

When Bathing Water Operators become aware of pollution incidents/ abnormal situations/ exceptional weather events that could be considered a risk to human health they should:

- consult DAERA (Department of Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs).
- inform DAERA's pollution hotline on 0800 807 060.
- take appropriate management measures to protect bathers' health.
- provide information to the public.
- where necessary, remove any waste.
- and, if necessary, issue temporary advice against bathing.

Where DAERA (the Department) has issued a notice requiring Bathing Water Operators to comply with the Bathing Water Regulations:

- comply with and implement the measures which are specified in the notice;
- provide the Department with any information it requires in carrying out its functions under the Bathing Water Regulations.
- display the current classification of the bathing water provided by DAERA and where appropriate, any advice against bathing.

Where a bathing water receives a poor classification:

- in the following bathing season, signs must display the appropriate classification and the symbol advising the public against bathing. Information must also be provided about why the site is not recommended for bathing.

¹ [The Quality of Bathing Water Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2008 SR No. 231](#)

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ITEM 9

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Community and Wellbeing Committee
Date of Meeting	21 June 2023
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Community & Culture
Date of Report	05 June 2023
File Reference	
Legislation	Local Government Act (NI) 2014
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Community and Culture Q4 Performance
Attachments	None

Context

Members will be aware that Council is required, under the Local Government Act 2014, to have in place arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions. To fulfil this requirement Council approved the Performance Management Policy and Handbook in October 2015. The Performance Management Handbook outlines the approach to Performance Planning and Management process as:

- Community Plan – published every 10-15 years
- Corporate Plan – published every 4 years (Corporate Plan Towards 2024 in operation)
- Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) – published annually (for publication 30 September 2022)
- Service Plan – developed annually (approved April/May 2022)

The Council's 18 Service Plans outline how each respective Service will contribute to the achievement of the Corporate objectives including, but not limited to, any relevant actions identified in the PIP.

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Reporting approach

The Service Plans will be reported to relevant Committees on a quarterly basis as undernoted:

Reference	Period	Reporting Month
Quarter 1 (Q1)	April – June	September
Q2	July – September	December
Q3	October – December	March
Q4	January - March	June

The report for Quarter 4 2022-23 is attached.

Key points to note:

- Community consultation and engagement in preparation for the PEACE PLUS programme has concluded and 828 people have been involved to date. The Programme has not yet been formally launched by SEUPB.

Key achievements:

- A new Education Programme for the Museum is now in place, following the appointment of an Education Officer.
- There have been some key achievements including the Community Safety multi agency meetings that have been held, including the standing forums for Ards Blair Mayne, Aurora and multi-agency meetings in relation to ASB at Helens Bay beach. These meetings have been extremely beneficial for the collective engagement of key stakeholders including the PSNI, Community Safety, Youth Services and Street Pastors, working together to reduce ASB.
- Increased engagement in a number of schools in the Borough with partner agencies in relation to asb issues.

Emerging issues:

- The number of young people recruited to the Youth Voice Programme has increased and a rolling programme of recruitment is underway with further recruitment scheduled for September 2023.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes the report.














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Quarterly Performance Report - Community and Culture


Generated on: 05 June 2023

Last Update Q4 2022/23

Performance Data Traffic Light Icon	PI Short Name	Performance Data Current Value	Performance Data Current Target
	Establish a pilot Social Supermarket within the Borough	100%	100%
	% spend against budget	90.31%	100%
	Community consultation and engagement for the PEACE PLUS Plan commenced	100%	80%
	% staff attendance	95.94%	95%
	% staff receiving team briefings	100%	100%
	No of people volunteering within the service	9	10
	Create a one stop shop for Community Volunteers	0%	100%
	Delivery of an annual bursary for artists with a disability	Yes	Yes
	No of Creative Class sessions delivered (cumulative)	71	70
	Museum Education programme developed	Yes	Yes
	Design and deliver the Queens Jubilee Grants scheme	100%	0%
	Number of grant programmes delivered	8	7
	No of Council community-based summer schemes delivered	9	0

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Performance Data Traffic Light Icon	PI Short Name	Performance Data Current Value	Performance Data Current Target
	No of Community Led Summer Schemes delivered	3	0
	Support the delivery of 2 additional Summer Schemes	2	0
	Improved Confidence in Policing	0	75%
	Number of Community Safety Education programmes delivered to Schools/Community Groups	45	6
	Number of Community Safety multi-agency meetings attended (cumulative)	43	30
	No of young people recruited into the Ards and North Down Youth Voice	20	20

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RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council

Unclassified

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ITEM 10

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Community and Wellbeing Committee
Date of Meeting	21 June 2023
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Community & Culture
Date of Report	05 June 2023
File Reference	PCSP AND 5
Legislation	Justice Act (NI) 2011
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Reconstitution of PCSP 2023/2024
Attachments	None

Following Council elections in May 2023 the NI Policing Board commenced the process to appoint Independent Members to the PCSPs in 2024.

The appointment process consists of three stages which is provided for in Schedule 1 of the Justice Act (NI) 2011 and follows guidance outlined in the Code of Practice for the Appointment of Independent Members published by the Department of Justice.

- **Stage 1** – Pre-launch activity including targeted publicity and advertising campaign, application process and eligibility sift.
- **Stage 2** – Councils identifying a pool of candidates who are suitable for appointment, shortlisting/interviews taking place at Council level and a list of 'appointable' candidates provided to the Board by each Council; and
- **Stage 3** – The Policing Board appoints independent members to the partnerships.

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Stage 1 of the process was supposed to commence on 30 June 2023, however due to the issues connected with the Northern Ireland Budget the commencement date has been provisionally moved to 1 September 2023 (depending on clarification for the NI Policing Board budget by that date).

The Policing Board will be appointing HR experts to carry out the role of external HR provider for all Councils. The role of HR experts will be to support Council panels and ensure a consistent approach to the process. This is the same process as used in past reconstitutions in 2015 and 2019.

In 2019, Board officials worked with Council HR Managers and PCSP Managers to confirm those appointed to recruitment panels and it is likely this step of the process will commence by autumn 2023.

The Policing Board will require that Council have selected three Councillors to be appointed to the interview panel and the two reserve Councillors are available as back up. They all will receive appropriate training. The five Members should be from the ten Members appointed to PCSP.

The training will involve sessions on best practice in shortlisting/interviews, good governance for panels and key roles and responsibilities. Panel members will also be walked through the process and paperwork that they will be using. In 2019 a bespoke training session was also provided for Panel Chairs to support them in the duties of their role, and it is likely this will be replicated.

Stage 2 will commence in late 2023 (assuming a commencement date of 1 September for the application process) when shortlisting meetings and interview days will take place involving the three Councillors appointed by Ards and North Down Borough Council.

Stage 3 will proceed in line with the current Code of Practice, and it is anticipated that formal reconstitution will occur on 1 June 2024 with the appointment of the new independent members.

The current independent Members will therefore stay in place until 31 May 2024.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council appoint three Councillors to sit on an interview panel to select new independent members and also appoints two Councillors in reserve for contingency purposes.

Unclassified

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

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Community and Wellbeing Committee
Date of Meeting	21 June 2023
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Community & Culture
Date of Report	16 May 2023
File Reference	HER 05 MOV/01/23
Legislation	The Local Government Act (NI) 2014
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Movilla Coffin Lids - Response to Notice of Motion
Attachments	None

A Motion agreed in March 2023 that "Officers write in response to Historic Environment Division expressing concern that a reinstallation of the Movilla Stones to the Movilla Abbey walls might risk further damage to the stones, what reassurance can HED give that this will not be the case, whether alternative means of display of the stones has been given consideration and, if so, that Council offers assistance in this regard".

Recent correspondence (May 2023) between the Heritage Development Officer and HED's State Care Monuments Team has provided the following statement from Inspector Guillermo Santamaria:

Historic Environment Division appreciate and share the concerns raised by Ards and North Down Borough Council officers regarding reinstating the stones to the Movilla Abbey walls. The Department is not proposing to reinstall them in the previous location, which would only result in the same issues due to continued exposure to the elements. Instead we intend to restore this section of the north wall and install a new protective shelter accessible to visitors, elsewhere within the cemetery, which will appropriately house and hopefully interpretate the slabs.

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This is a high priority project for the Department and as such we are hoping to put it out to tender this year -budget dependent- to conservation specialists. As you know, the stones are currently stored safely and appropriately at Historic Environment Division's conservation depot at Moira. They have been allowed to dry out, and are now safely stored, awaiting conservation work before their return to site.

Senior Inspector Martin Keery further clarified that the Historic Environment Division had met with officers from the Parks and Cemeteries team a few years ago to discuss a viable location to display the stones once they are returned to site. The options put forward at that time will need to be revisited and further discussion between the Historic Environment Division and Council will take place once the tender goes out for the consolidation of the stones. The Historic Environment Division will keep the Heritage Officer updated on progress of the works and copied into any correspondence with other Council service units.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council, upon completion of conservation repairs, work closely with the Historic Environment Division for return of the objects for display at Movilla Abbey and for them to be located as described in this report.

Unclassified

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ITEM 12

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Community and Wellbeing Committee
Date of Meeting	21 June 2023
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Community & Culture
Date of Report	07 June 2023
File Reference	CW58
Legislation	N/A
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Community Transport Response to NoM - Letters
Attachments	Appendix 1 Letter to DfI 5 th May 2023 Community Transport Appendix 2 Letter from DfI 25 th May 2023 Community Transport

The following motion was agreed at the Council meeting on 26th April 2023, "That Council writes to the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Infrastructure highlighting the benefits of Community Transport and the Dial a Lift Service for elderly, disabled and socially isolated residents living in rural areas who depend on this service. Further request that funding is allocated on a longer-term basis to continue this vital transport service for our residents going forward".

A letter was sent on 5 May 2023 (Appendix 1) to the Permanent Secretary, Department for Infrastructure outlining the benefits of this scheme which are enjoyed by numerous residents within the borough, many of whom depend on these services as their only mode of transport, asking that the Department allocates further long-term funding to this vital transport facility for our residents.

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A letter of response was received on 25 May 2023 from the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Infrastructure.

This provides confirmation that funding will continue to be provided at 2022/23 levels until the end of July 2023. This will enable Community Transport Organisations to continue providing transport services, while the department analyses the responses to a consultation exercise that it is currently undertaking.

The letter further states that a review of Community Transport provision is intended for the longer term to ensure that both value for money and outcomes are maximised, through investment in these key services. DfI say it fully appreciates that the current circumstances remain far from ideal. The community transport organisations will be kept updated once any further information is available.

The consultation document referred to can be accessed at:

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/consultations/dfi-resource-budget-2023-24-equality-impact-assessment-consultation>

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes the above and the attached reply from the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Infrastructure.



5 May 2023

Dr Julie Harrison
Permanent Secretary
Department for Infrastructure
Room 701
Clarence Court
10-18 Adelaide Street
Belfast
BT2 8GB

Via email: julie.harrison@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk

Dear Julie

Reference: Request for Further Funding for Community Transport

At a recent meeting of Ards and North Down Borough Council it was discussed and agreed that I write to you to put on record the Council's support for Community Transport and Dial a Lift services for elderly, disabled and socially isolated residents living in rural areas.

The benefits of this scheme are enjoyed by numerous residents within the borough, many of whom depend on these services as their only mode of transport. To this end the Council would ask that the Department allocates further long-term funding to this vital transport facility for our residents.

I would be grateful if you could please consider this letter and respond accordingly.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Reid
Chief Executive



**From the Permanent Secretary
Dr Julie Harrison**

Stephen Reid
Chief Executive
Ards and North Down Borough Council

Room 701
Clarence Court
10-18 Adelaide Street
BELFAST
BT2 8GB
Telephone: (028) 9054 1175
Email: perm.sec@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk

Via email:

Stephen.Reid@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk

Your reference:
Our reference: SCORR-0224-2023

25 May 2023

Dear Stephen

Request for Further Funding for Community Transport

Thank you for your letter dated 9 May 2023 advising of the Council's support for community transport and recognised the benefits to rural people through the Dial-a-Lift services they provide and you requested that the Department allocates further long-term funding.

As you are aware, the Budget statement from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on 27 April 2023 set out final budget allocations across Northern Ireland departments for the current financial year.

The Resource Budget allocation for the Department for Infrastructure does not meet the required need and, despite taking extensive decisions to reduce expenditure and raise revenue, the estimated remaining budget shortfall for 2023/24 is £112 million.

In order to consider the implications of the budget allocation, and what, if any, mitigating measures can be taken, a public consultation has been launched seeking views on the equality impacts of the Resource Budget for 2023/24 and of potential decisions on expenditure across the department, including what the impact of ceasing to fund Community Transport would be, if such a decision was taken.

The consultation document can be accessed at:

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/consultations/dfi-resource-budget-2023-24-equality-impact-assessment-consultation>

Responses received by **12 June 2023** will be used to inform remaining decisions to be taken on the department's initial Budget allocation of 2023-24. Any further responses received before the consultation closes on 7 August 2023 will be used to inform further mitigation measures and reallocation of any additional funding available during 2023-24.

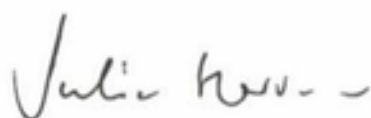
While it is important that we consider the evidence provided from the consultation between now and 12 June to understand what further decisions can or cannot be taken, I am mindful that it would be unreasonable to expect community transport providers to wait until 12 June to provide them with a decision on future funding after 30 June. I can therefore confirm that funding will continue to be provided at 2022/23 levels until the end of July 2023. This will enable them to continue providing transport services, while we analyse the consultation responses.

We also intend to review Community Transport provision for the longer term to ensure that we are maximising both value for money and outcomes, through our investment in these key services.

I am sorry that I cannot provide greater clarity at this stage but as you will see from the consultation it is important that we assess the implications of the decisions that would need to be taken and indeed those that cannot be taken to cut funding in the absence of a Minister.

I hope you find this information useful, and I fully appreciate that the current circumstances remain far from ideal. The community transport organisations will be kept updated once any further information is available.

Yours sincerely



JULIE HARRISON

Unclassified

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ITEM 13**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Community and Wellbeing Committee
Date of Meeting	21 June 2023
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Leisure Services
Date of Report	24 May 2023
File Reference	CW22
Legislation	N/A
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Leisure Services Quarter 4 Performance
Attachments	Appendix Leisure Services KPIs

Context

Members will be aware that Council is required, under the Local Government Act 2014, to have in place arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions. To fulfil this requirement Council approved the Performance Management Policy and Handbook in October 2015. The Performance Management Handbook outlines the approach to Performance Planning and Management process as:

- Community Plan – published every 10-15 years
- Corporate Plan – published every 4 years (Corporate Plan Towards 2024 in operation)
- Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) – published annually (for publication 30 September 2022)
- Service Plan – developed annually (approved April/May 2022)

The Council's 18 Service Plans outline how each respective Service will contribute to the achievement of the Corporate objectives including, but not limited to, any relevant actions identified in the PIP.

Unclassified

Reporting approach

The Service Plans will be reported to relevant Committees on a quarterly basis as undernoted:

Reference	Period	Reporting Month
Quarter 1 (Q1)	April – June	September
Q2	July – September	December
Q3	October – December	March
Q4	January - March	June

The report for Quarter 4 2022-23 for leisure services is included as Appendix 1.

Key points to note:

- By the end of this year Council saw an almost complete return to pre covid usage levels across the service area.
- Significant success across the sector despite the increasingly difficult conditions for our constituents is very pleasing but more difficult times lie ahead as the cost of living crisis will bring considerable challenges to consumer spend.
- The Council will be challenged on its high charges compared to other areas especially given the cost of living crisis and may consider a realignment of its commercial approach to leisure provision.
- 2022/23 Year end financial figures are not yet available but at month 11 the following summary table highlights the very successful year for the inhouse leisure operations against budget. This highlights a net underspend against budget of over £339,000 with only Comber, due to resurface of sportshall floor and delayed fitness suite refurbishment affecting income. Both these aspects will be resolved imminently.

- **Period 11**

Centre	Actual Net Exp	Budget Net Exp	Variance (-)/+	
ABMWLC	(15,515)	265,300	(280,815)	
CLC	176,190	165,500	+10,690	
LDP	119,908	165,700	(45,792)	
PSC	98,053	121,900	(23,847)	
Total	378,636	718,400	(339,764)	

- The above figures will help compensate for the increased cost against budget for the tariff risk for NCLT/Serco managed facilities as previously reported.

Key achievements:

- Total Hours booked in Community Centres is close to double its target which demonstrates a return to pre Covid-19 usage figures, with higher than pre Covid-19 usage in some facilities. The 2023/24 target for Total Hours Booked has been increased by 4,500.
- Footfall figures across leisure are significantly above target in most facilities

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- Sport Development programme is still expanding with particular success in number of grants awarded and attendees at sport development programmes.
- Significant net underspend via budget for the inhouse leisure team

Emerging issues:

- The requirement for a Transformation process within the Community Centres and Halls service (including amendments to staff structure, JD's, and Salaries) is now clearly apparent. Unfortunately, two recent incidents have further highlighted the requirement for an additional Supervisor, which if approved, will result in a Supervisor always being on shift during all of our opening hours across all 21 sites. This is considered a Health and Safety risk in addition to an operational and commercialisation opportunity.
- Cost of living crisis will affect consumer spend and place a challenge on the Councils relatively high charges approach to leisure provision.
- Sickness levels across the workforce are at an all time high. This potentially reflects the continual strain the staff are under impacting their health and wellbeing

Action to be taken:

- New Gym fit out for Comber Leisure Centre is now planned for early Summer 2023.
- A detailed Business Case is currently being completed which will provide rationale for the Transformation within Community Centres and Halls. It is hoped that a quick decision will allow a planned recruitment process to replace one of the two supervisors who is leaving their post in mid-June in addition to recruiting an additional Supervisor, can be commenced ASAP and at the appropriate salary scale and JD.
- The recommencement of Community Centres and Halls User Forums will begin from Q1 2023. These Forums were paused during the Covid-19 pandemic, but it is now deemed appropriate to recommence these given a return to pre Covid-19 usage figures and the requirement to engage again with our community and other user groups formally.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council note the report.

Leisure

Generated on: 20th May 2023



PI Code	Short Name	QUARTERLY							
		Q1 2022/23		Q2 2022/23		Q3 2022/23		Q4 2022/23	
		Value	Target	Value	Target	Value	Target	Value	Target
EN.02.LA01.001	% sent to recycling rather than landfill for Community Centres	48%	50%	44%	50%	51%	50%	53.9%	50%
EN.02.LA01.002	% sent to recycling rather than landfill for Leisure Centres	54%	50%	65%	50%	55%	50%	54%	50%
EX.01.LA01.001	% spend against budget	90.4%	100%	135.49%	100%	122.37%	100%	N/A See narrative	100%
EX.01.LA02.001	Number of bookings on grass pitches	612	623	1,327	1,220	2,152	1,895	2,325	2,596
EX.01.LA03.001	% customer satisfaction	96%	96%	96%	96%	96%	96%	96%	90%
EX.02.LA01.001	We will set up community user forums to encourage local community groups to make use of Community Centres	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
EX.04.LA.01.001	% staff attendance	92.87%	95%	93.04%	95%	92.24%	95%	91.54%	95%
EX.04.LA01.002	% staff reporting regular/monthly receipt of team briefings	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
LI.02.LA01.003	Maintain Quest awards for all 4 Leisure sites	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
LI.02.LA02.001	% of people who complete the PAR scheme	0%	60%	5%	60%	25%	60%	35%	60%
LI.02.LA02.002	% of people who take out a membership package at the end of a referral programme	0%	50%	100%	50%	60%	50%	25%	50%
LI.02.LA04.001	Number of fitness classes per week delivered by Leisure Ards and Serco/NCLT	199	110	210	110	234	110	226	110

PI Code	Short Name	QUARTERLY							
		Q1 2022/23		Q2 2022/23		Q3 2022/23		Q4 2022/23	
		Value	Target	Value	Target	Value	Target	Value	Target
LI.03.LA01.001	Footfall at Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex	181,500	168,750	371,500	337,500	565,000	506,250	825,000	675,000
LI.03.LA01.002	Footfall at Comber Leisure Centre	32,600	31,250	60,200	62,500	87,500	93,750	109,000	125,000
LI.03.LA01.003	Footfall at Portaferry Sports Centre	3,300	3,250	6,700	6,500	9,850	9,750	14,500	13,000
LI.03.LA01.004	Footfall at Londonderry Park	16,200	13,125	28,700	26,250	42,000	39,375	58,000	52,500
LI.03.LA01.005	Footfall at Aurora	202,243	275,000	392,246	550,000	825,352	825,000	1,019,878	1,100,000
LI.03.LA01.006	Footfall at Queen's Leisure Centre	47,468	22,500	139,829	45,000	163,657	67,500	190,172	90,000
LI.03.LA01.007	Footfall at Sportsplex	55,102	22,500	66,708	45,000	94,311	67,500	117,212	90,000
OP.01.LA05.001	Number enrolled in Learn to Swim programme	1,321	1,311	1,330	784	1,321	1,311	1,342	1,425
OP.01.LA06.001	Active Aging Memberships	370	300	382	300	382	300	394	300
OP.03.LA01.001	Number of Clubs affiliated with the Sports Forum	92	44	101	77	101	99	99	110
OP.03.LA01.003	Number of Sports Forum Grants awarded (cumulative)	63	32	106	63	143	94	171	125
OP.03.LA02.002	Number of views of online Sports Directory	2,924	175	2,711	350	1,812	525	923	700
OP.03.LA03.001	Number of individuals attending Sports Education Courses	0	0	12	0	24	25	43	50
OP.03.LA03.002	Participation in Sports Development Programmes delivered/facilitated by Council (cumulative)	364	150	1,028	900	2,186	1,200	2,292	1,500
OP.03.LA04.002	Total value of Sports Forum grants awarded (cumulative)	£15,502	£10,000	£25,243	£20,000	£29,576	£30,000	£33,421	£40,000
OP.03.LA05.001	Number of Sports Capital Grants awarded to clubs	0	0	0	0	14	10	14	10
OP.03.LA06.001	Total value of capital grants awarded	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£46,364	£45,000	£46,364	£45,000
PD.01.LA01.001	Total hours booked in Community Centres	0	4,500	5,719.5	9,000	14,555	13,500	23,342	18,000
EX.01.LA03.001	% customer satisfaction	96%	90%	96%	90%	96%	90%	96%	90%

Unclassified

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ITEM 14**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Community and Wellbeing Committee
Date of Meeting	21 June 2023
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Parks & Cemeteries
Date of Report	01 June 2023
File Reference	PCA4
Legislation	Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (NI) 2011
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Tree & Woodland Strategy (up to 2032) Year 2 Update
Attachments	Appendix Tree Maintenance Frequently Asked Questions

The purpose of this report is to update Members on the recent progress of the Council's Tree & Woodland Strategy that was agreed in March 2021. The purpose of the Tree & Woodland Strategy is to recognise the importance of trees, the many benefits they afford us and the increasingly important role they can play in mitigating the effects of climate change. The strategy is required to ensure the Council's limited budget is focused on positive planting programmes and managing tree care and risks.

Our citizens are rightly proud of the greenness of our Borough, but it is something that is not static, and which cannot be taken for granted. Trees play a significant role in improving environmental conditions and people's quality of life. Trees act as carbon sinks and absorb carbon dioxide (the main greenhouse gas) and produce oxygen. In addition, trees filter, absorb and reduce pollutants. Trees can make our borough a healthier, more attractive and more comfortable place to live and work. Trees provide food and shelter for wildlife such as birds, squirrels and insects, as well as for people. Trees have been proven to increase property value and to help relax people by lowering heart rates and reducing stress.

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Council is committed to conserving and retaining existing trees and other features where it is considered that they have landscape or amenity value and will use its powers to protect trees where necessary. Council is also committed to ensuring improved tree cover within the Borough, and to promote the importance of trees to ensure several Corporate and Community Plan objectives are met. Council has a legal 'duty of care' and will provide appropriate levels of management arrangements to ensure that users and neighbours of its land are reasonably safe. The appointment of the Tree & Woodland Officer in December 2022 will ensure continued progress can be made regarding the implementation of the Tree & Woodland strategy actions and objectives.

Scheduled Tree Works Completed in 2022/2023 Season

Ards and North Down Borough Council uses a proactive approach in the management of its tree stock. We engage an expert consultant to periodically carry out full inspection surveys for each of our sites, to assess the risk of significant harm from a tree or branch fall. The inspection surveys recommended several trees to be felled and pruned. The Council Parks Service and our contractors understands that felling of trees is a sensitive area and is only completed when necessary. An explanation of where these steps may be taken is explained in the Frequently Asked Questions section on Councils website (**Appendix 1**). Notice of scheduled tree work is also provided through the website and updated regularly.

Our aim is to carry out all scheduled tree works between 1st September and 28th February, but this is not always possible. The presence of nesting birds protected under the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 can only delay, not prevent, the felling of trees, hedgerows and woodlands. Generally, 1st March to 31st August is accepted as the breeding season. Work to hedgerows, trees and woodlands can take place at any time, but the onus is on the person doing the work to avoid committing an offence under the Wildlife (NI) Order 1985.

Kerrs Wood, Bangor: Tree work commenced in Kerrs Wood, Bangor on Monday 21st November and finished Friday 20th January 2023. Tree surgeons completed 24 tree fells, 47 maintenance pruning's and 14 monolith creations on trees which have been deemed 'High Risk' based on the tree survey report.

Ballymenoch Park, Holywood: Tree work commenced in Ballymenoch Park, Holywood on Monday 20th February and finished on Friday 10th March 2023. Tree surgeons felled 38 trees throughout Ballymenoch Park on trees which have been deemed 'High Risk' on the tree survey report.

Stricklands Glen, Bangor: Tree work commenced and finished in Stricklands Glen, Bangor on Friday 24th February 2023. Tree surgeons completed seven trees on trees which have been deemed 'High Risk' based on the tree survey report.

New Tree Plantings and Replacing Felled Trees

The Council undertakes to replace trees in numbers in excess of those that need to be felled and has an annual tree-planting programme which sees many trees of both native and interesting varieties planted over each Autumn/Winter season. For

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example, our **STAND4TREES** initiative aims to plant a tree for every person in the Borough, that is approximately 160,000 trees. Through planting season 2022-2023 in excess of 15,000 new trees were planting in the borough.

In general, trees planted will be native species such as oak, elder, hazel, hawthorn and birch, in line with Councils 'Local Biodiversity Action Plan', unless there is a specific ornamental scheme which requires cultivated species. An example of this is Castle Park (Bangor) and Ballymenoch Park (Holywood) which are regarded as historic tree arboretums and would require rare and unusual trees as replacements. This is intended to ensure that there is a diverse collection of tree colonies across the Borough.

Planting of replacement trees at Ballymenoch Park has been scheduled for tree/hedgerow planting season, November 2023 – March 2024. Parks Officers have identified several unusual species of semi mature size to be installed when the season allows, in addition to the new native hedgerow which will require 3,750 mixed native plants.

Since tree work finished at Kerrs Wood, 50 new trees have been planted throughout the area, a mix of *Fagus sylvatica* (Common Beech) and *Pinus sylvestris* (Scots Pine). Stricklands Glen has also seen *Pinus sylvestris* (Scots Pine) and *Alnus glutinosa* (Alder) trees replanted throughout the area.

Community Tree Planting Events

Multiple community tree planting days have been organised across the borough during this tree planting season. Some examples include:

On Saturday 28th and Sunday 29th January, Parks Officers held a community tree planting weekend at Castle Park, Bangor which saw over 150 members of the public plant 1,500 whips in Castle Park.

On Friday 24th February, Parks Officers organised a tree planting event at Ann Street, Portaferry where Year 9 pupils from Strangford College and St. Columba's College, as well as members of Portaferry 'In Bloom' planted 800 native tree whips.

On Saturday 11th March, members of 'Love Ballyholme' community group plant 500 whips in Brice Park, Bangor. As well as community-based planting events, Parks staff have planted more than 11,500 trees at various locations across the borough. Bringing the total number planted to 26,000 since the Tree and Woodland Strategy was launched.

New Tree Plantings and Hedgerow Plantings 2023/2024

A total of 15,000 tree whips (small trees) will be ordered this year for the up-and-coming tree and hedgerow planting season, which runs from November 2023 through February 2024. The locations of the new tree and hedgerow plantings are outlined below. For the majority of the sites, tree and hedgerow planting events will be held in partnership with local community groups and schools participating.

Unclassified

Valentine Pitches, Castle Park, Bangor
Trees Planting: 2,500 whips (3000m²)



Skipperstone Community Centre to Bloomfield Road
Hedgerow Planting: 3,500 whips (700metres)



Ballymenoch Park, Holywood, hedge 1: carriageway boundary.
Hedgerow Planting: 1,900 whips (750metres)



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Ballymenoch Park, Hollywood hedge 2: carpark to top of the park.
Hedgerow Planting: 1,900 whips (750metres)



Londonderry Park, Newtownards, canal boundary.
Hedgerow Planting: 5,000 whips (1000metres)



Ballycran Play Area, Kircubbin
Trees Planting: 250 whips (370m2)



Community Orchard Plantings

As part of Councils commitment to successfully implement the Tree and Woodland Strategy, Park Officers identified potential sites on which community orchards can be planted. This has been carried out through a process of community engagement and internal site management. The aim is to achieve a target of three new Community Orchards each year.

Community orchards are an excellent place for people to come together, providing a space for celebrations and are a source of food. They can be used as educational resource for local schools, community groups and the wider public. Trees in general can reduce stress and illness by providing psychological refreshment and a sense of wellbeing, creating character and a sense of place and permanence.

Orchards encourage healthy eating and outdoor activities improving wellbeing, as well as making our towns, villages and neighbourhoods more pleasant places to live. Tree plantations of any type can symbolize community focal points and offer aesthetic, amenity and historic value and can act as landmark features within our settlements and open countryside.

Ards and North Down now has six new community orchards, each being planted by local community groups and schools, meeting the target for this stage of the Tree and Woodland Strategy. Planting season 2022-23 seen orchards planted at Brice Park, Bangor, Londonderry Park, Newtownards and Dickson Park, Ballygowan.

Ards and North Down Orchard Locations:

- Ann Street, Portaferry
- Lawson Gardens, Portavogie
- Village Hall, Greyabbey
- Brice Park, Bangor
- Londonderry Park, Newtownards
- Cottown Open Space, Six Roads Ends
- Dickson Park, Ballygowan

Proposed Schedule of Orchard Plantings 2023/2024

Town	Location	Size (M2)	Trees
Holywood	Holywood Nature Park	1000	50
Kircubbin	Kircubbin Pavilion, Kircubbin	550	30
Comber	Laurel Bank Lane	550	30

Holywood

In May 2023, Parks Officers and members of Holywood Shared Town, identified a location of approx. 1000 square meters of grassland within Holywood Nature Park, suited to a community orchard. The orchard will contain up to 50 mixed fruit trees with consideration given to species most suited to the location.

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The orchard site will remain open and freely accessible to the community and is located on council-maintained land. Funding for trees and maintenance will be sourced by Parks Service. Hollywood Nature Park is well used by the residents of the entire borough and the orchard would provide opportunity for community education and engagement. The proposed location is within a natural setting of the nature park which is primed for further development. Multiple schools are in close proximity. This area of Hollywood Nature Park is grassland under-utilised and regularly mown as part of Parks maintenance.



Kircubbin

Through an onsite meeting in June 2023, Parks Officers and representatives from the local community of Kircubbin, identified a location approx. 550 square meters of grassland within Kircubbin Pavilion, suited to a community orchard. The orchard would contain up to 30 mixed fruit trees with consideration given to species most suited to location. The new orchard will be located close to the offices of Peninsula Healthy Living and associated community garden. The community garden already provides a host of nutritious vegetables, and this provision will be strengthened by the addition of mixed fruits. The orchard site will remain open and freely accessible to the community, located within an existing community focal point. The proposed planting will be used as an extension to the well-used park facility. Planting will be carried out in conjunction with local schools and the local community. The proposed location is within walking distance of main residential areas and the local primary school. This proposed area is grassland under-utilised and regularly mown as part of Parks maintenance.



Comber

Comber Regeneration Community Partnership (CRCP) engaged with Parks Officers to discuss a potential community orchard to be planted on approx. 550 square metres of grassland located at Laurel Bank Lane, with a target completion date of planting season 2023/24. The orchard would contain up to 30 mixed fruit trees with consideration given to species most suited to the location. The orchard site will remain open and freely accessible to the community, located within an existing community focal point.

The proposed planting will be used as an extension to the well-used park facility. Planting will be carried out in conjunction with local schools and community groups. The proposed location is within walking distance of Comber town centre and main residential areas. A primary school and large secondary school are in close proximity. This proposed area is grassland under-utilised and regularly mown as part of Parks maintenance. Under 20% of the green space within the park would be required for planting, leaving the remainder for continued use as an amenity grassland.



Calendar of Events 2023/2024

A key aim of the Tree and Woodland Strategy is to actively engage and collaborate with the community and others in valuing trees as a vital community asset. Parks Service will continue to commit to a series of events and promotional initiatives that enhance the profile of trees, provide educational opportunities, and encourage community participation. These events and promotions will be in line with local and national campaigns, such as National Tree Week - the UK's largest annual tree celebration, Love Parks Week and Seed Gathering Season. Some themes and events for 2023-24 are outlined below.

- May 2023 National Hedgerow Week
 Mental Health Awareness week

- June 2023 Veteran and Champion Tree Tour of Bangor's Castle Park

- July 2023 Love Parks Week

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September 2023	Tree Care Month Tree Seed Gathering Season
October 2023	World Apple Day
November 2023	Orchard Planting Events Hedgerow Planting Events National Tree Week
December 2023	Orchard Planting Events
January 2024	Community Tree Planting Events
February 2024	Community Tree Planting Events Orchard Planting Events
March 2024	Community Tree Planting Events Orchard Planting Events

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council note the progress of the Tree and Woodland Strategy to date and continue to support future initiatives.

Tree Maintenance Frequently Asked Questions

Ards and North Down Borough Council uses a proactive approach in the management of its tree stock. We engage an expert consultant to periodically carry out full inspection surveys for each of our sites, to assess the risk of significant harm from a tree or branch fall. The inspection surveys often recommended a number of trees to be felled and pruned.

Why are the trees surveyed?

All tree owners have a legal duty of care to make adequate provision to ensure the safe condition of their trees. Tree inspection surveys collect essential tree attributes i.e. species, location, condition, etc and provide recommendations on required works. All inspections must be carried out by a professional tree inspector with a relevant Professional Tree Inspection Qualification.

Why does a tree need pruned or felled?

The most important reason to prune any kind of tree is to get rid of dead, diseased, or damaged branches. This helps keep people, pets, wildlife and property safe from any large limbs that could fall. Pruning also promotes the health of the tree, by preventing the spread of disease and ensuring the tree uses energy to grow only the branches that are healthy. In many cases pruning encourages flowering, fruiting, and growth of certain parts of a tree, contributing to a healthy canopy of foliage.

Why does pruning happen at this time of year?

At this time of year (Autumn & Winter) many trees are not actively growing and have entered a period of dormancy. Trees store their energy in the roots throughout dormancy and do not experience the same shock, compared to pruning in the growing season. Trees can also become stressed if too much leaf area is reduced while actively growing, because this is how trees make their energy. Completing works after leaf drop makes it easier to spot dead, diseased and crossing branches that should be pruned and the structure of the crown is more visible

Do we tell residents of up-and-coming work?

Yes, we provide information on our website advising of any extensive planned tree work within facilities owned or managed by Council. However, sometimes this is not always possible, particularly when urgent work is required.

What about the impact on wildlife if a tree is pruned or felled?

Council is committed to providing people with access to a well-managed, sustainable environment where wildlife can thrive. All trees are subject to an environmental assessment prior to being worked on which will prevent work happening that impacts our wildlife and fauna. Where it is safe to do so, trees are left as a standing monolith. A monolith is a means of mitigating the risk posed by large hazardous trees, without resorting to felling. Retaining trees as monoliths provides valuable habitat for the many species that are dependent on decaying wood and cavities. Pruning to remove dead, damaged or diseased limbs helps to keep the tree healthy, prolonging its life and the habitat it provides.

Do we replace the lost trees?

The Council undertakes to replace trees in numbers in excess of those that need to be felled and has an annual tree-planting programme which sees many trees of both native and interesting varieties planted over each Autumn/Winter season. For example, our **STAND4TREES** initiative aims to plant a tree for every person in the Borough, that is

approximately 160,000 trees. Through planting season 2021-2022 in excess of 12,000 new trees were planting in the borough.

Why have a Tree & Woodland Strategy

The Council agreed a Tree & Woodland Strategy in 2021. This Strategy recognises the importance of trees, the many benefits they afford us and the increasingly important role they can play in mitigating the effects of climate change. The strategy is required to ensure the Council's limited budget is focused on positive planting programmes and managing tree care and risks. The key aims of the strategy that guides the Council's management of trees are:

1. **Community Engagement:** to actively engage and collaborate with the community and others in valuing trees as a vital community asset.
2. **Tree Planting:** to increase the native tree canopy within the Borough by planting more trees to ensure a healthy balanced tree population that positively responds to the impacts of climate change and urban expansion.
3. **Managing Trees:** to ensure good tree care, through sustainable management of the tree population and reducing risk.

To find out more about our Tree & Woodland Strategy please visit www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/trees

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ITEM 15

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Community and Wellbeing Committee
Date of Meeting	21 June 2023
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Parks & Cemeteries
Date of Report	01 June 2023
File Reference	PCA118
Legislation	N/A
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below: N/A
Subject	Wildfire Report
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Consultation Wildfires in NI Draft Strategic Way Forward June 2023 Appendix 2 - Consultation Questions Response

Background

Council received a consultation document entitled '*Wildfires in Northern Ireland - A Draft Strategic Way Forward*' from The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA).

The stakeholder consultation process for the paper will run until 20th June 2023. Council is permitted to deliver a response beyond the closing date due to Council meeting dates.

Aim of this Consultation

The current wildfire problem in Northern Ireland is purely the result of human activity with wildfires being caused by accidental or by deliberate ignition. Wildfires in Northern Ireland impact on large areas of landscape, particularly in heather or gorse dominated upland areas. These fires destroy biodiversity and affect air quality and water resources.

The Consultations recommended actions.

As a direct result of the 2011 wildfires an Interdepartmental Group was established in to develop recommendations to address the wildfire issue and a Northern Ireland Wildfire Stakeholder Group was subsequently established through which several recommended actions were delivered.

The aim of this consultation is to seek the views of key stakeholders on the proposed strategic goals and recommendation for actions. The way forward is driven by five Strategic Goals:

- To reduce the numbers of wildfires.
- To lessen the impact of wildfires on the environment, society and the economy.
- To have a framework for partnership working and shared resources for wildfire prevention, strategic planning and interagency response.
- To build resilience into those landscapes and habitats most susceptible to wildfire and reduce the risk and/or severity of wildfires.
- To have communities that are aware and prepared for wildfire events.

The Consultations recommended actions.

- Develop and implement a five-year 'Strategic Action Plan' that will deliver the Strategic Way forward.
- Strategic Wildfire Group to report annually on implementation of the above 'Strategic Action Plan'.
- A 'Strategic Wildfire Group' to undertake a 3-year review of the 'Strategic Way Forward' and the 'Strategic Action Plan'.

The completed consultation response document is attached in Appendix 2 and the template is included in Appendix 1.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council approves the consultation response.

Wildfires in Northern Ireland

Draft Strategic Way Forward

Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.



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1. Introduction:

1.1 Wildfires are a threat to people, property, wildlife and the countryside and efforts to fight them are a drain on the public purse. Wildfires in Northern Ireland impact on large areas of landscape, particularly in heather or gorse dominated upland areas. These fires destroy biodiversity and affect air quality and water resources.

1.2 The current wildfire problem in NI is purely the result of human activity with wildfires being caused by accidental or by deliberate ignition. Consequently, our wildfires are largely preventable if everyone is vigilant to the risks of wildfire especially during periods of high risk.

1.3 The UK National Risk Register 2020 , the Independent Assessment of UK Climate Risk (CCRA3) and the Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme 2019-24 have identified an increased threat of wildfires and associated impacts as a consequence of climate change and changing weather patterns. This has risks for our natural environment, biodiversity, agriculture and forestry.

1.4 The wildfire events of April and May 2011 were the catalyst for a significant change in the way that the wildfire problem in Northern Ireland was looked at. At one point the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) were tackling 140 wildfires a day. On the 2 May every NIFRS fire appliance, with the

exception of those based on Rathlin Island, were deployed at wildfire incidents across the whole of Northern Ireland. This was the busiest period in the history of the NIFRS. In total NIFRS responded to over 3000 wildfire incidents at a cost of £8m.

1.5 Forest Service, Northern Ireland Water and the farming community were significantly impacted by these 2011 wildfires. Forest Service lost an estimated 700 HA of forestry plantation valued at approximately £1m. In the Silent Valley catchment and surrounding area of the Mourne a wildfire damaged between 8-10 square kilometres of upland heath which is estimated to have cost NI Water circa £230,000 because of deterioration in raw water quality leading to increased treatment

costs. Over 5000 ha of farming agricultural land that was damaged required support payments.

1.6 These wildfires also damaged some of our most important nature conservation sites with an estimated 6,600 ha of land within designated sites was affected.

1.7 As a direct result of the 2011 wildfires an Interdepartmental Group was established in to develop recommendations to address the wildfire issue and a Northern Ireland Wildfire Stakeholder Group was subsequently established through which several recommended actions were delivered. Of particular note were: the Eastern Mourne Wildfire Project; the delivery of locally based

wildfire community awareness and engagement initiatives such as in the Belfast Hills and the Ring of Gullion; international and national liaison with key wildfire partners; joint stakeholder response at wildfires; and the establishment of an informal wildfire risk alert system. However, the spate of wildfires has continued and more needs to be done.

1.8 The proposed strategic way forward will build upon this previous work and hopes to refocus and align efforts to enable Northern Ireland to be best placed to face the wildfire challenges that lie ahead. It has been developed through a co-design approach with a wide range of government Departments and agencies and land managers and environmental bodies. The focus of the co-

design approach was to develop agreed Goals, Themes and Recommendations for Action as outlined in following sections.

2. Strategic Way Forward

2.1 The way forward is driven by 5 Strategic Goals:

- To reduce the numbers of wildfires.
- To lessen the impact of wildfires on the environment, society and the economy.
- To have a framework for partnership working and shared resources for wildfire prevention, strategic planning and interagency response.
- To build resilience into those landscapes and habitats most

susceptible to wildfire and reduce the risk and/or severity of wildfires.

- To have communities that are aware and prepared for wildfire events.

2.2 Delivery of these Strategic Goals is based around 6 Strategic Themes:

- Governance
- Engagement
- Land Management
- Response
- Policy, Legislation and Enforcement
- Evidence

2.3 Addressing and delivering against these themes collectively and in combination are key to the delivery of this framework. Collective actions will help tackle the

wildfire issue with different stakeholders bringing their own expertise and skills to one or more of the themes and its related activities.

3. Governance

3.1 The Strategic Way Forward will be governed by the following structures:

NI Strategic Wildfire Group

3.2 The main function of this group shall be to:

- Develop a Strategic Way Forward (and associated recommendations for action) for wildfires in NI.
- Oversee the Northern Ireland Wildfire Forum.

- Oversee the development of an action plan to implement the Strategic Way Forward.
- Report on the implementation of the Northern Ireland Strategic Way Forward and its recommendations for action.
- Periodically initiate a review of the Northern Ireland Strategic Way Forward taking into account feedback from the Wildfire Stakeholder Forum.

3.3 This group shall contain Departments, agencies and public bodies who have a critical role to play in delivering the strategic way forward. The group was established in March 2021.

Northern Ireland Wildfire Stakeholder Forum

- 3.4 The Stakeholder Forum shall:
- have responsibility for developing, implementing, monitoring and reviewing Action Plans to deliver the Strategic Way Forward and associated Recommendations for Action; and
 - oversee the work of local wildfire groups.

3.5 The Stakeholder Forum was established in January 2022.

Local Wildfire Groups

3.6 Local Wildfire Groups have the responsibility for:

- undertaking operational wildfire work and initiatives in specific geographic areas.

3.7 These groups will in many cases be working directly on the ground with local landowners and managers. The membership of these groups may include members of the Stakeholder Group as well as locally based partners. Currently there are two local wildfire groups operating in Northern Ireland, the Belfast Hills and the Mourne wildfire groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- 1. Develop and implement a 5yr Strategic Action Plan that will deliver the Strategic Way forward.**

- 2. Strategic Wildfire Group to report annually on implementation of Strategic Action Plan.**

- 3. Strategic Wildfire Group undertake a 3yr review of the Strategic Way Forward and the Strategic Action Plan.**

4. Engagement

4.1 It is important to make people aware of the dangers of wildfires as well as to how their actions directly or indirectly create wildfires and what the consequences of these fires can be on the environment, society and the economy.

4.2 Rising awareness and education are an important aspect of the wildfire issue and an important part of the strategic way forward. A

well-informed public will be more likely to use fire carefully and adhere to bye-laws, advice and legal restrictions / requirements and they can assist in the prevention and reporting of fires.

4.3 Engagement also means interacting with Academia and stakeholders in GB, Ireland and internationally to gain knowledge and to share best practise.

4.4 The only way to solve this problem is to work together.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- 4. Review the potential to develop of Firewise ® in communities in high-risk areas of Northern Ireland.**

- 5. Issue Wildfire Risk Alerts during periods of wildfire risk.**
- 6. Fire awareness and educational programmes developed and targeted at specific groups within the community.**
- 7. Development of a Landowner and Community Engagement communications programme.**
- 8. Establishment of Local Wildfire Groups.**
- 9. Develop International liaison / links with appropriate experts and organisations.**
- 10. Develop links with the GB and Irish Wildfire Forums / Stakeholder Groups.**

5. Land Management

5.1 The management of Northern Ireland landscapes is a key factor in managing the wildfire risk. In very simple terms this means managing the landscape and its vegetation through a variety of approaches to help reduce the risk of wildfire and the uncontrolled spread of wildfire across entire landscapes.

5.2 Many high-risk landscapes contain national and international conservations designations and are important for biodiversity and natural beauty (Areas of Special Scientific Interest, Special Area of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty).

5.3 Across Europe one of the biggest contributors to the increased risk of wildfires are unmanaged landscapes leading to a situation where vegetation has continued to accumulate across the landscape.

5.4 It is important therefore that a balance is established to maintain conservation features and agricultural productivity whilst managing the landscape to help reduce and manage the wildfire risk.

5.5 To achieve this, it will be necessary to have appropriate policies in place regarding conservation management and agricultural management on these landscapes and sites combined with wildfire management plans

across those landscapes that are at risk of wildfire.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

11. Development of Wildfire Management Plans and Response Plans for high-risk areas.

12. Develop or advocate advice and guidance about wildfire management.

13. Identify funding opportunities to support the management of wildfire risk in Northern Ireland.

14. Consider methods to increase surveillance at high-risk locations during periods of high wildfire risk.

15. Review availability of wildfire awareness and management training courses for landowners within NI.

6. Response

6.1 These are the activities associated with responding to wildfire incidents but also the training and resources required in advance of responding to a wildfire incident. The primary organisation for delivery on this activity is the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS). As well as enhancing its own wildfire capabilities, other stakeholder organisations have developed the capacity to support NIFRS at wildfire incidents, the level of support ranges from the provision of additional and sometimes specialist wildfire fighting equipment, to

provision of specialist subject matter advice to direct assistance during tactical burning operations.

6.2 This joint support during response together with the deployment and use of shared resources and skills should continue to be developed to provide a fully integrated and flexible multiagency response to wildfires across Northern Ireland.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

16. Develop a National shared wildfire resource list for Northern Ireland.

17. Develop Interagency Response.

18. Review need for additional specialist equipment or support.

19. Develop Inter-Agency and Stakeholder Awareness Training

7. Policy, Legislation and Enforcement

7.1 Policy, legislation and enforcement in the context of the Strategic Way Forward refers to activities that relate to the development or application of Government policy or legislation that has direct or indirect relevance to the control and management of wildfires in Northern Ireland such as those related to prescribed burning, burning of vegetation and arson.

7.2 It also includes wildfire investigation to take enforcement action (and to improve our understanding of why fires happen to inform future decision making).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- 20. Undertake a review of associated wildfire land management, agricultural and environmental policies in NI and compare with other countries with comparable fire risk landscapes to inform future policy development.**

- 21. Undertake a review of all existing legislation concerning burning of vegetation to assess adequacy of legislation governing wildfires and prescribed burning.**

22. Develop Post Wildfire Investigation capability in NI.

8. Evidence

8.1 Evidence should be transparent, robust and impartial. Such evidence sources are used to inform the development of policies and strategies, to support their implementation and to evaluate and measure outcomes. Evidence can also be used to help manage risks to society and the environment and help inform decision making.

8.2 Relevant evidence can include findings from existing research and development and monitoring and surveillance results, as well as from newly commissioned research and

development where there are gaps in the knowledge/evidence base.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

23. Identify NI research and evidence needs to inform prevention management

24. Development of centralised wildfire mapping and information database

25. Secure evidence to identify of high-risk areas and to support development of wildfire management / response plans.

9. Consultation Questions

9.1 In relation to the Strategic Way Forward outlined:

- **Do you agree with the 5 Strategic Goals?**

- **Do you have any comments to make in relation to the 5 Strategic Goals?**

- **Do you agree with the 6 Strategic Themes?**

- **Do you have any comments to make in relation to the 6 Strategic Themes?**

- **Do you agree with the Recommendations for Action?**

- **Do you have any comments to make in relation to the Recommendations for Action?**

9.2 Please send any responses you have to
wildfireinfo@daera-ni.gov.uk

By post to :

Colum McDaid

Northern Ireland Environment Agency

Natural Environment Division

Klondyke Building

Cromac Avenue

Gasworks Business Park

Malone Lower

Belfast BT7 2JA

By 5pm on Tuesday 20th June 2023

10. Next Steps

10.1 Following on from the outcome of this consultation, responses will be considered and the Strategic Way Forward will be finalised. An associated Action Plan to implement the Recommendations will be developed by the NI Wildfires Stakeholders Forum.

10.2 The Action Plan will then be implemented, monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis by the NI Stakeholders Forum and the NI Strategic Wildfire Group.



For further information:

Natural Environment Division
Klondyke Building
Cromac Avenue
Gasworks Business Park
Malone Lower
Belfast BT7 2JA

Colum McDaid

Email: wildfireinfo@daera-ni.gov.uk



An Agency within the Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**
www.daera-ni.gov.uk



**INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE**

Consultation Questions

In relation to the Strategic Way Forward outlined:

5 Strategic Goals

- To reduce the numbers of wildfires.
- To lessen the impact of wildfires on the environment, society and the economy.
- To have a framework for partnership working and shared resources for wildfire prevention, strategic planning and interagency response.
- To build resilience into those landscapes and habitats most susceptible to wildfire and reduce the risk and/or severity of wildfires.
- To have communities that are aware and prepared for wildfire events.

Do you agree with the 5 Strategic Goals?

Yes

Do you have any comments to make in relation to the 5 Strategic Goals?

No

6 Strategic Themes

- Governance
- Engagement
- Land Management
- Response
- Policy, Legislation and Enforcement
- Evidence

Do you agree with the 6 Strategic Themes?

Yes

Do you have any comments to make in relation to the 6 Strategic Themes?

No

Do you agree with the Recommendations for Action?

Yes

Do you have any comments to make in relation to the Recommendations for Action?

Yes

Recommendations for Action

Governance

- Develop and implement a 5yr Strategic Action Plan that will deliver the Strategic Way forward.

- **Strategic Wildfire Group to report annually on implementation of Strategic Action Plan.**
- **Strategic Wildfire Group undertake a 3yr review of the Strategic Way Forward and the Strategic Action Plan.**

Engagement

- **Review the potential to develop of Firewise ® in communities in high-risk areas of Northern Ireland.**
- **Issue Wildfire Risk Alerts during periods of wildfire risk.**
- **Fire awareness and educational programmes developed and targeted at specific groups within the community.**
- **Development of a Landowner and Community Engagement communications programme.**
- **Establishment of Local Wildfire Groups.**
- **Develop International liaison / links with appropriate experts and organisations.**
- **Develop links with the GB and Irish Wildfire Forums / Stakeholder Groups.**

Land Management

- **Development of Wildfire Management Plans and Response Plans for high-risk areas.**
- **Develop or advocate advice and guidance about wildfire management.**
- **Identify funding opportunities to support the management of wildfire risk in Northern Ireland.**
- **Consider methods to increase surveillance at high-risk locations during periods of high wildfire risk.**
- **Review availability of wildfire awareness and management training courses for landowners within NI.**

Response

- **Develop a National shared wildfire resource list for Northern Ireland.**
- **Develop Interagency Response.**
- **Review need for additional specialist equipment or support.**
- **Develop Inter-Agency and Stakeholder Awareness Training**

Policy, Legislation, Enforcement

- **Undertake a review of associated wildfire land management, agricultural and environmental policies in NI and compare with other countries with comparable fire risk landscapes to inform future policy development.**
- **Undertake a review of all existing legislation concerning burning of vegetation to assess adequacy of legislation governing wildfires and prescribed burning.**
- **Develop Post Wildfire Investigation capability in NI.**

Evidence

- **Identify NI research and evidence needs to inform prevention management.**

- **Development of centralised wildfire mapping and information database.**
- **Secure evidence to identify of high-risk areas and to support development of wildfire management / response plans.**

Comments

Engagement needs to be wide ranging and delivered in as many formats/media platforms as possible to target a wide audience. While there are wildfire hotspots, the people using them come from all over Northern Ireland and beyond, so targeting just that local area/community will not fully address the issue.

In high-risk settings, prominent warning and advice signage needs to be placed at all main entry points to those landscapes. Having actual Engagement Rangers on the ground talking to people daily will further reinforce the message to those actively using the landscapes and who may have missed or ignored the signs.

The setting of fires in any scenario, should be prohibited, by law, during the summer months, at least from April until the end of September and fines imposed to all who breach it. Licences could be issued for anyone wishing to undertake prescribed burning so that the risks can properly be assessed before the grant of a licence. Countries such as Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovenia have all totally or partially banned fires.

Land management needs to be reinforced. If vegetation requires cutting back/reduced then this must only be done in the winter and then burnt in controlled pyres, not the indiscriminate burning of gorse or stubble that previously/currently occurs. If fires of this nature are discovered on land outside the winter months, then the landowner should be deemed responsible and should face penalties. This will also protect nesting birds and other creatures such as the common lizard, not to mention countless invertebrates, as well as protecting upland areas, preventing the release of previously sequestered carbon in the underlying peat deposits of blanket bogs.

DAERA needs to work with farmers to ensure that fire risks are minimised and ensure that fire breaks are created, where necessary and that the land and unwanted vegetation is managed in a responsible way to minimise fire risk.

Legislation needs to be stronger. Policy/legislation should reinforce appropriate land management techniques as outlined above. In wider terms, items such as disposable BBQ's should be banned from sale, they are not sustainable and pose a significant fire risk as well as ending up as discarded litter as usually people don't take them away with them as they can still too warm, thus leading to the fire risk. In many cases bins and benches have been damaged by inappropriate use of these disposable BBQ's, as well as wildfires being attributed to them. In 2022, a number of supermarkets withdrew disposable BBQ's from sale during a drought period in England including Marks & Spenser, Morrisons, Asda, Lidl, Tesco, Sainsbury's, Aldi, and Waitrose. Marks & Spenser, Waitrose and Aldi then announced they would no longer stock disposable barbecues on a permanent basis because of the potential detrimental impact they have on the environment and wildlife. The Co-op and Morrisons

have also ceased selling them. Online grocery specialist Ocado has also stopped sales. Iceland stopped short of a total ban, saying it has removed barbecues from sale in high-risk areas such as national parks and is reviewing the situation (England only).

In England Local Authorities have powers to restrict the use of disposable BBQ's, using a Public Spaces Protection Order, made under Section 59 of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. Targeted action has already been taken in Dorset, Brighton and Hove, Olney, Kent and Fylde. For example, Kent County Council banned disposable BBQ's from a 14 mile stretch of coastline and imposed £100 fine if found using them. There are also numerous petitions calling for a ban on disposable BBQ and Chinese Lanterns to minimise fire risk and impact on the environment and wildlife.

Similar sale restrictions and fines could be imposed in Northern Ireland. There is no demonstrable need to have BBQ's (especially disposable ones) in a natural setting when other types of food can easily be consumed. If people do wish to consume cooked food in the outdoors, then camping stoves are readily available and could be used as an alternative. Appropriate warnings and advice could be attached to the sale of the stoves/gas that specifically highlights the dangers of wildfires. If Firewise becomes a brand/recognised label, then the camping stove manufacturers could carry the Firewise logo on their packaging.

Resources would be required to deliver the strategic goals. Legislative, licensing and enforcement mechanisms would be required, with the need for adequate staffing to deliver the goals. Clear agency responsibility for each task and its delivery needs identified.

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ITEM 16**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Community and Wellbeing Committee
Date of Meeting	21 June 2023
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Parks & Cemeteries
Date of Report	25 May 2023
File Reference	CW4
Legislation	N/A
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Victoria Primary School Play Area Letters - Response to Notice of Motion
Attachments	Appendix 1 Letter to DfI 8th March 2023 Appendix 2 Letter from DfI 15th March 2023 Appendix 3 Letter to DfI 24 th May 2023

Members will recall the update brought on Victoria Primary School Play Area in November 2022. As a result, the following recommendation was adopted by Council:

“To Ballyhalbert Sports Clubs no longer avail of facilities at Glastry College (due to facilities being closed to the public in winter months). Further that Council express concerns at lack of lighting and proper footway link connecting the village to Glastry College and write to the Department for Infrastructure requesting the upgrade of existing footway on Victoria Road to include widening curbing along with lighting to promote a safer route to school and connecting the village to Glastry College via a safe and assessable footway.

Furthermore, the possibility for a project fronting Victoria Primary Ballyhalbert could potentially be added to the list of projects being put forward for Peace Plus funding and considered by the Peace Plus Partnership and progressed through the process

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outlined above in the report. Consideration should also be given to the other sites identified in the Play Strategy for older children provision as part of the Peace Plus process that could be delivered on Council land.

Furthermore, that officers bring back a report to Council following the conclusion of the Peace Plus consultation advising members of any council applications going forward to deliver facilities for children and young people across the Borough".

In relation to writing to the Department for Infrastructure (Dfi) a letter was sent on 8th March 2023 (Appendix 1). A response was received 15th March 2023 (Appendix 2). A further letter for clarity was sent 24th May 2023 (Appendix 3). For Members information, as a result of a follow up query, Dfi confirmed that an up-to-date assessment of the need was carried out in March 2023, and they remain of the opinion that that unfortunately Victoria Road currently does not meet the criteria for street lighting as requested.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes the above and the attached reply from the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Infrastructure.

Your Ref: SCORR-0002-2023

8 March 2023

Dr Julie Harrison
Permanent Secretary
Department for Infrastructure
Room 701
Clarence Court
10-18 Adelaide Street
Belfast
BT2 8GB

Dear Julie

**RE: Improved Footway and Provision of Street Lighting on Victoria Road,
Ballyhalbert to Glastry College.**

Thank you for your letter dated 17 January 2023 which was reported to the Council's Community and Wellbeing Committee at its meeting on 15 February 2023.

As you may have expected, the committee expressed disappointment at the response provided and Council has asked for some clarity on the matter which I hope you can provide. In particular, you made reference to an assessment of this rural location and as a result, the criteria for the provision of street lighting was found not to be met. The criteria you cited included density of housing and road safety.

The Council has asked for further information on the standard applied in relation to these two criteria and the local data and evidence against which the standard was used. Members have also queried when the assessment was carried out as housing in the area has increased dramatically over recent years. For example, when the current development of 400 units is complete the number of houses in the village will have quadrupled since the 1990s.

I trust you will be able to give this matter your attention and provide these further updates, as requested by members, for their consideration.

Yours sincerely



Stephen Reid
Chief Executive



**From the Permanent Secretary
Dr Julie Harrison**

Stephen Reid
Chief Executive
Ards and North Down Borough Council

catherine.mcdowell@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk

Room 701
Clarence Court
10-18 Adelaide Street
BELFAST
BT2 8GB

Telephone: (028) 9054 1175

Email: Julie.Harrison@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk

Your reference:

Our reference: SCORR-0115-2023

15 March 2023

Dear Stephen

IMPROVED FOOTWAY AND PROVISION OF STREET LIGHTING ON VICTORIA ROAD, BALLYHALBERT TO GLASTRY COLLEGE.

Thank you for your letter of 8 March 2023 seeking clarity on how the Department applies its criteria when assessing requests for street lighting.

Criteria for the provision of road lighting as set out in the Department's current policy states that lighting will not normally be provided beyond the extents of the urban limit, which in this case is the extent of the 30mph speed limit. The policy does however also set out certain circumstances when lighting may be provided beyond this limit, which are: when frontage development is continuous beyond the urban limit; there is another lit area within 300m; or when analysis of night-time collision statistics indicates that provision of lighting as a collision remedial measure may be justified.

The Roads team have completed an assessment which regrettably indicates that none of the above-mentioned applicable criteria are met at this location.

Whilst I am sorry I'm unable to accede to your request on this occasion, I hope this information helps to explain the basis for the decision.

Yours sincerely

JULIE HARRISON

Your Ref: SCORR-0002-2023

24 May 2023

Dr Julie Harrison
Permanent Secretary
Department for Infrastructure
Room 701
Clarence Court
10-18 Adelaide Street
Belfast
BT2 8GB

Dear Julie

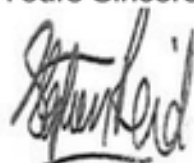
**RE: Improved Footway and Provision of Street Lighting on Victoria Road
Ballyhalbert to Glastry College**

Thank you for the attached reply dated 15 March 2023 which was in response to my letter of 8 March 2023. The additional information on the standards applied in the engineer's assessment is helpful. However, when the Members of Council considered these they asked me to refer you to an unanswered question.

This is when was the assessment referred to carried out? Housing in the area has increased dramatically over recent years. For example, when the current development of 400 units is complete the number of houses in the village will have quadrupled since the 1990s.

I trust you will be able to provide a further response in due course so that this may be reported back to Members.

Yours Sincerely



Stephen Reid
Chief Executive

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ITEM 17**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Community and Wellbeing Committee
Date of Meeting	21 June 2023
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Parks & Cemeteries
Date of Report	05 June 2023
File Reference	PCA4
Legislation	None
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Commemorative Tree Planting
Attachments	None

Members will be aware that Council have facilitated the planting of commemorative trees on Council land in conjunction with local groups and organisations.

Historically requests have been received on an ad hoc basis as a result of a written request from interested organisations or other groups. A policy on when and how to approve such requests was developed and approved by Council, to ensure fairness, equity of treatment, ensure compliance with any statutory obligations, and provide satisfaction that approved request are within the context of any other approved policies and plans. For example, the trees on open spaces which are accessible and visible to all, and so should reflect the areas community plan with regard to respectful and shared communities, and therefore be quality shared or neutral displays. (Community Plan Outcome 3, p27)

The policy aims to provide a consistent and fair approach to the decision-making process on whether or not to approve any request to plant a commemorative tree on Council property. It is critical that all tree planting contributes to the Councils overall Tree and Woodland Strategy.

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The policy sets out the following criteria:

1. A request will be approved if it meets the following essential criteria:
 - a. The request is being made by a properly constituted organisation.
 - b. The request is submitted in writing in the approved form at least 8 weeks in advance of the requested planting date.
 - c. The tree will become the property of Council and maintained as such. The species and variety will be at the discretion of Council and align with the Councils Tree and Woodland Strategy.
 - d. Applications will be considered on a date received priority should there be a conflict in dates requested. (Officers will liaise with those making a request to accommodate where required).
 - e. Applications must include details of any commemorative plaque to be considered for approval.
 - f. The request is satisfactorily equality screened.
 - g. The request is deemed to be eligible (See Section 2)
2. Eligible requests will be as follows:
 - a. To raise awareness of charities nominated by the Mayor
 - b. To highlight events directly organised by the Council
 - c. To mark a significant sporting event in the Borough.
 - d. To commemorate a significant anniversary of, or an event organised by a charity or community organisation which has a significant connection to the Borough.
 - e. To commemorate a major national event or anniversary.
3. In addition to failing to meet at least one of the above criteria, a request will be deemed ineligible if it falls into any of the following categories:
 - a. An application which in officers' opinions is only promoting a commercial interest
 - b. The promotion of an ethos, activity or organisation which is not deemed in the context of communities to be shared, neutral or promoting good relations.

A copy of the policy and application form are attached as appendices to this report.

Members are advised that the Commemorative Tree Planting Policy does not apply to or replace the memorial tree planting which takes place in Council cemeteries.

In recent weeks there has been one request for commemorative tree planting. These have been received from: -

- Cloughey & District Community Association – Planting of 20 Quercus robur (English Oak) tree whips to commemorate 21 years of 'Making Cloughey Better'. Trees will be planted on the boundary of Cloughey football pitch by the local community.

Unclassified

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Officers can confirm that this request complies with the criteria in the policy subject to the policy approval.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council approves the Cloughey & District Community Association Commemorative Tree Planting request as outlined in the report.

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ITEM 18**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Community and Wellbeing Committee
Date of Meeting	21 June 2023
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Parks & Cemeteries
Date of Report	05 June 2023
File Reference	PCA5
Legislation	N/A
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Display Bed Applications
Attachments	Appendix Display Bed Designs

Members will be aware that Council agreed a policy on the February 2019 for the use of Display Beds in the Borough, this policy requires Officers to report to Council any applications received by external organisations. The Council has received one application for use of the display beds, Officers have assessed applications and have determined that all requests meet the criteria in the policy and are recommended for approval. The applications were deemed by Officers to not require equality screening.

The applications are as follows and the proposed design of the display is included in the attached Appendix. The Parks team will endeavour to replicate the design as far as possible, however detail design may alter to facilitate installation. If necessary, the Officer will liaise with the applicant if the installation may have to be significantly different from that proposed.

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Name of Group / Organisation	Display Bed applied for	Proposed dates of display	Reason for the display
ANDBC Democratic Service on behalf of UDR CGC Greenfinches	Adjacent to Bangor Post and Sorting Office	3 rd July 2023 to 14 th August 2023	UDR CGC Greenfinches Logo to highlight events directly organised by the Council

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council approves the above applications for display beds.

Appendix 1.

UDR CGC Greenfinches Logo



Unclassified

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ITEM 19**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Community and Wellbeing Committee
Date of Meeting	21 June 2023
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Parks & Cemeteries
Date of Report	01 June 2023
File Reference	CW146
Legislation	Stormont Regulation and Government Property Act (NI) 1933 & The Local Government Act 1972 (NI)
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Branch Out Community Group Support
Attachments	Appendix 1 Community Asset Transfer Policy Framework Appendix 2 Permanent Secretary Response to Council Support Letter Appendix 3 Education Authority Letter of Support for Branch Out Community Group

Council agreed the following motion in February 2023.

This Council notes its previous sponsorship of the Community Asset Transfer request from Branch Out Community Group and welcomes the agreement from DfI to lease the woodland area to the group for 1 year. Officers will:

- Write to DfI to express council's support for the work of Branch Out on the DfI-owned site and how it complements The Big Plan for Ards and North Down.
- Write to the EA to express council's support for their work on the EA-owned site, adjacent to the woodland.
- Bring back a report, identifying what can be offered to support the work of Branch Out including, but not limited to, providing advice, support, equipment and finance.

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- Engage directly with Branch Out to identify what support is needed.

Responses to the letter sent by Council have been received and are included in the appendices to this report.

Officers report on support available from Council

In line with the Corporate Plan and Community (Big) Plan, Council recognises the need to support local communities in reclaiming existing outdoor spaces and contribute towards Council wide Plans and Strategies, which include the following key documents:

- The Corporate Plan - Growing Better Together (2020 – 2024)
- The Big Plan (Community Plan)
- Roadmap to Sustainability (2021 – 2028)
- Local Biodiversity Action Plan (2023 - 2032)
- Let's Grow Together (Sustainable Food Growing Strategy - 2021 to 2032)
- Local Development Plan

The focus of the Corporate Plan is 'Growing Better Together' to realise a vision for Ards and North Down where it is a vibrant, connected, healthy, safe and prosperous Borough. Community gardens and growing space contribute to the overall vision of the Corporate Plan and align with the agreed priorities. The priorities are:

- Priority 1: Prosperity - Growing our local economy.
- Priority 2: Environment - Growing a cleaner, greener local and global environment.
- Priority 3: Opportunity - Growing the lifelong potential of our community.
- Priority 4: Pride - Growing empowerment, respect and safety of our community.
- Priority 5: Life - Growing the health and wellbeing of our residents.
- Priority 6: Excellence - Growing a high-performing Council.

Community gardens and growing space contribute towards all five outcomes of the Big Plan. The three outcomes of particular relevance are:

- Outcome 1: All people fulfil their lifelong potential.
- Outcome 2: All people enjoy good health and wellbeing.
- Outcome 5: All people feel pride as they have access to a well-managed sustainable environment.

Council's Parks and Cemeteries Service actively engages with community groups, volunteer organisations and education providers from across the Borough, providing advice and support, with the objective of encouraging and assisting all stakeholders in the Ards and North Down area to increase their civic pride, by enhancing the natural resources of the Borough. Engagement with Branch Out Community Group has been ongoing since March 2021, when the draft business plan for land at Talbot Street was presented and advice sought. Recognising the opportunities for growth, through further community engagement and participation, a new post of Engagement Officer has been created to actively involve residents in the service.

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Advice and guidance are provided by Parks and Cemeteries Officers with expertise in specific areas such as Ulster in Bloom, Biodiversity, Trees and Woodlands, Horticulture and Green Flag Awards. The Parks and Cemeteries Service also work in partnership with Social Farms and Gardens, a UK wide charity supporting communities to farm, garden and grow together. Their mission is to improve the health and wellbeing of individuals, communities, and the environment through nature-based activities. Financial assistance is provided through this partnership by way of Participatory Budgeting. The initiative provides funding to groups who want to deliver projects that reduce carbon emissions, reduce food waste and address food poverty. In 2023 this initiative supported eight projects from across Ards and North Down, totalling £4,000.00. Branch Out Community Group have been made aware of the support available through Social Farms and Gardens.

Council's Community Development Team provide a range of different support and development services to assist local community and voluntary groups. Support includes but is not exclusive to, setting up a new group, project assistance, training, developing relationships with other organisations and grant aid, including community development grants and community festivals grants from the council and externally from other organisations. Council also supports and works alongside the following local community networks:

- North Down Community Network
- Ards Community Development Bureau
- County Down Rural Community Network

Support for community projects provided by Parks and Cemeteries Service is in line with agreed strategies and initiatives, most notably:

Ards and North Down in Bloom

The Ards and North Down in Bloom initiative has been developed with three overlapping objectives which are: horticultural excellence, community participation and environmentally sustainable practices. To support communities, Parks and Cemeteries Service invite annual applications from village groups, community associations etc, within the Ards and North Down Borough, for funding to enable the purchase of bedding plants, shrub and tree material, for planting within local villages or towns. The allocation of funding is subject to council budget approval and capped at £1000.00 per application. Since 2019, the In Bloom Funding Scheme has awarded more than £72,000 supporting 85 projects. In 2023 Branch Out Community Group was assisted in the purchase of project materials.

Tree & Woodland Strategy

The purpose of the Tree & Woodland Strategy is to recognise the importance of trees, the many benefits they afford us and the increasingly important role they can play in mitigating the effects of climate change. The strategy objectives actively engage Officers with the community in valuing trees as a vital community asset. Parks and Cemeteries Service continue to commit to a series of events and promotional initiatives that enhance the profile of trees, provide educational opportunities, and encourage community participation. The strategy also allows for provision of trees to local groups to support tree planting projects such as a community orchard. The

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business plan provided by Branch Out Community Group includes installation of a heritage orchard as well as planting of native trees.

Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP)

The recently agreed LBAP sets out how the Council can work alongside several governmental and non-governmental partner organisations to develop and complete actions and fulfil targets which promote and enhance biodiversity within the Council area. The plan provides the opportunity for local people to decide on the priorities in their area and to have a say in the development and implementation of the plan. It provides the opportunity for everyone to be involved and contribute to the actions that we are all agreed upon. Parks and Cemeteries Officers are committed to supporting communities to engage in the LBAP by providing a range of engagement and educational events. As detailed in the business plan, Branch Out Community Group aims to create a woodland to promote biodiversity and encourage wildlife.

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Let's Grow Together

This strategy aims to ensure our residents have opportunities to improve their health and wellbeing through involvement in sustainable food growing activities within their local area. This can be achieved by:

- Developing new sites where suitable locations are identified and there is recognised local demand.
- Promoting the benefits of community food growing to improve quality of life outcomes for local residents.
- Supporting sustainable food growing that delivers a resource for improving biodiversity.
- Engaging the community in the development of food growing as an educational tool.
- Encouraging the development of the social economy in local areas and provide suitable training and skills development for employability.

The Parks and Cemeteries Service currently supports a number of community and food growing initiatives across the Borough, including, 32 allotment plots, eight self-sustaining community gardens and six community orchards. June 2023 also seen the launch of the Schools Growing Club initiative, providing practical advice and a support package to set-up or improve an existing gardening club within six schools each year. The initiative is designed to bring together schools and local communities in shared projects. Officers are committed to providing a range of educational and engagement events that support local communities to achieve targets, set out in the Let's Grow Together Strategy. Branch Out Community Group include a number of food growing elements to their plan for the area at Talbot Street.

Community based projects are increasing in frequency across Ards and North Down and volunteers are participating in activities that benefit the borough on a weekly basis. Recognising the need to support these activities, Parks and Cemeteries Service created a community tool station, where groups can borrow small equipment, litter pickers, shovels, brushes etc to complete projects and then return. The tool station is used regularly by community groups and schools with many projects attended by Parks and Cemeteries staff, who provide hands-on practical assistance.

Recent engagement between Branch Out members and Parks Officers indicates that current support requirements centre around their wish for Department for Infrastructure land to be made available for project activities, by way of Community Asset Transfer.

Community Asset Transfer is a process to allow community-based organisations, to take over publicly owned buildings or land, in a way that recognises the benefits to communities, the public sector and the third sector. This may be at a reduced lease rate, through grants or other supports, or the transfer of something the local authority does not plan to use or sell. Although there is no legislative framework to support asset transfer in Northern Ireland, the 'Community Asset Transfer' policy framework was developed in 2014 by the Department of Social Development (now Department for Communities), to enable an environment that supports Community Asset Transfer. The framework identifies what a successful asset transfer must achieve:

- Deliver community benefits

Unclassified

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- Support development of social enterprise
- Contribute to social, economic, or environmental regeneration.
- Support the sustainability of community organisations.
- Improve social cohesion.

Community ownership and control of assets can bring benefits to both parties and to the wider community that the asset is used to serve. In developing the 'Community Asset Transfer' policy framework, a cross-departmental Steering Group on Community Asset Transfer identified a number of barriers which need to be addressed to enable the practice to be used more extensively and more creatively. Barriers exist both within and between the public sector and the third sector and are described in **Appendix 1**, as well as a series of practical measures to address these barriers.

Appendix 2, Department for Infrastructure (DFI) response to Council letter of support for the work of Branch Out Community Group, indicates that DFI Lands team are in contact with Branch Out Community Group in relation to the disposal of Talbot Street Plot 2 via Community Asset Transfer. DFI indicate that the larger plot of DFI land, Talbot Street Plot 1, will soon become available on the open market. DFI advise, "In line with Government Disposal Procedures, Branch Out Community Group may bid for the surplus subject land, along with any other interested third parties."

Members should note **Appendix 3**, letter of support for the Branch out project from the Education Authority.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council note the support services available to Branch Out and similar community groups, volunteer organisations and education providers within Ards and North Down. It is further recommended that members note that presently the main support requirement for Branch Out Community Group being assistance to secure the Community Asset Transfer of Talbot Street Plot 2.



Community Asset Transfer in Northern Ireland

Enabling and Supporting Community Ownership and Management of Public Assets



Urban Regeneration and Community Development Group
Department for Social Development

May 2014

MINISTERIAL FOREWORD

The development of a new policy framework to support Community Asset Transfer in Northern Ireland fulfils a number of Government commitments. It supports the Executive's commitment in the Programme for Government (2011-2015) to "invest in social enterprise growth to increase sustainability in the broad community sector". This work also supports the Concordat between the Voluntary and Community Sector and the Government which contains a commitment to investigate the potential for community asset management and ownership in Northern Ireland.

The framework will also contribute to delivery of other Executive priorities including the Economic Strategy and the Delivering Social Change programme. The need for economic development and new social policy initiatives are clearly linked and Community Asset Transfer will provide regeneration opportunities, new service delivery potential and local job creation.

Following extensive public consultation and discussions with key stakeholders across the public sector, I am now pleased to bring forward firm proposals for implementation of this policy framework. It presents an exciting agenda for change and real opportunities for people to make positive changes within their communities. Community Asset Transfer can be a real catalyst to stimulate regeneration and greater community cohesion across Northern Ireland. This policy framework sets out how Government can support community ownership and management of public sector assets and empower local communities.

The document includes some case studies, both local and from other parts of the UK, which demonstrate that successful asset transfer can bring real social, environmental and economic benefits to communities. It can also lead to wider regeneration and bring associated benefits in health, education and community well-being.

My Department will continue to work closely with Development Trusts NI and other stakeholders to test and implement this policy framework. A number of demonstration projects have been identified for this purpose and I look forward to hearing of their progress.



Nelson McCausland MLA

Minister for Social Development

Community Asset Transfer in Northern Ireland - Enabling and supporting Community Ownership and Management of Public Assets

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1. Introduction

Community Asset Transfer is a change in management and / or ownership of land or buildings, from public bodies to communities. "Community" ownership and management of public assets encompasses a range of third sector organisations e.g. voluntary and community sector groups, faith-based organisations, community enterprises and social enterprises. Throughout this document the term 'third sector organisation' is used in this broad sense.

Community Asset Transfer should be understood as a spectrum which ranges from management agreements and leases of varying duration through to full ownership. Not all third sector organisations will aspire to full ownership of assets although for many this will be the preferred option. Shorter leases, including 'meanwhile' leases can be useful for managing risk and building capacity and may be a stepping stone to longer term arrangements.

Community Asset Transfer should be recognised as a flexible tool with a broad range of applications, depending on the imagination and ambition of those involved. It represents a means of investing in regeneration and positive social, economic and environmental outcomes which can be used to support Executive priorities. This policy framework will facilitate community ownership or management of surplus public sector assets as a mainstream option as part of the normal disposal process. It will not always be the preferred option and disposal at full market value will still apply in many cases.

A number of public sector organisations in Northern Ireland already have some experience of transferring assets to community partners. Up until now however there has been no coherent policy context to support the process and inform decision making. This policy framework will address this gap and will create a more enabling environment for Community Asset Transfer in Northern Ireland.

In introducing this policy framework it is recognised that transfers will work best where there are positive working relationships between the asset holder and the organisation to which it is transferred. The transfer has to be beneficial to both parties and carried out in a spirit of partnership. We have the advantage of being able to learn from how asset transfer has worked and is working in other regions of the UK. We also need to take account of the different arrangements in Northern Ireland, but the underlying principles remain valid. It is helpful to look at case studies and

so we have included a number of these at Annex C. The case studies highlight many of the issues that arise during the asset transfer process.

It is important to note that a decision by a public body to dispose of an asset at less than market value carries an opportunity cost, that is, while there will be benefits of a non-monetary nature delivered by the transfer, there will be a corresponding gap in public finances that will not be available for investment in other public services. That will be an important consideration in any transfer and for that reason the associated business case will be assessed with the same rigour as for a capital grant.

It should also be emphasised that, in many cases, disposal at full market value will continue to be the preferred option for asset owners. The policy framework will, however, ensure that Community Asset Transfer is a mainstream option as part of the disposal process.

2. The Benefits of Community Asset Transfer

There is evidence to show that, in the right circumstances, community ownership and control of assets produces a range of benefits. Community Asset Transfer can bring benefits to both parties involved in the transfer and should also bring benefit to the wider community which an asset can be used to serve. Research shows that the benefits include:

Benefits to the Community

- It can improve neighbourhood-based service provision, increasing accessibility for local people, which is particularly important in rural areas;
- It can bring a sense of community identity and pride and the potential for increased community cohesion;
- It can lead to additional jobs, training and business opportunities;
- It can contribute to physical regeneration; and
- It can bring increased confidence, skills and aspirations locally.

Benefits to the public sector

- It can lead to more efficient use of public sector assets – community organisations often make extensive use of volunteers and their local knowledge and hands-on management of the asset can result in lower overheads and better value-for-money, as well as a more intensive use of the asset;
- It can enable community organisations to support public service provision in ways that are more responsive and better related to local need; and
- It can enable effective partnerships between the public sector and the third sector to enhance local services.

Benefits to the Third Sector

- It can lead to increased sustainability for organisations and improved leverage with external agencies - an asset can provide a community organisation with greater financial viability and reduce its dependency on grants;

- It can enable a community organisation to apply for external funding that is not available to a public authority, or even to secure loan finance on the value of the asset; and
- It can facilitate collaboration and resource sharing amongst organisations.

3. Strategic context – opportunities to support Community Asset Transfer

Community Asset Transfer is one of a number of tools that aim to support the Third Sector and assist organisations move towards sustainability. This section explains the wider context within which this policy framework is set.

UK Policy Context

Community Asset Transfer is well supported by policy, legislation and funding elsewhere in the UK. The idea is central to the Scottish Government's Community Empowerment agenda and to the Coalition Government's Localism Agenda and the concept of the 'Big Society'. It is also being actively promoted by the Welsh Assembly Government as a means of enhancing community capacity and supporting social enterprise.

In developing this policy framework for Northern Ireland we have taken account of policy and practice elsewhere and the increasing body of research and guidance available to support Community Asset Transfer (see [Annex B](#)). The opportunity has been taken to build on and learn from experience of others and to draw on case study examples and the skills and professional networks which have been built up.

NI Policy Context

The Community Asset Transfer policy framework is complementary to a range of other current Executive priorities to promote economic growth and tackle poverty. The Economic Strategy and the Delivering Social Change Programme are intended to stimulate economic growth and tackle underlying causes of poverty and social disadvantage across Northern Ireland.

Community Asset Transfer will provide regeneration opportunities and enable Third Sector organisations to increase service delivery potential and provide new employment within local communities. This links with the Department for Social Development's wider objective to 'support social economy growth' within the wider voluntary and community sector and with the recently established Social Economy Incubation Hubs.

The Urban Regeneration and Community Development Framework sets out the strategic direction for this work over the coming years and following transfer of powers to the new district Councils. It provides an enabling framework which will encourage:

- A more targeted anti-poverty approach by better addressing the underlying causes of spatial deprivation and exclusion;
- A stronger emphasis on the outcomes to be achieved from urban regeneration and community development initiatives and how these can change neighbourhoods; and
- Maximising the limited resources available to develop more sustainable forms of urban regeneration and community renewal.

Public Sector Asset Management in Northern Ireland

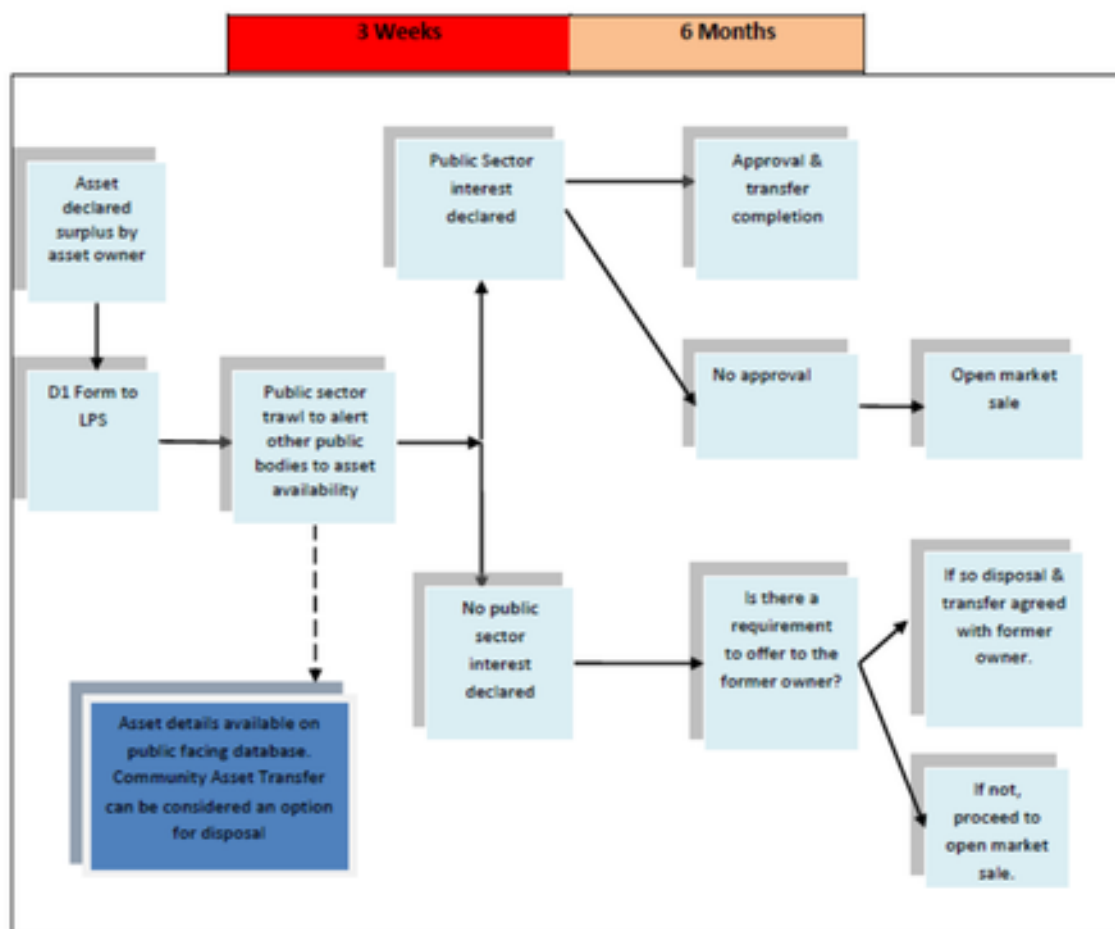
The Executive has established a small Asset Management Unit (AMU) who are working with every department and until June 2013 reported progress to the Budget Review Group. In January 2011, the Executive tasked the AMU with developing and delivering:

- a region-wide Asset Management Strategy;
- departmental Asset Management Plans updated annually; and
- ePIMS as a central asset database.

In addition the AMU was tasked with helping departments to deliver a programme of asset disposals. All of the tasks set by the Executive are being delivered and in June 2013, the Executive approved the region-wide Asset Management Strategy. The AMU is now working with departments to deliver the recommendations of the Strategy.

We have been working closely with the AMU both in the development of the Asset Management Strategy and in the implementation of recommendations to ensure that policy on Community Asset Transfer is reflected appropriately. One of the key objectives for the AMU is to identify savings opportunities from the running cost of assets and as a by product deliver additional capital income for the Executive by identifying and disposing of assets that are deemed to be surplus. An overview of the disposal process is illustrated below including indicative timescales for the process and the point at which Community Asset Transfer can be considered as an option for disposal. It should be noted that consideration of Community Asset Transfer as an option at the public sector trawl stage does not imply a preference for disposal and all cases will be assessed by the asset owner in accordance with disposal procedures. It is in the context of the disposal process outlined that

Community Asset Transfer will need to be considered. As part of its role, the AMU is creating a central asset database. The information held on this database will help to facilitate the implementation of Community Asset Transfer by enabling access to information on surplus public assets. In addition to the work of the AMU on behalf of the Executive, there is a keen focus on asset management within local government in advance of the implementation of local government reform and the creation of new councils in 2015.



Social Enterprise Agenda

The Northern Ireland Economic Strategy acknowledges the contribution that social enterprise can make to achieving business growth, supporting economic development and tackling disadvantage. The Strategy contains a commitment to support 160 new social economy start-ups and invest in social enterprise growth.

Social Enterprise NI is a newly established consortium of social enterprises and social entrepreneurs which aims to provide a “central meeting place where the sector can collaborate, share knowledge, information and best practice to create real social change”. The consortium is funded by DETI and is engaged in a three year work programme which will complement the aims of Community Asset Transfer.

The emerging importance of the social enterprise agenda has been highlighted by recent research conducted on behalf of DETI and DSD. The research mapped the third sector in Northern Ireland and considered its capacity to become more enterprise driven. Both Departments will be taking forward recommendations from the report, some of which will directly support the out-working of this policy framework.

Work of other Third Sector partners

DSD has engaged Development Trusts Northern Ireland (DTNI) as a delivery partner to support the implementation of Community Asset Transfer. DTNI will build capacity and expertise within the third sector to enable community organisations to take advantage of future opportunities.

The Building Change Trust has a strategic objective to build, strengthen and utilise community capacity and assets. It has been working with DSD and other public sector bodies to support investment readiness and skills development within the third sector.

4. Creating an enabling environment for Community Asset Transfer

Introduction

This policy framework aims to create an enabling environment for Community Asset Transfer in two main ways. Firstly, it will establish some conditions or 'ground rules' to govern individual transfers and help both parties to a transfer to understand the circumstances in which the transfer of an asset may be appropriate. The ground rules are laid out in Section 5. Secondly it will seek to address the barriers which exist in terms of regulation and guidance, finance, skills and awareness, through a series of pragmatic actions. These are laid out in sections 7-10.

Any proposed asset transfer must support the priorities of the Executive and aim to create the widest public value. The list below is indicative of the kind of outcomes that should be achieved by successful asset transfer:

- Delivering community benefits;
- Supporting development of social enterprise;
- Contributing to social, environmental or economic regeneration;
- Improving, safeguarding, creating local services/amenities;
- Supporting the sustainability of a community organisation; and
- Improving social cohesion.

This list of potential outputs highlights again the principles of partnership and mutual benefit which are at the core of this policy framework which aims to create an enabling environment in which willing partners can come to an agreement which delivers the best outcome for all involved. Asset transfer will not be the right option for all third sector organisations and experience from elsewhere warns that it should not be an end in itself, neither should it divert organisations from their core activities.

Asset holders in collaboration with the Asset Management Unit will be required to take a view as to which assets are suitable for Community Asset Transfer. Not all publicly held assets will be available for consideration.

The goal is to make the best use of the public estate and work in partnership to secure the widest public value from our publicly owned assets. In creating a more enabling environment for Community Asset Transfer this policy framework will provide a means of investing in regeneration and positive social, economic and environmental outcomes which can be used to support Executive priorities.

The conditions are set out in the following section, grouped under a number of headings to explain the underlying rationale.

5. Conditions (Ground Rules)

Sustainability

Third sector organisations must develop a business plan which demonstrates the viability of the proposed use of an asset. The business plan must take account of all the costs associated with developing and managing the asset (including repairs, refurbishment, running costs etc).

Third sector organisations will need to demonstrate the capacity to develop and manage the asset appropriately. In considering this a public sector organisation can take account of the commitment demonstrated by a community organisation, the resources and support available and the potential to improve capacity.

The spectrum of transfer options can vary widely, including a freehold, long lease, shorter lease or a licence to occupy.

Legal arrangements (contracts, leases etc) will ensure that community organisations are enabled to manage and develop the property as an asset in the long term, while providing necessary safeguards, proportionate to the risk. Safeguards may include imposing certain restrictions on the use of an asset.

For transfers where grants or loans are required to develop the asset, the length of tenure will need to be long enough to secure external investment. In these cases community asset transfer would be expected to mean a long lease, of at least 50 years, or a freehold.

Accountability

Third sector organisations will need to be incorporated, constituted for social benefit and to demonstrate an 'asset lock' provision to ensure that the asset is retained for community benefit.

Third sector organisations will be expected to maximise opportunities for community cohesion.

Third sector organisations will need to demonstrate community support for their proposals and a commitment to accountability, open access and maximising the use of an asset by and for the community.

Decision making

Assets will include both land and property.

Asset transfer may be used as a strategic method of achieving wider regeneration objectives or community ownership of new services or hubs. Transferred assets will often, although not necessarily, have been declared surplus to requirements.

Assets may be transferred at less than market value or 'best consideration'. The level of discount against market value will be set on a case by case basis, and must be commensurate with the level of anticipated non-monetary benefits, which will be judged on the basis of the nature of the property, an assessment of the third sector organisation's business plan and the extent of the public value associated with a transfer.

The decision to transfer an asset will not be considered as setting a precedent. Each asset transfer will be judged on its own merits and the detail of the transfer arrangements will be arrived at through individual negotiation.

Where there is competition for assets third sector organisations will be encouraged to collaborate. Where this is not possible an open and transparent competitive process will be used.

The decision to transfer an asset will in all cases be supported by an economic appraisal.

The decision to transfer an asset will take account of any potential EU State Aid issues.

6. Current Barriers to implementation of Community Asset Transfer

A cross-departmental Steering Group on Community Asset Transfer identified a number of barriers which will need to be addressed to enable the practice to be used more extensively and more creatively. The Steering Group was supported in its analysis by research evidence and by early engagement with key stakeholders through a number of policy development workshops. Barriers exist both within and between the public sector and the third sector and are described below. A series of practical measures to address these barriers is set out in Sections 7-10 (pages 16-21).

Information and awareness

- There is currently a lack of awareness (both within the public sector and the third sector) of the potential beneficial outcomes associated with Community Asset Transfer and of how it can be applied;
- There is a poor understanding within the public and third sectors of the risks associated with Community Asset Transfer and how to manage them;
- There is currently inadequate public facing information available about the availability of surplus public sector assets and whether or how they can be acquired;
- There is often uncertainty within public sector organisations about the discretion they have to transfer assets into community ownership or management;
- There is not enough access to information and case studies where asset transfer has been implemented; and
- There is no one centre of expertise that can provide advice and support to organisations interested in asset transfer.

Regulation and guidance

- Individual government departments may be constrained by legislation when considering the purpose for which they can transfer an asset via a capital grant;
- There is uncertainty about how to construct leases which balance tenants' rights against the need to manage risk in the transfer process; and

- Local government currently has no delegated authority to allow for the disposal of assets at less than market value.

Skills

- Public sector organisations often lack the skills to assess the benefits associated with the proposed use of an asset, or to judge the feasibility of a proposed use;
- Many third sector organisations are not “investment ready” and may lack the skills and capacity to successfully manage and develop assets.

Funding

- There is a lack of financial support available to invest in early pre-feasibility work to explore potential use of assets, build business cases etc;
- Assets may need additional investment to make them “fit for purpose” and to repair, refurbish or convert them for an alternative use.

The following sections present a series of actions organised under the headings of information/awareness, public sector asset management; skills development and funding. The collective impact of these proposals should be to:

- Raise the profile and understanding of Community Asset Transfer as a tool for investment and regeneration;
- ‘Mainstream’ Community Asset Transfer as an option for public sector asset management and address current operational barriers;
- Create and maintain the necessary skills within public sector and third sector organisations to support implementation of Community Asset Transfer and the long term sustainable management and development of assets; and
- Provide investment to support the implementation of Community Asset Transfer.

7. Information/awareness

Actions	Impact
<p>Development Trusts Northern Ireland (DTNI) will run a programme of information and awareness raising to target audiences from the public sector, third sector and political representatives.</p>	<p><i>The aim of these actions is to raise the profile and understanding of Community Asset Transfer as a tool for investment and regeneration.</i></p> <p>Implementation These proposals will be supported by the Strategic Investment Board's Asset Management Unit and endorsed by the Department of Finance and Personnel.</p> <p>DSD is currently resourcing the Development Trusts NI to effectively fulfil its role in supporting these proposals.</p>
<p>We will develop and disseminate guidance and toolkits for the third sector.</p>	
<p>We will promote existing guidance and signpost to relevant UK resources.</p>	
<p>We will ensure effective communication of any substantive changes to the guidance governing Community Asset Transfer within the public sector.</p>	
<p>DTNI will develop and make available information on case studies, both of local examples and from elsewhere in the UK.</p>	

8. Public Sector Asset Management

<p>Actions</p> <p>Consideration of Community Asset Transfer will be embedded into strategic asset management:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community Asset Transfer will become integrated into all Departments' practice, as one of the options for dealing with under-utilised or surplus property assets; - Departments will regularly review the transfer potential of its assets; and - We will ensure that there is agreement within government on appropriate accounting arrangements for assets that are disposed of at less than 'best value'. <p>Current operational barriers to Community Asset Transfer will be addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We will create a single point of contact for information on surplus public sector assets; - We will ensure timely access for the public to relevant information on available surplus assets; and - We will explore ways in which access can be given in a user-friendly way to key information on a public sector asset database, to include local government assets. <p>Where necessary we will amend guidance to better facilitate the transfer of assets and clarify the mechanisms available to support Community Asset Transfer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Changes will focus on the Land and Property 	<p>Impact</p> <p><i>The aim of these actions is to 'mainstream' Community Asset Transfer as an option for public sector asset management and address current operational barriers.</i></p> <p>Implementation</p> <p>These actions will be supported by the Department of Finance and Personnel, the Strategic Investment Board's Asset Management Unit and the Department of the Environment.</p>
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<p>Service Central Advice Unit Disposal Guidelines and Managing Public Money NI guidance.</p> <p>We will explore what legislative changes are necessary, if any, to facilitate Community Asset Transfer and make recommendations.</p> <p>We will make appropriate arrangements to allow greater local government discretion in the disposal of assets at less than market value.</p> <p>We will support research into evaluating non-monetary costs and benefits with strategic partners.</p> <p>Through the Northern Ireland Guide to Expenditure Appraisal and Evaluation and civil service training courses, we will promote good practice guidelines on quantifying non-monetary costs and benefits and valuing non market impacts.</p> <p>We will work with others to improve our understanding of impact measurement and develop more robust methodologies to support decision making, monitoring and evaluation.</p>	
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9. Skills Development

Actions	Impact
<p>We will develop skills and expertise to support both public sector and third sector organisations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We will maximise learning from the wider UK and EU experience while ensuring that guidance is tailored to Northern Ireland circumstances; and - We will address public sector skills gaps. <p>We will support a Community Asset Transfer demonstration programme to increase understanding of skills requirements and gaps within the public sector and third sector.</p> <p>We will ensure effective partnerships and 'synergies' with other complementary initiatives e.g. Social Enterprise NI, Building Change Trust - Investment Readiness and 'Inspiring Impact', the NICVA-led consortium on skills development, Belfast Buildings Trust etc, by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - recognising overlap with existing initiatives; and - avoiding duplication and maximising collaboration. <p>We will work with others to establish an independent centre of expertise on Community Asset Transfer to act as advisor, broker and repository of best practice, evaluation, monitoring etc, by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ensuring a distinct offering; and - working in partnership with others (as above). 	<p><i>The aim of these actions is to create and maintain the necessary skills within public sector and third sector organisations to support implementation of Community Asset Transfer and the long term sustainable management and development of assets.</i></p> <p>Implementation These actions will be supported by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.</p> <p>DSD is currently resourcing the Development Trusts NI to effectively fulfil its role and will work with other third sector partners.</p>

10. Funding

Actions	Impact
<p>The transfer of assets into community ownership and management is recognised as a means of investing in regeneration and positive social, economic and environmental change which can be used to support Executive priorities.</p>	<p><i>The aim of these actions is to provide investment to support the implementation of Community Asset Transfer.</i></p>
<p>Development Trusts Northern Ireland (DTNI) will lead a Community Asset Transfer demonstration programme involving assets from a range of public sector organisations.</p>	
<p>We will work with others to develop more social finance instruments and promote existing and emerging opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the transfer of an asset can be used to e.g. encourage innovation, lever additional finance and reduce grant dependence; - There is a particular need for grants to support pre-feasibility studies and business planning; - There is scope for initiatives such as Community Shares to complement the aims of Community Asset Transfer. 	
<p>We will work with others to establish a funding stream to support pre-feasibility work on potential asset transfer projects.</p>	
<p>We will seek opportunities from within existing grant programmes to support Community Asset Transfer e.g.</p>	<p>Implementation These actions will be supported by Department for Social Development and Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and a range of government funders.</p>

<p>Social Investment Fund, Neighbourhood Renewal, Rural Development Fund.</p> <p>We will explore opportunities from within European Union funds to support Community Asset Transfer (under the social investment umbrella).</p> <p>We will evaluate the DTNI demonstration programme and consider the lessons learned in terms of the range of resources needed to support Community Asset Transfer.</p>	
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11. Community Right to Bid/Right to Buy

Community Rights form part of the policy context for Asset Transfer in Scotland and England. The Right to Buy was first introduced in Scotland for rural areas in 2004 and the Scottish Government is proposing to expand the power through the Community Empowerment Bill to cover urban areas.

Community Right to Buy in Scotland

The Community Right to Buy allows communities with a population of less than 10,000 in Scotland to apply to register an interest in land and the opportunity to buy that land when it comes up for sale.

To take advantage of the Community Right to Buy process, communities must submit an application form to register an interest. All applications to register an interest in land are recorded in the [Register of Community Interests in Land \(RCIL\)](#) held by the Registers of Scotland. PDF versions of the documentation held are available for public viewing through the RCIL.

After an application has been submitted and passed initial checks, it is forwarded to the landowner and if applicable any heritable creditor, for their comments. At this stage a temporary Prohibition is placed on the landowner/heritable creditor preventing them from transferring or marketing the land. Any comments submitted by the landowner/heritable creditor will be fully considered by Ministers when making their decision to approve or reject the application.

The "Right to Buy" can only be activated when the landowner has indicated that the registered land is to be sold or where the provisions of the Act have been breached.

Once a community body which holds a registered interest in the land for sale, confirms that it wishes to proceed with its "Right to Buy", it has six months to conclude the transfer of land or longer if agreed with the landowner.

In England the Localism Act introduced a range of community rights in 2012 including the right to bid (for assets), the right to build and the right to challenge (to deliver services).

The Community Right to Bid in England

The Community Right to Bid allows communities and parish councils to nominate buildings or land for listing by the local authority as an asset of community value. An asset can be listed if its principal use furthers (or has recently furthered) their community's social well-being or social interests (which include cultural, sporting or recreational interests) and is likely to do so in the future. When a listed asset comes to be sold, a moratorium on the sale (of up to six months) may be invoked, providing local community groups with a better chance to raise finance, develop a business and to make a bid to buy the asset on the open market.

Further information can be found at <http://mycommunityrights.org.uk/>

The recent Joseph Rowntree Foundation report on Community Asset Transfer in Northern Ireland recommended the introduction of equivalent community right to bid or buy legislation in Northern Ireland.

There is a shortage of case study evidence from England and Scotland on the practical outworking of these rights; they have only recently been introduced in England and have not been extensively applied in Scotland either.

The Department is content that community rights has been identified as a further important enabling element for Community Asset Transfer. This forms part of a wider agenda that we will continue to explore more fully in the context of the Reform of Local Government in Northern Ireland and the implications of community planning.

12. Impact Assessments

Human Rights

The Department believes that the proposals are compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998.

Equality

Under the terms of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Department carried out screening for equality impact and is satisfied that the proposals will not lead to discriminatory or negative differential impact on any of the section 75 groups. A copy of the screening form can be viewed on the Department's website:

www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/consultations

13. Next Steps

In taking forward the implementation of the Framework, the Department for Social Development will:

- Within 3 months develop an implementation plan that will describe how and when the actions outlined above will be taken forward; and
- Work with the Department's delivery partner, Development Trusts NI (DTNI) to manage a programme of demonstration projects. The purpose of the programme will be to test this policy framework to determine if it is doing what it was designed to do.

Annex A: Development Trusts Northern Ireland (DTNI)



Development Trusts NI (DTNI) was established in 2010 and is a Northern Ireland registered Charity¹.

DTNI is grant funded by the Department for Social Development (DSD) to provide expertise and experience to achieve the establishment of new development trusts in Northern Ireland, to promote awareness of asset transfer, and to identify and nominate from within its membership a selection of organisations whose work and interest in community development, urban regeneration and asset acquisition will form part of a demonstration asset transfer programme.

These demonstration initiatives will draw extensive support from DTNI. DTNI's aim in this work is to "encourage, support and empower local communities to develop new and inspiring projects, thus enabling them to become independent and sustainable".

DTNI will actively work with the Department for Social Development during this consultation period. As an advocate for the Voluntary and Community Sector, DTNI will ensure that those issues of importance to the sector are highlighted.

DTNI Contact details

3rd Floor, Cathedral Quarter Managed Workspace
109-113 Royal Avenue
Belfast BT1 1FF

Mobile: 07595 979642

Email: info@dtni.org.uk

DTNI is a member-led organisation with a board of directors drawn from its membership and from the private sector. They are specialists in community asset ownership, enterprise, collaboration, social action, local regeneration, commissioning, community voice and advocacy.

DTNI is part of a wider movement which includes Development Trusts Association Scotland, Development Trusts Association Wales and Locality in England. Together there is now a UK wide network with over 850 members. Members of Development Trusts NI automatically receive membership of the UK-wide Association.

¹ Charity Number XT27682.

Annex B: References

Making Assets Work – The Quirk Review

Published in 2007 the five key recommendations from this report by Barry Quirk, CEO, Lewisham Council was the catalyst for the reform of government policy to reflect community ownership and enable the possibility of transfer of government owned land and property to the community sector

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120919132719/www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/makingassetswork>

Opening the transfer window. The Governments Response to the Quirk Review

The Government accepted the five key recommendations of the Quirk Review and in this paper set out the building blocks to set Community Asset Transfer in motion.

<http://libraries.communityknowledgehub.org.uk/resource/opening-transfer-window>

Managing risks in asset transfer – Communities and Local Government

Drawing from experience this useful paper provides [English] local authorities and community-based organisations manage and minimise the possible risks to be encountered in the transfer of land and property assets from the public to the community sector.

<http://www.dtascommunityownership.org.uk/sites/default/files/managing-risks-in-asset-transfer.pdf>

Community Empowerment Action Plan (Scotland)

Announced in March 2009 this action plan provides clarity on what community empowerment is, why it is important and how communities can get involved. The action plan provides a range of best practice examples from across Scotland.

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/engage/empowerment>

DTA Scotland – Promoting Asset Transfer Final Report Nov 2011.

Published by the Development Trusts (Scotland) in 2011 this report supported the need for sustained programmes of support and funding at national and local levels.

<http://www.dtascommunityownership.org.uk/sites/default/files/PAT%20Final%20Report%20Dec%202011.pdf>

Scottish Government's Community Empowerment Bill

On 6th June 2012 the Scottish Government launched a 12 week exploratory consultation on a range of ideas for the proposed Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill. Proposals included the extension of a community right to buy to urban Scotland and giving local authorities greater powers to deal with empty homes and buildings. Consultation on a draft Bill is planned for Summer 2013.

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/engage>

Final Evaluation of the Asset Transfer Unit May 2011

An independent evaluation of the performance of the Asset Transfer Unit over its first two years in operation. The evaluation conducted by SQW and initiated by Locality found that the profile and reach of the Unit was impressive and that although it is too early to properly assess the impact of the Unit in asset owner capacity to promote asset transfer, where the Unit has been involved capacity has increased. Departments and Agencies considered that a core dedicated Unit such as the Asset Transfer Unit is required to continue the momentum of improvement in asset management and promotion of transfers

<http://www.sqw.co.uk/files/1013/8712/6248/16.pdf>

Joseph Rowntree Foundation: Community assets: emerging learning, challenges and questions – Julian Dobson, 2011

This paper explores the opportunities, challenges and questions arising for community organisations, funders, policy-makers and government based on learning from recent events on community assets and research papers and briefing documents published in 2010 and 2011.

<http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/community-assets-learning-challenges-questions>

Joseph Rowntree Foundation: Community organisations controlling assets: a better understanding – Mike Aiken et al, 2011

This study examines the benefits that come from community organisations owning or managing assets, what makes for success and what are the challenges. It also provides key messages for practitioners and policy-makers in taking forward the community assets agenda.

<http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/community-organisations-controlling-assets>

Joseph Rowntree Foundation: Community asset transfer in Northern Ireland

This report demonstrates asset transfer has had positive effects on community relations, segregation and social inclusion. Innovation in the statutory sector has had a significant impact on area-based regeneration, public health, community development, education and training and childcare provision. The report also proposes the need to consider new legislation similar to the Right to Challenge and Right to Buy elsewhere in the UK and that new forms of finance, skills and support for practitioners are needed.

<http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/community-asset-transfer-northern-ireland>

Building Change Trust Observatory – Development Trusts.

This paper provides an overview development trusts, it explores their contributions as community enterprises to combating poverty, and considers the transfer of public assets to communities as a way of establishing and growing development trusts. It describes the innovative 'meanwhile use' of

temporarily vacated commercial spaces as a complementary strategy to development trusts' long term approach. It also highlights the work of the recently formed Development Trusts NI, and the Building Change Trust.

<http://www.dtni.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/CFNIObsPBDevelopmentTrusts92011.pdf>

Building relationships in communities BRIC - Queens University

BRIC is a four year programme designed to encourage greater levels of social integration within Northern Ireland's housing sector. It is run with assistance from the EU's PEACE III Programme. The project is delivered by the Rural Development Council, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the training consultancy TIDES. The idea is to help Housing Executive staff promote sharing within the currently highly segregated social housing market. The project focuses on peace and reconciliation and helps promote the idea of a shared society.

www.nihe.gov.uk/index/community/community_cohesion/bric.htm

Social Finance in Northern Ireland: Innovative Thinking and Action

This study aims to produce a blueprint report that will guide the development of new social finance products in Northern Ireland. To develop the blueprint the study will review social finance supply and demand in Northern Ireland; explore new developments in the UK, Ireland, elsewhere in Europe and the US; identify gaps in the market, explore potential funding and delivery mechanisms and provide an estimate of future demand.

<http://www.charitybank.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Social%20Finance%20in%20Northern%20Ireland.pdf>

Social Economy Evaluation assignment July 2011. (KPMG Report to DETI)

KPMG was commissioned by a DETI-led Steering Group to undertake an evaluation of the Social Economy in Northern Ireland (NI). The study was charged to examine the role of the Social Economy sector and its unique value in terms of the economic, social and environmental impact in the NI context; evaluate the Social Economy Enterprise Strategy 2010/11 with an explicit focus on future direction and priorities and evaluate the Social Economy Network's performance.

www.detini.gov.uk/social_economy_evaluation_report_final.pdf

Focus on Social Economy Enterprise

This is a simple but very useful factsheet produced by the Rural Network NI in 2009. In simple terms it explains the Social Economy Enterprise business model. It was used as simple reference tool at a time when DETI were inviting views on the Social Economy Enterprise Strategy 2009-2011

<http://www.ruralnetworkni.org.uk/download/files/Social%20Enterprise.pdf>

Programme for Government 2011-2015 (NI)

On 12th March 2012, the First Minister and deputy First Minister published the Programme for Government 2011-2015. The Programme for Government identifies the actions the Executive will take to deliver its number one priority – “a vibrant economy which can transform our society while dealing with the deprivation and poverty which has affected some of our communities for generations.” The Executive is committed to formulate community asset transfer policy across government; publish a list of existing government assets and identify potential for asset transfers. It commits to disseminate policy and outline best practice for Departments and to baseline research of VCS/SE continuum and to identify opportunities for growth of social economy model within the Voluntary and Community Sector.

<http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/index/work-of-the-executive/pfg.htm>

Concordat between the Voluntary and Community Sector and the Government

The Concordat is an agreement between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector which outlines key values and principles and establishes a set of shared commitments on how Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector can work together to better serve the people of NI. The Concordat establishes new and refreshed structures of engagement between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector to help shape the effective use of resources, including the development of good professional practice and the provision of appropriate accountability.

<http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/consultation-concordat-for-relationships-between-govt-vc-sector.pdf>

Managing Public Money NI

Produced by DFP this manual provides guidance on the proper handling and reporting of public money. It sets out the main principles for dealing with resources used by public sector organisations in Northern Ireland (NI).

<http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/index/finance/afmd/afmd-key-guidance/afmd-mpmni.htm>

Disposal of Surplus Public Sector Property In Northern Ireland

This guidance is published by the Land and Property Service Central Advisory Unit (DFP). It provides property disposal guidelines for public bodies and best practice for public sector bodies.

www.deni.gov.uk/disposal_of_public_sector_property.pdf

FUNDING

Big Lottery - Asset transfer and capital programmes

<http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/research/communities-and-places/community-assets>

Charity Bank

<http://www.charitybank.org/>

Community Development Finance Institution

<http://www.cdfa.org.uk/>

Community Shares

<http://www.communityshares.org.uk/>

Government Funding Database

<http://govfundingpublic.nics.gov.uk/Home.aspx>

New Philanthropy Capital

<http://www.thinknpc.org/>

LEGISLATION AND ASSOCIATED GUIDANCE**Stormont Regulation and Government Property Act (NI) 1933**

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/apni/1933/6/contents>

The Local Government Act 1972 (NI)

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/apni/1972/9/contents>

Disposal of Surplus Public Sector Property In Northern Ireland

www.deni.gov.uk/disposal_of_public_sector_property.pdf

The Local Government Act 1972: General Disposal Consent (England) 2003 (Wales) 2003

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1972/70>

Circular 06/03: Local Government Act 1972 general disposal consent (England) 2003

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7690/462483.pdf

NAFWC 41/2003 : Local Government Act 1972 general disposal consent (Wales) 2003

<http://wales.gov.uk/pubs/circulars/2003/english/NAFWC41-03-e.pdf;jsessionid=53AD9975E3FDFBCC707D5C8C4993D47C?lang=en>

Disposal of land by local authorities (Scotland) regulations 2010

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2010/160/contents/made>

Disposal of Land by Local Authorities (Scotland) Regulations General Guidance

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/319642/0102183.pdf>

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2003/2/contents>

Scottish Public Finance Manual

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Government/Finance/spfm/Intro>

The Localism Act 2011

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/contents/enacted>

Localism Agenda and the concept of the 'Big Society'

<http://www.localism-agenda.com/background/>

USEFUL LINKS**Asset Transfer Unit (England)**

<http://locality.org.uk/asset-transfer-unit/>

Building Change Trust

<http://www.buildingchangetrust.org/>

Development Trust association Scotland

<http://www.dtascot.org.uk/>

Development Trust NI

<http://www.dtni.org.uk/>

Land and Property Service

<http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/lps/index.htm>

Locality

<http://locality.org.uk/>

Investment Readiness in the UK

www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/er_invest_ready.pdf

The Place Station

<http://www.theplacestation.org.uk/>

Social Enterprise Northern Ireland SENI

<http://www.socialenterpriseni.org/>

Social Enterprise UK

<http://www.socialenterprise.org.uk/about/about-social-enterprise>

Annex C: Case Studies

Asset Transfer; A Continuum of Possibilities.

The debate around community asset transfer in Northern Ireland (NI) at the moment is very much premised around an understanding that equates transfer with ownership. While that is true in many instances in Northern Ireland and across Britain it is only part of the picture. All community and voluntary organisations utilise assets to deliver their services, these may be rented on an as needed basis, by way of an annual or longer term rental agreement with a third party that may be a private, public or another third sector asset owner. Equally those assets might be mortgaged or owned outright.

In Northern Ireland Asset Transfer (or Community Asset Transfer as it is commonly referred to) is the process by which a community or voluntary organisation might acquire a surplus public sector asset be that land or building(s). That asset will be sought with the express intention of furthering the organisations social and business aims and objectives, its continued development and the delivery of its services for its community.

Asset Transfer is better understood if seen as a continuum of possibilities as opposed to the wholesale transfer of a physical asset from one body to another. At one level it may be where an organisation moves from being a tenant in a local council run community centre to one where it adopts the management function of that asset. Such an arrangement may be on an annual or other short term lease or it may be longer, perhaps 5 or 10 or even up to 25 years. Lease arrangement might be accompanied by conditions and covenants on how and for what purpose the asset can be used.

As we move along that continuum of possibilities we progress through options considering whether the asset may be co-owned, utilised for a meanwhile use or transferred in full by way of sale under market conditions or at a nil or nominal cost. Where the surplus asset is disposed of under market conditions there are likely to be fewer or no restrictions on its future use, though listed buildings; those with a heritage or preservation value, are subject to strict planning and development controls. Other assets, such as those providing residential care or sports facilities for example may remain covenanted for the provision of health and social care for the elderly or leisure and recreation respectively.

Outside of the debate on the transfer of surplus public sector assets an organisation may also develop its asset base on terms of its own making, undertaking new capital build projects or entering the market and purchasing assets in open competition with others.

Across the community and voluntary sector in NI there are many examples of asset transfer and asset ownership. Some groups have been supported by way of one of grants and other philanthropic investments which have been wisely invested in capital projects (buildings and land). Having a capital asset base has in turn assisted those organisations sustain and grow their activities. DTNI believe that community and voluntary organisations should seek to acquire and develop an asset base. We consider that the NI Executive' enabling framework on 'Community Asset Transfer' will help define the means by which a new 'asset class' of community development and enterprise organisations will emerge and grow.

Here we present a number of short case studies which look at different forms of ownership; from facilities management to outright ownership, a continuum of possibilities.

OUTRIGHT OWNERSHIP: Limavady Community Development Initiative

Limavady Community Development Initiative (LCDI) serves the community of the Borough of Limavady in NI. Founded in 1987 the focus for the organisation was on job creation. A quarter of a century old, the Charity is still going strong and now employs some 60 people and is one of the largest community groups in NI; it continues to grow and work towards sustainable service delivery and is increasingly less dependent on grant funding.

The Asset: Roe Valley Hospital

One of the major factors in the growth of LCDI has been its acquisition of Roe Valley Hospital in 1997 (one of the best examples of a Union Workhouse on the island of Ireland). The availability of the asset came about in part because the building was in need of redevelopment to which the Department of Health was not committed to support.



Roe Valley Hospital: Limavady Community Development Initiative

The opportunity for LCDI to acquire the Roe Valley Hospital came about at a time when it had outgrown its original premises. It was also in possession of European funding that would support them make a new capital purchase. The process of engaging with the asset owner (The Department for Health) began in 1997 though wasn't completed (actual purchase and move) until 1999. The complex was then subsequently regenerated with a mix of capital development grants and loans and developed as a major multifunctional community based facility. The majority of the space in the complex is rented and the income is a major contributor to the organization's sustainability.

General Manager Damien Corr said:

The move was for LCDI an audacious one, we were ambitious, passionate and rash enough to believe in ourselves that we could own and manage this asset and make a major contribution to the community and borough of Limavady. That belief in ourselves was paramount to our ultimate success. It took commitment and effort to convince public sector officials to take us seriously but as to the bona fides of our business proposal. The success of our proposal was in part being able to convince the statutory health authority that what we would bring to ownership would better serve the community in the longer term. And to be fair, once we had convinced them on the merits of our proposal which meant emphasising the social impact and longer term social return their support became invaluable.

The department in turn became central to what we wanted to achieve; they showed a degree of innovation not normally associated with the public sector. The extent of that willingness was revealed when they accepted our bid for purchase which was some £50,000 less than the highest bidder.

LCDI clearly understood what the benefit of owning the asset would mean: A sustainable income, an opportunity to grow as an organisation. So successful was their business plan that the building has been paid for with only residual debt on outstanding loans remaining. The building currently generates approximately £250,000 per annum from the key anchor tenants. Some of those anchor tenants are the health and social care providers that previously occupied the building when owned by its parent body the Department of Health.

There were no conditions on sale other than those associated with those attached to the loan agreements entered into to purchase and refurbish the hospital. LCDI were not expected to continue to use the site to provide health and social care. In fact they made the case and campaigned for the retention of social care services within the facility post refurbishment to which the then local health care trust agreed to. That agreement and subsequent tenant lease agreement to remain on site for 15 years was core to LCDI acquiring matching loans from banks and other social investors.

To facilitate the new arrangement and to acquire the asset LCDI established Roe Valley Community Property Limited. It is the owner of the asset and LCDI is its sole shareholder and all profits gift aided back to LCDI.

Key Learning Points:

- Engage early and positively with the public body that is seeking to dispose of the asset.
- Recognise that the public body has its own mission and objectives and bear these in mind when pursuing your own goals and look for joint wins and co-solutions to problems that may emerge.
- Don't get giddy about what you might own; rather ask why we shouldn't take the asset and think through and generate solutions.
- Do your homework; understand what you need to do and who you need to engage with. For example lottery turned down an initial request for money from LCDI – so they engaged with lottery personnel to design a solution.
- Don't expect that it will happen overnight – passion is necessary but not enough, you need lots of people on your side.
- Make the case for community ownership - don't expect it to be handed to you on a plate. Negotiate, Negotiate, Negotiate.

FACILITIES MANAGEMENT: Roden Street Community Development Group

The Asset: Grosvenor Community Recreation Centre

The Roden Street Community Development Group began life as the Roden Street Action Team, initially based in a Save the Children facility in Roden Street adjacent to the interface. The original group began life as a result of a group of local, concerned residents. The area at that time was facing acute difficulties centered around housing, environmental problems, anti social issues and interface tensions.

Roden Street CDG are now based in the Grosvenor Community Recreation Centre on the Grosvenor Road, Belfast and they have a 10 year lease on the building which up for renewal in 2015. They provide a broad range of services for a diverse range of users including Belfast's Filipino community. They provide a broad range of services in respect of social development including parental support, childcare, physical activity programmes and other initiatives connected to health and social care, healthy living and well being.

Roden Street CDG have a Facility Management Agreement with Belfast City Council (BCC) for a full size 3G pitch at Grosvenor Recreation Centre (GRC). The site was previously an old hard porous surface in poor condition with limited local usage, which has been transformed into a dramatic and well used 3G facility for use by the local community and others. BCC contributed £100,000 to the project and the Big Lottery New Opportunities Fund for PE & Sport provided additional funding of £634,614. That application for investment was fronted by Roden Street CDG and St Josephs Primary School and was targeted at modernising existing sports facilities for school and community use with specific criteria that identified local schools who would be eligible for free use during term time.



Roden Street CDG Grosvenor 3G Pitch

Conditions of Use

The contract comes with a number of conditions and covenants on use. Key

amongst these is free use of the Facility during term time Monday to Friday between 9.30am and 4.00pm to 3 local schools that are specifically named in the contract:

- St Joseph's Primary School
- St Peter's Primary School
- St Clare's Primary School

In addition to the free use stipulation, Roden Street CDG are also committed to:

- Facilitating access by members of the public, sporting clubs, groups and schools to use the facility subject to the payment of user charges;

- Ensuring that a full and varied sports development programme is carried out at the facilities and prepare and implement a sports development programme that is subject to approval by the Council;
- Forwarding a proposed timetable of usage on a monthly basis and an end of month timetable of usage; and
- Forwarding any reports as required relating to usage, such as teams, bookings, variations, maintenance or any other matters the Council may require a report on.

Alongside the 3G pitch Grosvenor were provided with a plot of land that is now managed and used by them and is presently functioning as a community garden. There are no conditions on use of the plot other than it cannot be sold.

Finance & Development

A management fee of £44,400 per annum is paid to Roden Street CDG in two 6 monthly payments which is sourced from the income generated by the new synthetic pitch. This fee was further subsidised by the Big Lottery Fund 2009/11 to the tune of £30,000. The average annual income generated on the site is in the region of £70,000. Though financially this appears to benefit the Council more so than Roden Street CDG, there are other non-monetary returns. For example the council are responsible for site maintenance and upkeep of the facility. There is an alternative model exercised by the council in respect of its facilities where all the income generated is retained by the group managing the facility. Shaftsbury Recreation is managed² under a similar model but with greater opportunity for income generation comes additional responsibility, such as maintenance and upkeep.

The contract term on the 3G facility runs for five years having started in 2009 and is due for renewal in 2014 with an option for extension to up to 20 years management agreement in increments of 5 year periods.

Roden Street CDG had also sought funding for additional development of the Facilities; in particular for transforming Grosvenor Recreation Centre building into a multi-use sports hall. Investments secured and approved for that purpose were undertaken at risk by the group. So though Roden Street RDC have been successful and generated additional income to enhance the facility the premises remain the property of the council. The contract between BCC and Roden Street CDG is not a tenancy arrangement or intended to be. Enhancements brought about by the Roden Street CDG do not change its relationship as facilities manager or create conditions for tenancy.

Centre Manager Tina Black considers that the arrangement they have negotiated with BCC works for their group. Though there are additional opportunities to undertake a social enterprise model of management and perhaps extend their management experience by undertaking to manage other facilities they feel that they don't have the requisite skills capacity (financial modelling, insurance, systems etc) to go beyond what they are currently managing. The newly developed Dunville Park with its 3G pitch was an option and proposed by BCC but not taken up by Grosvenor due to management and staff challenges particularly as the location was off site. For Tina Black (centre Manager) part of the problem is the challenge of scaling-up; *'who supports an organisation to embrace these opportunities. This is compounded by an indifference to asset ownership in the community and voluntary sector; In the north of Ireland we don't have a developed culture of ownership'*.

² by Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group

"We would need to know more of how other organisations work in leisure to consider a broader move into enterprise development, and though we are not ruling out further development any such move would need to be thoroughly investigated, staff skilled up and investment secured. For now the model we have, a public/social partnership works for both parties. We have developed our relationship with the council to best utilise the asset to meet the needs of our local community and in that respect we have sacrificed the opportunity to go out to a wider private market and maximise financial return. Though the demand is there - approximately 48 groups/teams are on the waiting list - we have struck a balance in favour of local demand and need. We have worked to facilitate the local community lead on a sports development programme which is what is important rather than seeing the asset as a potential cash cow. And though generally our relationship with the council is at 'arms length', they are accessible and responsive to our organisation's needs when we need them'.

Key Learning Points:

- Do your research.
- Have a varied management committee - including business owners, a solicitor for example.
- Have appropriate governance for the organization.
- Be realistic about the cost (Roden Street CDG consider that their own financial projections could have been better), don't undersell the cost of managing a building especially if you are negotiating a running costs agreement.
- Make sure your management committee are open minded - there is a need for innovative thinking and creative minds, for example it's not 9 to 5 Monday to Friday.
- Make sure staff have a sense of ownership of the asset - not merely a manager.
- Make sure the job roles and skills sets are relevant - not simply community development worker, but facilities management.
- Negotiate with stakeholders, strategically plan as to what this means for the organisation, don't just focus on the operational details which are necessary to make it work for the council, it needs to work for the local community.

Community Spaces Northampton



Locality member Community Spaces Northampton (CSN) is a new community charity managing seven community centres in Northampton.

It aims to offer a better community centre service to local people. This case study describes the bidding process and the challenges involved in a multiple asset transfer.

In 2011 Northampton Borough Council (NBC) offered eight community centres for community asset transfer and expressions of interest received from 16 organisations – including six organisations bidding for all eight centres.

Organisations expressing an interest were given ten weeks to prepare a business plan with financial projections.

The assessment of the seven business plans received resulted in the selection of two bidders, one bidder to take over one centre, and a partnership – Community Spaces Northampton – to take over the remaining seven. CSN was an informal partnership led by the Alliston Garden Youth & Community Centre (AGYCC).

The development work to establish CSN formally was supported by Locality and Northamptonshire Social Enterprise Development Agency and included:

- formation of CSN as a charitable company
- legal support in lease and management agreement negotiations
- visit to Fresh Horizons to see at first hand a community business managing community centres
- HR support including TUPE
- condition surveys of all buildings
- business planning and accountancy support in setting up finance systems

Work continued after transfer to recruit and train trustees and a co-ordinator, raise finance for capital improvements, establish CSN's profile and undertake an organisational restructure.

Regular meetings with NBC officers were critical to the transfer process – to track progress, identify sticking points and find solutions.

TUPE was a significant issue with two caretaking staff spending more than 50% of their time working at the seven centres and therefore transferring to CSN. To reduce the liability for CSN, the Council

offered an indemnity and drafted an agreement enabling the caretakers to remain in the Council's pension scheme.

Glendale Gateway Trust



Glendale Gateway Trust was set up in 1996 following a village appraisal. Based in the market town of Wooler, it covers the beautiful but sparsely populated area of Glendale in North Northumberland.

The first project undertaken by the Trust was development of a resource centre, the Cheviot Centre, to provide meeting, exhibition and office space and to house the tourist information centre. The land was provided by community asset transfer on a long lease from Berwick Borough Council. The Trust raised funding for a new building which was opened in 2001.

The Trust aims to meet the needs of local people and its priorities are:

- economic development
- affordable housing
- social and recreational opportunities.

The Trust aims to ensure that there is a strong community and voluntary sector in Glendale. A wide range of community organisations use and are based in the Cheviot Centre. The Youth Drop-In Centre on the High Street has been an essential element of provision for young people in the area for more than ten years.

The Trust used its initial asset base, the Cheviot Centre and the youth drop-in building, to take forward its objectives around economic development and affordable housing. Key industry areas for North Northumberland are tourism and farming – both struggle to recruit local workers if there is a lack of affordable housing. At the same time, run-down and empty shops are a disincentive to tourism.

Focusing on these objectives, the Trust's achievements include:

- buying properties on the High Street – two have been converted to modern shops for rent to local businesses with affordable rented flats above – one property has been converted to a three bedroom house

- purchase of land behind the High Street which had not been previously developed due to problems with road access. Because the Trust owned the properties in the High Street and could allow access, the land was sold to a housing association and 15 affordable homes built
- purchase of the youth hostel in Wooler from the Youth Hostel Association in order to secure its future. The youth hostel has a crucial economic impact in the town as visitors spend money with a range of local businesses.

Overall the Trust has sought to maximise its economic impact in the Glendale area by using local traders in its building development projects. A Local Multiplier 3 calculation showed that the £43k spent to renovate the three bedroom house on the High Street was worth £129k to the local economy in Glendale.

The latest venture for the Trust is an asset transfer linked to moving the library service. The library in Wooler is now housed in the Cheviot Centre freeing up the library building for community asset transfer to the Trust to be turned into two affordable housing units.



**From the Permanent Secretary
Dr Julie Harrison**

Stephen Reid
Chief Executive
Ards and North Down Borough Council
Town Hall, The Castle
BANGOR
BT20 4BT

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BELFAST
BT2 8GB
Telephone: (028) 9054 1175
Email: perm.sec@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk

Via email:
stephen.reid@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk

Your reference: CW146
Our reference: SCORR-0205-2023
02 May 2023

Dear Stephen

BRANCH OUT COMMUNITY GROUP

Thank you for your letter of 19th April 2023 regarding Branch Out Community Group.

I appreciate you taking the time to write to convey Ards and North Down Borough Council's support for Branch Out's work on Plot 2 of surplus Dfl land at Talbot Street, Newtownards. I note you have identified that their work complements the Council's Community Planning Document 'The Big Plan' for the Ards and North Down (2017-2032), in particular Outcomes 2 and 5.

I am advised our Lands team are in contact with Branch Out Community Group in relation to the disposal of this small plot of surplus Dfl land via Community Asset Transfer. I am also aware that a larger plot of surplus Dfl land (Plot 1) will soon become available on the open market. In line with Government Disposal Procedures, Branch Out Community Group may bid for the surplus subject land, along with any other interested third parties.

I hope this information is helpful.

Yours sincerely

JULIE HARRISON



Issued via email: Jeanette.Barnes@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk

18.5.2023

Dear Graeme

Thank you for your correspondence regarding the work of Branch Out Community Group based at Talbot Street/Londonderry Primary School.

The Education Authority has a statutory duty to promote and facilitate Community Use of Schools and in this case the Education Authority is very keen to support the work of this group for the community, health and environmental benefits you have outlined.

Officers from the EA Community and Schools Team and EA Asset Management Service have been working with the school and Branch Out Community Group to put in place the required legal agreement to allow Branch Out to continue their excellent work and progress their development plans for the area. Such agreements can take some time to finalise however EA officers will shortly be in contact with Branch Out Community Group to agree the draft legal agreement details.

As an interim measure a signed Hire of Premises agreement can be used and this will allow Branch Out to make use of the site as the legal agreement is finalised.

If you have any further queries on this matter please contact Jim Dunbar -Lead Officer, Community and Schools Team

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'C. Currie'.

Cynthia Currie
Interim Director of Education

"To inspire, support and challenge all our Children and Young People to be the best that they can be."

Education Authority

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Unclassified

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ITEM 20

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Community and Wellbeing Committee
Date of Meeting	21 June 2023
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Parks & Cemeteries
Date of Report	01 June 2023
File Reference	PCA119
Legislation	N/A
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Cemetery Post Boxes 'Letters to Heaven'
Attachments	Appendix Example of Postbox and Plaque

The purpose of this report is to seek permission from Members to implement the 'Letters to Heaven' initiative within our key Cemeteries.

Council Officers have been inspired by a recent story around the 'Letters to Heaven' memorial post box, an idea developed by a nine-year-old girl in Nottingham, who wanted to put her thoughts about her deceased grandparents in writing. At request of the girl's mother, a post-box was installed in Gedling Crematorium before Christmas and over 100 letters have since been posted. These post-boxes have since been installed in several cemeteries across England and Northern Ireland to be used by families who want to express their thoughts in writing about their loved ones.

Children visiting the cemetery are invited to write a letter as if to loved ones they have lost, through the Postbox to Heaven. Children will be able to post letters and cards at any time of the year but particularly on birthdays, anniversaries, and Christmas when their loss is felt so much greater. Each post box will have a plaque explaining that the initiative is managed by the cemetery team.

Officers believe this is a great initiative to support grieving Children throughout the Borough and would seek permission to install these within our two main Cemeteries

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i.e. Clandeboye and Movilla. Further support would be afforded to relatives by the promotion of the Here-2-Help app on the information accompanying the boxes. The Council has been actively promoting this app for some time as it is an invaluable source of both regional and local information covering a wide range of services including mental health support and child bereavement services.

Once the boxes are full, we will then take their contents to be recycled at our recycling centres.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council approves the installation of Cemetery Post boxes in Clandeboye and Movilla cemeteries.

Appendix 1

Example of a cemetery post box and associated plaque:



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ITEM 21**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Community and Wellbeing Committee
Date of Meeting	21 June 2023
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Parks & Cemeteries
Date of Report	05 June 2023
File Reference	PCA116
Legislation	N/A
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	'Cycling Friendly Borough' response to Notice of Motion
Attachments	None

The following Motion was agreed by Council in February 2023:

"This Council acknowledges the environmental and health benefits associated with the recent increase in cycling and declares Ards & North Down a cycling friendly Borough. The Council also recognises that people who cycle are among the most vulnerable road users, and tasks officers with producing a report detailing ways in which we can help improve safety. The report should include possible sources of funding, potential partnerships, and ways in which we can promote good relations between users of different forms of transport."

This report details for Members the 5 elements that are currently in place, under development or planned, and progress made to date in the delivery of this decision and that will make a contribution towards ensuring that a 'Cycling Friendly Borough' status can be declared and sustained.

The six elements are as follows:

- A. The role of, and working with the Department of Infrastructure
- B. The proposed Ards and North Down Borough Council Cycling Masterplan
- C. Working with Sustrans, on its National Cycling Network and One Path Initiative

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- D. The Councils Greenway network programme
- E. Cycle to Work Schemes

A. Department for Infrastructure (DFI)

DFI are statutorily responsible promoting and improving road safety via education, licensing, and regulation of transportation. The Safe and Sustainable Travel Division aims to promote improved road safety and deliver better regulation of the transport sector. The Division is responsible for coordinating the implementation of the Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy. In addition, the Division has a role in promoting the use of alternative and sustainable modes of transport such as: walking, cycling, public transport and car sharing.

The Division has developed a draft Road Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2030. This draft Strategy follows a consultation exercise and reflects the continuing commitment to working in partnership to reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries across the roads network and to the ongoing development of a safe and sustainable transport network that meets the needs of all road users.

Following the consultation this draft Strategy, which is founded on internationally recognised 'Safe Systems' principles, identifies strategic priority areas which DFI can, within government, along with other road safety stakeholders, focus to deliver the strategic outcomes for Safe People, Safe Roads and Safe Vehicles.

As it has not yet been possible to secure Executive agreement for this draft Strategy, the Minister secured the support of Ministerial Colleagues for the publication of the draft. It will be presented to a future Executive for approval. Since the development of the Strategy, a number of research projects have been completed exploring issues affecting children, cyclists, motorcyclists, and older road user groups, and reviewing the Road Safety Education Service.

An annual programme of research and statistical investigations into road safety problems in Northern Ireland will continue to be developed and implemented in partnership with road safety partner organisations. Any recommendations made will be considered and proposals for new ways to address road safety problems in NI will be incorporated into the Strategy. DFI have over the years delivered several 'Road Safety' Campaigns such as:

- Being a safe pedestrian
- Cycling
- Protective clothing
- Road safety for children under seven
- Road safety for 7 to 11 year olds
- Teenage Road Safety
- Share the Road to Zero

They also produce a plethora of other safety awareness information, and in relation to cycling the information available is as follows:

- Cycle Journeys
- Cycle Parking and Security

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- Cycle Safety for Children
- Cycling Safety
- Cycling – getting started
- Electric bikes (electrically-assisted pedal cycles)
- The Benefits of Cycling
- Using cycle lanes and other cycling facilities safely

The Cycling Proficiency Scheme that had been funded by DfI for over 50 years teaching children how to cycle safely as well as proposed Road Safety Campaigns are currently under threat due to Executive budgetary cuts in DfI's budget. Advocacy from Councillors to Ministers may be useful in reinstating these programmes.

Council Officers already meet representatives from this Division every two-months to ensure connectivity with proposed DfI cycle lanes, public transport links, etc and the Council's proposed Greenway Network. Council Officers have also been liaising with representatives from DfI and Atkins in relation to the development of the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan which covers Bangor, Holywood, Newtownards and Comber with the aim to improve urban active travel infrastructure.

Also, it is through these meetings, that Council is made aware of funding opportunities. Recently Council have been awarded £4.6 million from DfI from their Green/Blue Fund towards the delivery of sections of the proposed Greenway Network in the Borough (Comber to Newtownards and Newtownards to Green Road Bangor), funding was also received from the UK Government Levelling Up Fund (£3.2 million). These meetings will continue going forward.

The Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, requires DfI to act on this legislative requirement which will include increasing Active Travel provision. It sets out a minimum spend on active travel from the overall transport budgets of 10% (which would equate to approx. £70 million per year, so DfI may deliver some of the Active Travel infrastructure directly or in partnership with Councils. If the latter is the case Council will continue to be an active partner in this regard.

B. Ards and North Down Borough Council Cycling Masterplan

Council Officers are keen to pursue a 10-year cycling masterplan for the Borough and intend to submit a business case for its development as part of the 2024/5 Estimates Process. The Masterplan would be developed over 4 months and would provide the basis for a strategic approach to developing a network of key active travel routes.

Development of the plan would be done in the following stages:

Stage 1: Review of strategy policy documents and a review Audit of Active Travel initiatives, in the following way.

a) A review of Physical Measures

Desk-based audit of initiatives at national, regional and local level. Map and evaluate routes to make recommendations on which active travel initiatives should be considered for delivery in the Borough, identifying delivery partners, target audiences and potential funding sources.

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b) A review of Soft Measures

Evaluation of the impact of the delivery of behavioural change and engagement projects.

Stage 2: Engagement with key council staff (E.g., Planning, Regeneration, Leisure and Recreation, Community Wellbeing and Environmental Health) and Dfl.

Further activity that will contribute to the development of a cycling friendly Borough will include engagement with cycling groups and clubs, community interest groups and the general public as part of the development of this strategy.

Stage 3: Drafting of the Active Travel Masterplan

Using the information gathered, the Masterplan could propose:

- A cycle and walking path typography of three categories of cycle and walking routes that link to, expand and improve the existing NCN and network of greenways across the borough: Segregated cycle routes (A routes), Quiet ways (B Routes), Off-Road Greenways (C Routes).
- A suite of other measures that will lead to transformative change across the district. These will include major junction improvements; pedestrianised areas and Bus and Cycle only streets; low traffic neighbourhoods; school streets; speed reduction measures; pedestrian priority measures; outline cycle parking and storage strategy; outline parking removal strategy; measures to activate public space.
- The masterplan will map infrastructure proposals at three levels of detail: 1- ANDBC wide, 2- Urban areas: Bangor, Holywood, Newtownards, Comber and 3- an overview of Smaller Settlements.

Stage 4: Development of an Implementation Plan

Production of an implementation and delivery plan for the Masterplan would identify for delivery

- Priority routes taking into account: cost, technical deliverability, such as landownership, political deliverability, connection to existing and proposed active travel initiatives, and anticipated benefit to the community.
- Indicative costings for projects, grouping these into short term 'quick wins', medium term projects, and longer term, more ambitious projects.

Additional analysis- not included in the budget: Community Co-Design: As part of the implementation plan, set out a delivery model that contains genuine engagement with residents of ANDBC. Inviting them to 'Discover' issues and barriers, 'Co-Design' solutions, and 'Test' proposed measures at consultation, or using on street trials.

The rationale for developing a Cycling Masterplan for the Borough is clear and many current government strategies including transport, health and urban regeneration identify that cycling as a form of active travel can bring significant outcomes to people. Locally within the Borough active travel has a significant role to play in contributing to

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the outcomes identified in 'The Big Plan' as part of this Motion. The development of a Cycling Masterplan will support the delivery of 'The Big Plan' and its vision to 'create positive outcomes for everyone' over the span of the plan and create a safer and more connected cycling and walking infrastructure for all which will encourage more people to use the network. Lack of a safe infrastructure is the main barrier to people engaging in active travel.

C. Working with Sustrans

a) National Cycle Network

Council regularly liaise with Sustrans, who are a charity that promotes walking and cycling. Sustrans consists of engineers, educators and industry experts. It created the National Cycle Network, and as custodians, it is their role to care for it, improve it and champion a long-term vision for its future.

The National Cycle Network (NCN) in the UK is a network of walking and cycling routes covering the whole country. In Northern Ireland it runs through our two main cities, Belfast and Londonderry, and connects many of our towns with the countryside. The NCN has provided for nearly 30 million trips a year in Northern Ireland; two-thirds of which are cyclists. According to pre-pandemic data, across the UK, leisure and tourist cyclists and walkers on the National Cycle Network spend an estimated £2.5 billion annually in local businesses.

Following a UK-wide assessment of the quality of the Network in 2018, they produced a report entitled 'Paths for Everyone' with a vision for traffic-free, accessible routes by 2040. It aligns with the Department for Infrastructure's own 'Strategic Plan for Greenways' which earmarked £150 million to create new traffic-free routes connecting communities across Northern Ireland. To meet this new vision, 80% of the NCN in Northern Ireland was reclassified and a further 6% removed in July 2020. In summary:

Where a route is removed from the Network but is of importance to local tourism and of a significant distance and scale, it will be reclassified as a named strategic route e.g., Strangford Lough Cycle Trail.

Reclassification of many of these routes will enable Sustrans to market them better and more honestly to the adults who normally cycle on roads. It also opens up the potential of a network for both leisure and tourism. They work closely with the Department of Infrastructure to support this vision.

In the long-term, Sustrans' aim is to re-route on-road parts of the NCN to new traffic-free sections or create new protected infrastructure.

In Ards and North Down Borough Council no routes were removed but three NCN/RCN (Regional Cycle Network) routes were affected by the changes as follows:

- RCN Route 20, from Whiterock to Comber along Strangford Lough, now known as: Strangford Lough Cycle Trail.
- NCN Route 93, from Newtownards to Bangor (which includes the North Down Coastal Path, this section, as an off-road trail, will remain part of Route 93)

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the remaining sections will now be known as: North Down, Bangor to Newtownards.

- NCN Route 99, from Portaferry to Comber via Newtownards, now known as: Strangford Lough Cycle Trail.

(See map below)

As they are all largely on-road, these have all been reclassified and geared towards and adult audience and will be referred to as their local, familiar name.

It is the aim of Sustrans, following the Review, to re-invigorate the network in Northern Ireland and work with Councils and other partners to invest in a network that brings business to rural areas as well as giving people an opportunity to travel actively. Also, it will create a safer, more consistent user experience, manage user expectations and allow people to make an informed choice when using different routes on and off the Network.



— NCN Traffic Free — Remove — Reclassify

Over time Sustrans anticipate that the Network will grow again as sections are brought up to standard and new off-road routes are added. However, for now, Sustrans want to honestly recognise that many long-distance routes were designed for, and are used by, an adult audience who are more experienced at sharing space with vehicles. Council will continue to work in partnership with Sustrans and add to the Network as further off-road routes come online in the Borough.

b) One Path Initiative

As the amount of people walking and cycling in public spaces and on multi use paths has increased over the years, so too has the interactions between those users and in some cases, these are negative. Sustrans has in recent years have received a significant increase in contact from local Councils, members of the public and community groups about concerns relating to the behaviour of some path users and requesting support and guidance about how to manage this issue. Most of the

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conflicts being reported are occurring between different types of users for example, dog walkers complaining about cyclists or cyclists complaining about joggers.

As managers of many public spaces and multi-use paths, it is incumbent on Council to try to respond to these to these complaints. The danger is however that a response such as imposing speed limits, segregation of paths or adding signage outlining a list of rules impedes one group of users and leaves them feeling targeted causing further tensions between user groups.

It is also important to highlight that shared sections of the NCN pass through many of the local Council areas across Northern Ireland, however from a path user perspective this may not be apparent. It is therefore important that agencies do not promote inconsistent messages on shared routes which could result in even more conflicts and deter people from enjoying these important spaces.

The approach of 'The One Path initiative' is to discuss and understand the issues people face when using shared paths and to collaboratively develop ways which help people to better share the space. By participating in this process, people will feel more invested in their local space, understand other user's experiences, feel more connected to their community, and it will create a positive atmosphere. The ethos behind the One Path Initiative is 'Share, Respect, Enjoy'.

This would be a 2-year initiative, helping users of shared spaces understand and respect how other users enjoy the space as follows.

Stage 1: An audit and analysis of issues

Stage 2: Development of a creative engagement programme

Stage 3: Embedding the One Path ethos, 'Share, Respect, Enjoy'.

In the first year the project provides for engagement with a variety of user groups through a series of focus group sessions e.g. with running groups, walking groups, cycling clubs, dog walker groups, local community groups, statutory bodies and so on. This is followed in the second year by on path animation events to engage users in conversations about messaging and how they and others can safely use the path together without the need for restrictive codes of conduct and lists of dos and don'ts – the initiative helps path users understand each other's perspectives and that the simple message of '**Share, Respect, Enjoy**' is applicable to all.

At the end of the two-year programme a One Path festival would be held along a shared space giving the various user group representatives opportunity to highlight their own work by running engagement events then and thereafter.

Given the progression of the Comber-Newtownards-Green Road Greenway project, it is would be timely to deliver the One Path Initiative in 2024.

D. Greenways

In January 2023, Council scaled back its greenway plans for the Borough, but is still progressing with the following:

a) Comber to Floodgates Park, Newtownards

(Planning ref LA06/2019/0308/F Ongoing from 12/03/201).

Further to extensive engagement with DFI, this is awaiting a final DfI Roads consultation response.

b) Floodgates Park to Londonderry Park, Newtownards

(Planning ref LA06/2019/0544/F - Permission Granted 02/09/2021)

c) Belvedere Road, Newtownards to Somme Heritage Centre

(Planning ref LA06/2020/0940/F - Permission Granted 01/09/2022)

d) Somme Heritage Centre to Green Road, Bangor

(Planning ref LA06/2021/0885/F - Ongoing from 05/07/2021) - Awaiting final NIEA Consultation response.

In relation to the Councils alternative decision concerning the abandoned Kinnegar to Donaghadee route, a further report will be brought back after the summer on the establishment of a working group to explore issues of connectivity maintenance and accessibility concerning the North Down Coastal path.

The Borough already has a greenway route; the Comber Greenway, connecting Comber to the centre of Belfast, this was Northern Ireland’s first greenway, created in 2008. As stated above the funding is in place to deliver these new greenways and it is envisaged that construction work will begin in 2024. A map of the greenway routes is shown below.



All external and internal funding has been secured for these schemes, with Council responsible for approximately 15% of the overall capital costs.

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E. Cycle to Work Scheme

Cycling is a "Be Active" step in the "Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing" health message supported by the Council through the Employee Health and Wellbeing Group and various Community Planning projects. Employees are therefore encouraged to cycle and have been supported through the Council's Cycle to Work Scheme – one of our advertised employee benefits packages designed to attract and retain staff. This scheme allows employees and Members to purchase a bike through a salary sacrifice scheme and as the costs are deducted before tax and National Insurance contribution, it represents a 12.5% saving on each purchase value for the council and 32% - 42% saving for the purchaser depending on tax bracket. The scheme was temporarily closed over covid, but activity is now underway which is considering its reintroduction.

Through the Cycle to Work scheme, staff and Members can in purchasing a bike. They have the opportunity to become fitter, healthier and more energetic and focused at work and will also save money in using a cycle rather than car for journeys related to work and outside of work, and reduce carbon emissions.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council:

1. Notes the above areas of activity and how they will contribute to the delivery and sustaining of a cycling friendly Borough.
2. Continues to meet and engage with Sustrans, the Safe and Sustainable Transport Division of DFI, and the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan team to further promote safe cycling and active travel.
3. Notes that business cases will be submitted for the development of a 'Cycling Masterplan for the Borough' and the 'One Path Initiative'.
4. Recognises the value of continuing with its Cycle to Work scheme.
5. Seeks to advocate the Governments adoption of the Road Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2030 and ensure there is sufficient budget is made available to continue to deliver the Cycling Proficiency Tests and the wider Safety Campaigns within the Northern Ireland Government.
6. Brings back a further progress report to include indicative timelines on when the status of a cycling friendly Borough can be declared.

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ITEM 22

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Community and Wellbeing
Date of Meeting	21 June 2023
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Parks & Cemeteries
Date of Report	01 June 2023
File Reference	CW22
Legislation	Local Government Act (NI) 2014
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Parks & Cemeteries Q4 Performance
Attachments	None

Context

Members will be aware that Council is required, under the Local Government Act 2014, to have in place arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions. To fulfil this requirement Council approved the Performance Management Policy and Handbook in October 2015. The Performance Management Handbook outlines the approach to Performance Planning and Management process as:

- Community Plan – published every 10-15 years
- Corporate Plan – published every 4 years (Corporate Plan Towards 2024 in operation)
- Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) – published annually (for publication 30 September 2022)
- Service Plan – developed annually (approved April/May 2022)

The Council's 18 Service Plans outline how each respective Service will contribute to the achievement of the corporate objectives including, but not limited to, any relevant actions identified in the PIP.

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Reporting approach

The Service Plans will be reported to relevant Committees on a quarterly basis as undernoted:

Reference	Period	Reporting Month
Quarter 1 (Q1)	April – June	September
Q2	July – September	December
Q3	October – December	March
Q4 (attached)	January - March	June

Key achievements:

- Appointment of Bereavement Services Officer, Tree and Woodland Officer, Parks Supervisor & Cemetery Supervisor.
- A volunteer programme in Bangor Castle Walled Garden has attracted eleven volunteers and we have a waiting list to join our programme.
- 2022 Green Flag Awards retained for Castle Park, Londonderry Park, Kiltonga Nature Reserve, Linear Park and Ballymenoch Park. Plus Green Flag Pollinator award secured for Castle Park. This was the first year of the award.
- Donaghadee and Comber attaining 1st and 2nd place respectively in the Town category of Ulster in Bloom. Donaghadee nominated as a finalist for Britain in Bloom 2023.
- Planned programme of Winter Events including Tree Week and other **STAND4TREES** activities underway.
- New Play Parks in Castle Park (Portaferry), Tower Park (Conlig), Aurora (Bangor), Johnny the Jig (Holywood) & Upper Crescent (Comber) delivered.
- Floodgates Park Development Plan - Draft Masterplan completed.

Action to be taken:

- Completion of the Splash Pad at Groomsport.
- Preparation for extending the rewilding scheme is underway.
- Official opening of Play Parks will be organised over Spring and early Summer.
- Staff Task & Finish groups started to implement weed reduction policy.
- Mobile orchard for Holywood ordered and working with local group.
- Review of Community Trails is being finalised, report to follow.
- Launching Schools Growing Club initiative.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council note the report.














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Quarterly Performance Report - Parks and Cemeteries

Generated on: 01 June 2023

Last Update Q4 2022/23

Performance Data Traffic Light Icon	PI Short Name	Performance Data Current Value	Performance Data Current Target
	Total Hectares of Council maintained ground rewilded (m2)	49,195	49,195
	Managed ground with annual sowing (m2)	6,100	6,100
	Number of trees planted	15,108	15,000
	Number of tree, woodland and orchard projects supported	22	20
	Amount of herbicide used (litres)	170	175
	Publish and implement a new Local Biodiversity Action Plan	Yes	Yes
	% spend against budget (NOTE - Parks & Cemeteries have been charged with Coastal Path Project costs of £184,000 which can no longer be capitalised due to a recent Council decision, if this is excluded the percentage would be 104.62% and in target.)	109.62%	100%
	Investigate sponsorship initiatives and present proposals to Council	Yes	Yes
	% staff attendance	90.65%	95%
	% staff reporting regular/monthly receipt of team briefings	100%	100%
	Retain Green Flag Awards	6	5
	Best Kept Britain in Bloom and any other relevant award that highlights the excellence of the service offered by the Council	4	4
	% of available allotments utilised	100%	100%

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Performance Data Traffic Light Icon	PI Short Name	Performance Data Current Value	Performance Data Current Target
	Number of Britain in Bloom projects	23	22
	Overall funding for In Bloom projects	£12,245.00	£18,500.00
	Number of Friends Groups established	1	2
	Carry out ten community events throughout the Borough	24	10
	Investigate opportunities to start an apprenticeship scheme in association with Greenmount College	Yes	Yes

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ITEM 23

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Community and Wellbeing Committee
Date of Meeting	21 June 2023
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Parks and Cemeteries
Date of Report	05 June 2023
File Reference	PCU 27
Legislation	n/a
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Update on Projects Associated with Whitespots Country Park
Attachments	Appendix 1 Why Whitespots Brochure

Former Members of Council will be aware of the interrelated projects that are planned for the area around and within Whitespots Country Park and are at various stages of development. This report is to provide a brief update on each.

1. Whitespots Country Park

Council through the Regeneration, Development and Planning Directorate developed a vision for the existing Country Park and approved a Master Plan as part of an outline business case that allowed members to consider options and approve various phases of development. See attached "Why Whitespots brochure" at Appendix 1. This was part of a bid for the Belfast Region City Deal investment in the area. Unfortunately, this opportunity did not come to fruition primarily as there was no appropriate sponsor department associated with City Deal.

With a developed OBC indicating good outcomes, council continued to investigate partnership funding and were offered a grant under the Complimentary Fund with a sponsor department confirmed as DEARA. Council is at an advance stage of receiving DEARA/DfE approval of the OBC which will lead to receiving the Letter of Offer. The procurement process to appoint a consultant design team is underway to develop the

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full masterplan, submit a planning application and construct the initial phase(s) of the plan in accordance with the level of funding secured.

2. Greenway Network

Newtownards to Green Road Bangor:

Planning permission has been secured for a portion of this route, Newtownards to the Somme Museum, with the second section Somme to Green Road (Bangor) at an advance stage with the planners. This Greenway has secured funding from both DfI and Levelling Up which results in council providing 15% of the overall capital cost. Tender documentation is being prepared to appoint a contractor, with an anticipated start of site date set for Q1 2024 subject to planning and lands purchase being concluded.

3. Walking trails between Whitespots Country Park and Helens Bay.

Historical and well used trails along the former Ulster Way, allow walkers to make their way from Whitespots through the Clandeboye estate, via Clandeboye Avenue to the beach at Helens Bay. This route has recently been adopted as part of the Columbian Way, and Council have come to an in-principle agreement with the Clandeboye estate to upgrade pathways, promote and sustain it further for future generations. This assists in traffic free connector routes to and from Whitespots.

4. Somme Museum

The Somme Museum at Whitespots is owned and operated by the Somme Association. Council has been working with the Association, which is leading on an initiative to upgrade their facilities and consider the addition of more exhibits, experiences for visitors and widen its remit. This has the potential to increase attraction to the Country Park. Presently, the Association are developing an Outline Business Case funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Council officers are engagement with the Somme Museum regularly.

5. Gateway Project

In 2022, Council approved the submission of a Concept note to Peace Plus measure 4.1 (Reimaging Communities) for a "Gateway Centre". This Project would promote peace and reconciliation, learning from the better understanding of war, through the rejuvenation and re-imagining of the Somme Museum and the Country Park, increasing provision of transformative shared space and services and preserving our shared heritage on the Island of Ireland. This would be delivered through a mutual understanding using commemoration and interpretation of the experiences of the men and women who lived, fought and died in modern international conflicts but in particular through the time of the Home Rule crisis, Easter Rising, WWI and the Civil War exploring the social history of the time and the learning from it. The concept note indicated the Somme Association would work with us further through this opportunity to help both the Council and the Association realise the vision that each have for military heritage development and commemoration at Whitespots, discussions are continuing.

The concept note was well received by SEUPB and meetings took place to discuss next steps and a funding application. We have been advised that the development of plans and an application which would include a business case would need to be

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carried out over the summer of 2023, and a planning application process be at last underway but preferably planning would be secured, by the time an application for funding is submitted in the Autumn of 2023. Having considered these timescale requirements, officers are of the view that neither the time, capacity, skills or finances exist in the current year to meet this deadline. Regrettably therefore it is not going to be possible to apply for this funding this year. However, there may be future funding opportunities available if we were to begin to develop a business case and plans now.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes the above update and agrees to progress as outlined.

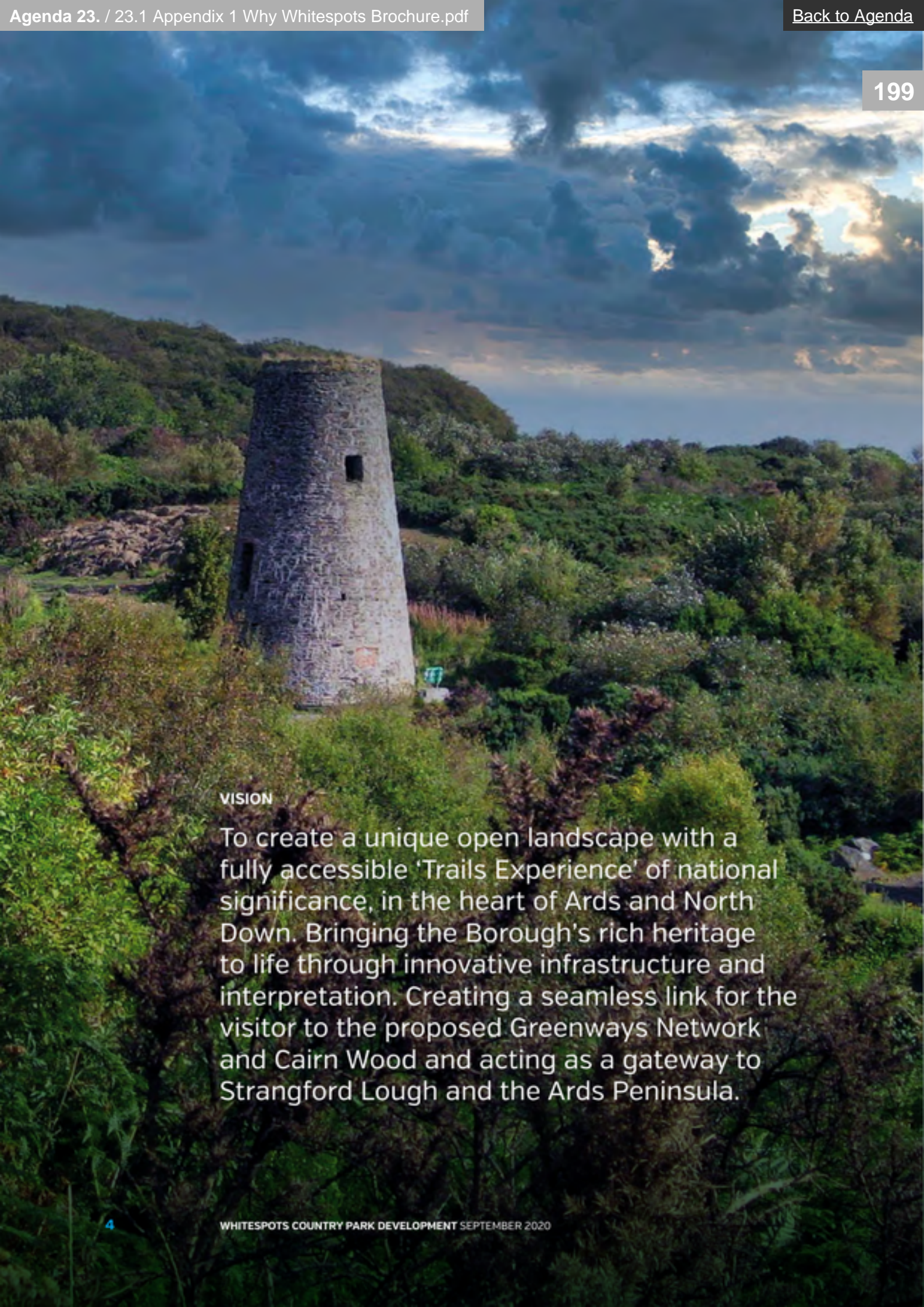
Whitespots Country Park Development

A unique development opportunity | Bringing rich heritage to life

September 2020
ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk







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.



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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: Visitor numbers (annually) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 250,000 local visitors using the facilities for active leisure. • 11,700 domestic visitors • 8,330 out of state visitors (Oos) Job creation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 FTE direct jobs

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	
Social 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.	Preservation Preserve and create access to a rich natural industrial and cultural heritage for the local community and visitors.
Position of scale Linking existing assets and successful attractions within the Borough with new ones to be developed.	Environmental sustainability 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.

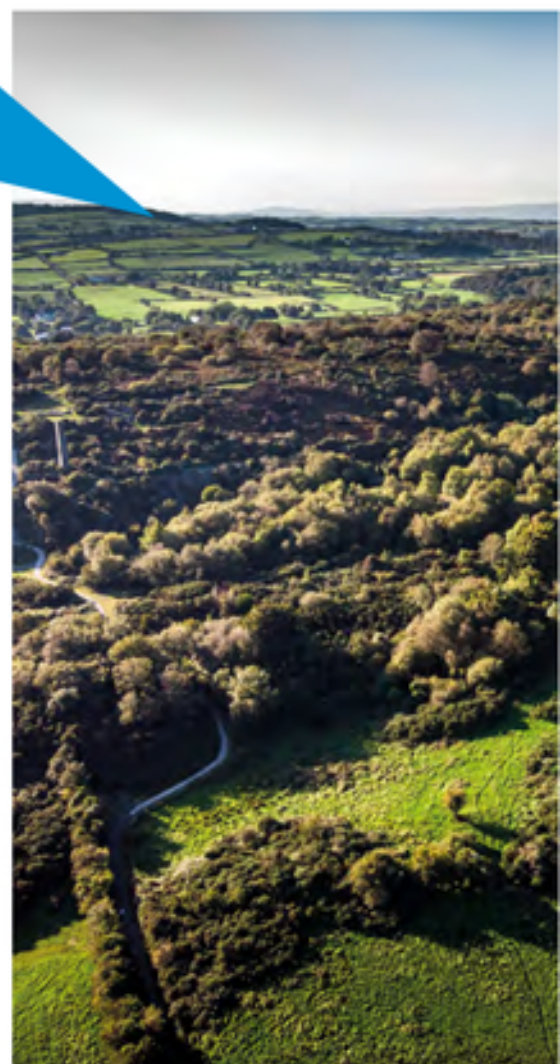
While Whitespots is the central focus, the masterplan integrates Conlig and Clandeboye Estate. The greenway linkages to neighbouring established attractions extends the offering from a day trip to a longer stay in the area, increasing potential visitor spend. This integration aims to boost overall tourism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

Close proximity to key areas of deprivation

4 adjacent wards in top half of the NI most deprived areas

CONWAY SQUARE and **WEST WINDS** within the top **8%** of the most deprived wards in NI



Declining tourism sector in recent years

36% reduction in the trips to AND

27% reduction in visitor spend



14% of jobs within the Borough dependent on tourism [highest in NI]


Economic productivity in Ards and North Down significantly lower than NI average

37% GVA lower than NI average



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

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>Phase 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgrade paths and trails • Separate area for Trial Bikes • A new Visitor Hub • Restoration of mine shafts and windmill stump • Enhancement of the woodland 	<p>£6m</p>	<p>Public sector funding used to create environmental, educational and heritage focused development</p>
<p>Phase 2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viewing tower • Restoration of historic chimney stacks • Creation of new woodland areas 	<p>Additional £4.3m (Total £10.3m)</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>Phase 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two zip wires • Adventure playground and pump track • High-ropes course • Elevated timber boardwalk 	<p>Additional £9.5m (Total £19.8m)</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
Health and Wellbeing	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
Employability and Skills	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
Tourism and Economic Development	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
Environmental Sustainability	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



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